

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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Falluja April 2004

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IRAQ: COALITION ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

'In this type of war the entire arsenal of a hegemonic superpower is superfluous. This superpower can conquer a country with its enormous power but it is impossible to administer and govern that country if its population battles resolutely against the occupiers.'

Fidel Castro, Havana, 1 May 2004.

During April the world witnessed the barbarism of imperialism as the Coalition forces attempted to defeat the Iraqi resistance. By May the US and British governments were scrambling to stop their plans for Iraq from falling to bits. The US government that mocked international law and institutions was scurrying to the United Nations to cobble together an interim government. Saddam Hussein's generals were back in charge of cities. A war to secure cheap oil had pushed oil prices to a 21 year high. A former commander in chief of US Central Command told the US Senate, 'I believe we are absolutely on the brink of failure. We are looking into the abyss.' TREVOR RAYNE reports.

In April alone the Coalition forces are reckoned to have killed 1,360 Iraqis; US troops suffered 138 dead and nearly 1,000 wounded. These US fatalities exceed those of the seven-week invasion war in 2003. The Iraqi resistance has shattered the illusions of the superpower, aggravated divisions within the US and British ruling classes and forced the occupation forces to change tactics.

The resistance must now decide on the sort of country that it wants the Iraqi people to build if it is to maintain the momentum and drive the enemy from its land. Imperialism will probe all divisions within the Iraqi people and resistance as it seeks to retrieve its position.

The occupying powers made two fundamental errors that compounded their problems. Firstly, the US

government insisted that the Ba'athist regime and its army be dismantled. 'The general rule for use of the military is that it is better to keep a nation intact than to destroy it. It is better to keep an army intact than to destroy it...' said the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu 2,000 years ago in *The Art of War*. Regardless, US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld, in all his arrogance, intending to demonstrate complete US mastery by force, knew better. The second error, committed at the start of April 2004, was to open up two fronts of attack at once without sufficient forces.

The decision to wreak revenge on Falluja coincided with an attempt to remove the anti-Coalition Shia cleric Al Sadr and his militia from Baghdad and the southern cities. The result was an armed uprising across much of Iraq beyond the means of the occupation forces to contain. When the Spanish people and government decided to remove their troops it was a political blow to the Coalition. As the fighting intensified, other governments threatened to follow suit. The US military admitted that 40% of the Iraqi forces it had recruited mutinied or deserted

and 10% changed sides during April. Iraqi refused to kill Iraqi in the service of an invader. Military resistance has brought a political retreat from the occupation powers. In this context the publication of images of torture and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners serve to further isolate the US and British governments and limit their ability to manoeuvre in Iraq.

Falluja shatters illusions

US Deputy Director for Operations Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt is consistent. Asked by the BBC on 23 November 2003 if he was worried about having US soldiers killed every other day he replied, 'We're not worried in the least. In fact, what we have demonstrated time after time, after every engagement with the enemy, we prevail... Militarily, this is an enemy that cannot defeat us militarily, and in engagement after engagement, we see the enemy breaking off, running away. And militarily, their attacks are becoming more and more insignificant to us...' Perhaps the brigadier was more interested in the public relations aspect of his role than with guerrilla tactics. On 30 March General

Kimmitt said that attacks on coalition forces, averaging 28 a day in the previous week, were a 'slight uptick' in the violence. This was 17 hours before four US private security mercenaries (former US Navy Seals) were dragged from their car in Falluja, killed, mutilated and displayed. Kimmitt dropped the public relations and went into soldierly mode: he promised an 'overwhelming response', 'We will pacify that city.'

Falluja is a city of 350,000 people. On 29 April 2003 US soldiers occupying a school in Falluja shot dead 18 demonstrators. After this US troops fired indiscriminately killing a little girl and her two brothers. By October 2003 the US had killed 40 of Falluja's people. A group called the Brigades of Martyr Ahmed Yassin, after the Hamas leader slain by the Israeli army, killed the four US mercenaries on 31 March. On 5 April US marines encircled Falluja, setting up roadblocks and enforcing a curfew. Water and electricity supplies to the city were cut off. According to the *New York Times* at least one US battalion had 'orders to

continued on page 9

Welcome...

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal... That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government'.
— US Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776

'When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people and for each portion of the people the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.'
— French Declaration of the Rights of Man, 1789

'The lives of billions of people who inhabit this planet depend on what a few think, believe and decide. The worst of all is that those who wield such great power do not have psychiatrists to look after them. We cannot just accept this. We have the right to denounce it, to exercise pressure and demand changes and end such an absurd, unheard of situation, which makes hostages of us all. No one should ever have such powers or no one on this earth will be able to talk of civilisation again.'
— Fidel Castro, 3 January 2004

Evidence about US and British soldiers torturing Iraqi civilians has created a dilemma for the world. Aside from the divisions in the ruling class and the appalled gasps of liberals who forgot the human cost of building western 'civilisation', the truth of imperialist occupation has raised the burning question: Now that I have witnessed the brutal side of imperialism, now that I understand what they mean by imposing 'freedom' and 'democracy', what will I do to oppose it?

Torture is an integral part of imperialism. Britain was the first imperialist state. British imperialists have contributed, with the zeal of scientific discovery, to the development of systems of torture to humiliate and demoralise a risen people (see pages 2/3). British occupation of one-third of the world's land surface meant that the British developed expertise in occupation strategies, how to suppress the resistance of a defiant people. These included collective punishment, imprisoning people within their own towns and villages, intimidating the entire population to withdraw support from resistance fighters, and



Victory to the Intifada picket of Marks & Spencer

torturing captives. The Zionists learned from the British occupation of Palestine in the 1940s. Today the Zionists instruct the US and Britain in Iraq (see page 8). Palestinian refugees are made homeless and forced to flee once again as Israeli bulldozers flatten their houses. Iraqis celebrating a wedding are bombed by the US in the middle of the night. All that is new is the intensity of the technology and its ability to cause an increasing amount of carnage and destruction. And of course, the digital photography.

The pages of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* contain plenty more information about what the logic of capitalism means for the majority of the world. From the health damage caused by the artificial sweeteners industry which is worth \$2.5 billion a year (see page 12) to the 50-year-old struggle of the Guatemalan people against racist oppression and poverty, the result of the CIA coup to overthrow the President Arbenz in 1954 (see page 10). From the Loyalist attacks on the Republican community in Ireland (see page 7) to the immoral and inhuman exploitation of immigrant labour in Britain (see page 16). We don't expect you to close these pages with a sigh of resignation, but to recognise the historical responsibility of all of us to uproot this corrupt and inhuman government and the system it represents. The system is anti-democratic and against freedom. It is an enemy of humanity. Use your outrage, add it to ours, so that we can rise up to reclaim our planet before it is too late. Knowledge is power, arm yourself!

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! also brings you information about people who are resisting and demanding an end to the robbery of the world's wealth, the murderous pursuit for profit

that drives the world's ruling class: in Venezuela, where 80% of the population live in poverty, the Bolivarian circles of the poor are taking steps towards armed defence of the Chavez revolution, which has brought them healthcare, education and political inclusion for the first time ever (see page 11); in Bolivia and Argentina where we have seen the power of the people when they rise to halt the thieving logic of neo-liberalism (see page 11); in Nepal where the People's Army now controls the whole country outside of the capital city, seat of the reactionary King and his brutal regime (see page 7); and in Cuba, where seven million people took to the streets on May Day, to celebrate their socialist system and send a thunderous message to the US administration that the Cuban Revolution will never surrender and will continue to blossom (see page 6).

In Britain too, we can sow the seeds of resistance, as the Victory to the Intifada Group is doing with the militant boycott pickets of Marks and Spencer, the biggest British sponsor of the Israeli state. Pickets continue despite the attacks by police, Zionists and fascists (see page 14).

There are traps and there are dead ends, like the opportunist tactics of the social-democrats who, obsessed with parliamentary politics, replace angry protest with water-downed pleas to Mr Bush and Mr Blair. But if we hold fast to our anti-racist, anti-imperialist principles we can be sure to stay on the side of the majority of the world in the struggle for real freedom and true democracy. Now is the time to join us. There are no more excuses!

Join us! Send us your contributions, both written and financial, to: FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Torture

On 28 April US Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld met with US Senators to discuss the war in Iraq. What he failed to tell them was that both an army review of conditions in Abu Ghraib prison, Baghdad (the Taguba review), and confidential International Red Cross reports, had revealed systematic, sadistic abuse of detainees tantamount to torture. Hours later the first of the obscene photos which are now familiar appeared on CBS's *60 minutes* programme, and the following day details of the Taguba review were published in *New Yorker* magazine.

Revelations and photos of the torture came thick and fast as the Red Cross and Amnesty International confirmed that they had been advising the Coalition of abuse of detainees by both the US and Britain since May 2003. President Bush claimed that he did not know and admonished Rumsfeld (who, despite this, 'was doing a great job') for not telling him. Rumsfeld could not avoid the scandal: it was clear that he had known of the abuse throughout and he warned Congress that worse images were to come, including video film.

In response to outrage across the world, and in particular in Iraq and the Middle East, apologies were eventually given. This, the Bush administration claimed, was the work of a few low-ranking 'bad apples' at Abu Ghraib who were shaming America by their un-American activities. The matter would be investigated and the guilty would be charged.

In Britain the revelations of torture were hyped by the *Mirror*. It claimed to have accounts of torture by British soldiers backed up by photos. Both the Red Cross and Amnesty International confirmed their own concerns about British treatment of detainees, including deaths in custody. The British Parliament's first response was to deplore not the torture but the revelations of torture, on the grounds that this would put British troops at risk. This was followed by a strenuous and finally successful effort to expose the *Mirror*'s photos as fakes. Piers Morgan, *Mirror* editor, was fired, and along with him went any serious attention to the fact that the British had been in breach of Geneva Conventions.

Immediately the British Labour government claimed the moral high ground. They had been accused wrongly by the tabloid press; they had been vindicated. British troops could hold their heads up and pretend that their occupation of southern Iraq is 'firm but fair', winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and steering them like a kindly uncle towards democracy and liberation. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* In reality the British are the architects of



the torture systems that are used, including by the USA, to humiliate oppressed people. This torture is not the product of depraved individuals or distorted personalities, it is a system designed to 'soften up' detainees for interrogation. The imperialists regard this as vital intelligence gathering. The British are the experts. They have brutalised their way through history.

A 'short sharp shock'

British settlers in Kenya in the early 20th century believed that: 'for a proper understanding of the savage African, one must not look on him as a human being, but as a rather superior kind of animal'. After World War II, the oppression of African people intensified as they were driven off the land into city slums and as the price of their staple foods rose by 600-800%. The Kenyan people began to organise, serving notice that they wanted their freedom. In response their organisations were banned and their leaders imprisoned.

In 1952 the uprising led by the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army – the Mau Mau – began. It was met with brutality and over the next seven years of war to defend the privileges of 40,000 whites, 11,000 'rebels' were killed, more than 1,000 of them hanged. 80,000 Africans were detained in concentration camps where a system of torture was devised, called 'the pipeline'. Detainees were sent through a series of camps, each more brutal and degrading than the last, until they were deemed to have co-operated with their captors by confessing or by implicating others.

The methods the torturers used will sound familiar. Prisoners were routinely beaten for long periods. Some police officers specialised in bending thumbs and hands back until they were dislocated. It was common to lock suspects in cells with detainees who had been shot; sometimes they were locked up with corpses. Apart from building the camps to hold the thousands of detainees, the government also had to find staff. Mercenaries

were recruited from far and wide, including prison officers from South Africa, and some were sadists. They were not, however, responsible for the overall regime in the camps: that system of torture was devised by the government. Women detainees were routinely sexually abused and raped. They were made to work as hard as male detainees, malnourished and denied medical help in childbirth. Detainees who died from torture were issued with false death certificates or mysteriously disappeared. Notoriously the prison officials responsible for the massacre at Hola camp in 1957 tried to pass off the deaths as resulting from an infected water supply.

This account could have been written about any of the British colonies where people fought against their oppression: India, Malaya, Aden, Hong Kong. The British devised a system of policing and detention reserved especially for the colonies to keep down the 'not quite human beings' who did not appreciate British occupation. It was later that these brutal skills were modernised and refined closer to 'home' in the north of Ireland, where British imperialism faced its greatest challenge in the 1970s and 1980s.

'A clear and present danger'

In the late 1960s the British were faced with renewed opposition in Ireland as a new generation tried to overturn British rule. This time the movement was based in the urban, deprived, working-class ghettos in the north of Ireland. 'Intelligence' about the new movement was needed. The old Special Powers legislation from the 1920s empowered the government to introduce internment. 3,000 people were interned and interrogated to try to gather intelligence about the IRA. A small number of 'guinea pigs' were subjected to a new regime, later to be classified as torture and inhuman and degrading treatment by the European Commission on Human Rights. The five techniques of interrogation, devel-

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

FRFI fund-raising appeal

We have met our £10,000 target!

Shortly before going to press we managed to meet our fundraising target. Over the last two months we collected £1,551, bringing our total to £10,012. This will enable us to meet the costs of our new office space and meeting rooms that we need for our expanding campaigning work during the rest of this year.

We cannot rest there, however. FRFI reports on and supports the struggles of the oppressed resisting imperialism throughout the world. It is the only newspaper in Britain to expose the true nature of Labour imperialism. We salute Cuba's struggle to build socialism. We intend to work with all those who want to build a new movement which genuinely represents the interests of the working class and oppressed. In this, your financial support remains vital. Please continue to dig deep!

Send your donations payable to Larkin Publications to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

I enclose £100 ☐ £50 ☐ £20 ☐ £10 ☐ £5 ☐ Other £

Name

Address

the imperialist way of war

oped for the 'subhumans' in Kenya, Malaya, Cyprus and Aden, were refined for a select group of internees. These techniques were: hooding; subjecting detainees to high pitched noise; forced standing against a wall for long periods; deprivation of sleep, food and water; sensory deprivation. The detainees were subjected to brutal treatment and threats, including the threat of being thrown out of helicopters.

Internment turned out to be troublesome. The treatment of the 'guinea pigs' led to two government inquiries and the finding of 'torture, and inhuman and degrading treatment'. The detention camps were too much like prisoner of war camps. The Prime Minister, Edward Heath, decreed that these five techniques must never be used again, announcing to Parliament that: 'If a Government did decide - on whatever grounds I would not like to foresee - that additional techniques were required for interrogation... they would probably have to come to the House and ask for powers to do it'. No such request has ever been made.

British imperialism was an old dog, but it was not averse to adapting its tricks. To replace internment a different regime was devised which would also have the advantage of criminalising the opposition. Brigadier Frank Kitson, later head of UK Land Forces, the British army's expert on counter-insurgency techniques in the colonies, served in the north of Ireland from 1970-1972. He promised to 'squeeze the Catholic population until they vomit the gunmen out of their system'. Kenneth Newman was promoted to Chief Constable of the RUC in 1976 by which time the new system was in place. Intelligence gathering was centralised, the CID was reorganised to specialise in interrogation and Castlereagh police station became the designated centre for most interrogations to take place. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (Temporary Provisions) 1974 was introduced by the Labour government in the face of 'a clear and present danger', allowing the arrest and interrogation of detainees, without access to solicitors, for up to seven days. All that the new system needed to do was extract the information by 'softening up' the detainees. Diplock courts with no juries allowed the prosecution to introduce confession evidence obtained under duress. The conveyor belt was in place.

From July 1976 to November 1979 5,067 'terrorist suspects' were interrogated at Castlereagh. A pattern of brutal treatment emerged. In 1978 two priests, Faul and Murray produced an account of the treatment of detainees in Castlereagh. They listed examples of treatment used to 'soften up' detainees for interrogation, many of them designed not to

leave marks on the body. Here are some of them:

Hair pulling • Punching to back of head • Heavy slaps across face and head and ears • Strangling • Chops to the throat • Gripping and pulling the Adam's apple • Pushing fingers into pressure points on neck • Punches and kicks to the stomach, buttocks, kidneys, spine • Manual squeezing of testicles; punching and kicking testicles • Lifting naked prisoner by placing sticks between legs • Arm twisting • Bending wrists backwards • Finger twisting • Forced positions of stress against a wall • Sitting on non-existent chairs • Squatting on hunkers • Press-ups to the point of exhaustion • Wrestling holds until prisoner vomits • Trailing body along the floor • Prone on floor while personnel stand and jump on back • Riding prisoner like a horse • Placing plastic bag, hood, jacket, underpants over head to restrict breathing • Simulated execution by clicking gun behind the head • Simulated electrocution by putting plug into mouth and turning switch to on • Burning

oners were kept, was the other half of British strategy to control the uprising. Along with the stick came the carrot: the blandishments offered to middle class liberals and opportunists; the cup of tea over the garden fence; the collection of information. When the British talk about their years of experience in public order policing distinguishing them from the crudities of the US army, they would like us to think of the carrot. The reality behind the scenes is the stick, and it is undoubtedly the case that torture is being used by the British in Iraq. That is why Iraqis have died in detention. That is why, for the first time since Edward Heath's promises in the early 1970s, hoods have been routinely used on prisoners of war.

It is a red herring to examine the perverted or sadistic personalities of the men and women who performed this torture in Iraq. It is a pipedream to imagine that the torture will stop because they are put on trial. Instead we should be asking what political cause has driven the Coalition to torture the detainees in this way. The answer lies in the growing mili-

tration camp to Iraq to 'gitmoise' its prison regime. That is why the accounts of torture meted out to the British detainees released from Camp X-Ray match the descriptions of torture emerging from Iraq's prisons.

In March 1968, in a small village in Vietnam, My Lai, US troops, under orders, slaughtered up to four hundred villagers, raping and violating them, alive and dead. Gradually over the months that followed the news seeped out as the soldiers involved, as well as those who refused to be involved, told their stories. In

response to reports of torture and murder, a Major Colin Luther Powell reassured his superiors that this could not be true. All new soldiers arriving in South Vietnam received a lesson on civic affairs and the importance of treating the Vietnamese with courtesy. They were told about the Geneva Conventions. The Vietnamese people, he wrote, were very appreciative of the efforts of the Army to improve their lives. By 2004 Colin Powell should have got tired of the same old lies. Calley, the only soldier to stand trial for the My Lai massacre was quickly pardoned and

became an overnight hero. Jonathan Schell, a journalist, wrote in 1968: 'If we learn to accept this, there is nothing we will not accept'. Enough said.

Carol Brickley

Further reading

Mau Mau, an African Crucible, Robert B Edgerton, IB Tauris, 1990

Ireland, the key to the British revolution, David Reed, Larkin Publications, 1984

Beating the Terrorists, Peter Taylor, Penguin, 1980

Labour, a party fit for imperialism, Robert Clough, Larkin Publications, 1992

Four hours in My Lai, Michael Billton and Kevin Sim, Penguin 1992

Terrorism Act powers abused - same old story

A climate of racist hysteria is being engendered by the government, police and media. Repeated mass raids under anti-terrorist laws are widely publicised and arrests given a high media profile. When those arrested are later released the story is barely reported. Thousands of people are being subject to police stop and searches under the guise of anti-terrorism. The real purpose is intimidation.

Raids

On 19 April ten people were arrested in Manchester amidst a blaze of publicity, when 400 police officers from four forces raided premises in Greater Manchester, Staffordshire, South Yorkshire and the West Midlands. Intense speculation followed about threats to local shopping centres and possible plots to bomb a Manchester United football match, causing unprecedented carnage. When the eight men, one woman and one boy were released ten days later having been charged with nothing related to any terrorist activity, there was hardly a murmur. The Iraqi Kurds at the centre of this furore were neither political nor religious. One of them had been a professional footballer in Iraq and a Manchester United supporter for ten years. The tickets for Old Trafford found in his possession were not a clue to a target but a souvenir.

A month earlier on 30 March, in another massive operation, more than 700 police officers had raided 24 addresses across the south of England. Eight British Asian men were detained for questioning. Five of them have subsequently been charged in relation to a quantity of ammonium nitrate fertiliser found at a warehouse in west London. They are being detained in Belmarsh maximum-security prison, awaiting trial on charges of conspiracy to cause explosions and possession of the fertiliser 'in circumstances which gave rise to rea-

sonable suspicion it was for a purpose connected with the commission, preparation of an act of terrorism'. Their names have been widely publicised, and an injunction originally taken out against tabloid newspapers preventing their printing the men's pictures has now been lifted. What chance is there of a fair trial?

Arrests

Between 11 September 2001 and the end of March 2004 there were 561 arrests under the Terrorism Act (TA) 2000. But by the end of January 2004 only 100 people had been charged and there had been just six convictions for offences actually related to terrorism (including two for membership of the previously entirely legal, international Sikh Youth Federation). Two hundred and thirty people arrested under the pretext of prevention of terrorism were subsequently charged with other offences, mainly deception or violations of immigration legislation. The supposed anti-terrorist provisions are being used as a dragnet to pick up and criminalise failed asylum seekers, or foreign students or workers whose visas have expired.

Indefinite detention

Sixteen foreign nationals have been detained without charge under the draconian Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) introduced by Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett after 11 September 2001. Twelve of them remain imprisoned in appalling conditions in Belmarsh maximum-security prison. 'M', the only detainee to win an appeal against such detention, was released after 16 months of such incarceration. He told *The Guardian* of the horrific physical and mental state he had found acquaintances in when he arrived at the prison: 'I knew some of them outside the prison. Their behaviour... when I saw them inside was complete-

ly different. They had lost weight and three or four of them had gone crazy'. Blunkett continues to defend the ATCSA provisions, despite their being counter to the European Convention on Human Rights, and despite judges having ordered the release both of M and of another detainee, who was considered to have become so mentally ill that imprisonment was no longer possible, and who is now under house arrest.

Stop and search

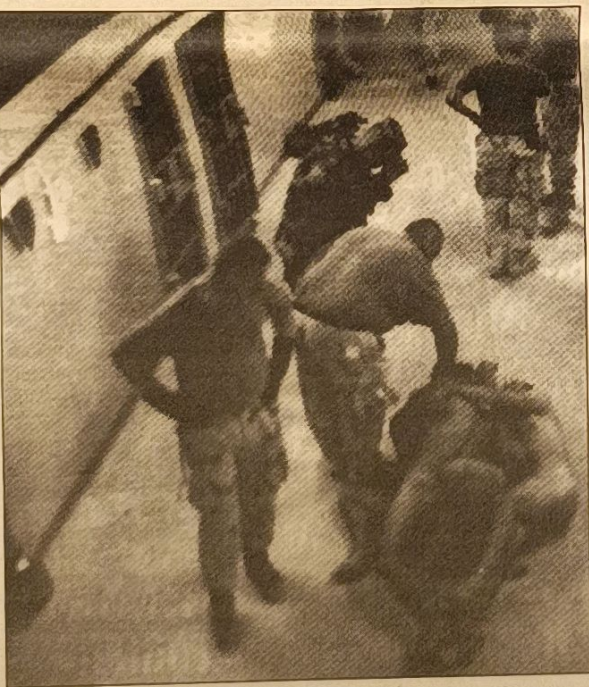
At the end of last year *Statewatch* magazine reported that the number of stop-and-searches carried out under anti-terrorist operations during the year was more than double the figure being officially given out by the Home Office, and stood at 71,100 instead of the claimed 32,100; some police forces having counted their anti-terrorist stop-and-searches under the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, rather than under the TA.

The percentage of arrests resulting from TA stop-and-searches was just 1.18%, compared to 13% for the ordinary criminal stop-and-searches made under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

No one is safe

In the 1970s and 1980s thousands of innocent Irish men and women were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) expressly to scare them out of showing support for the struggle against British occupation. In 1974, the PTA, like the ATCSA, was rushed through parliament in days on the crest of a wave of outrage at the IRA's bombing targets in Britain. By 1982 there had been 5,500 arrests but only 7% of those arrested were charged. Today, as Britain's vicious war against the people of Iraq intensifies and its support for Israel continues, Asian, North African and Middle Eastern communities are being similarly terrorised.

Nicki Jameson



skin with matches and cigarettes • Degradation: making prisoner lick water or vomit off floor or behave like a dog • Spitting in the face • Stripping prisoner naked and making obscene remarks about his body, his wife, his children • Pouring liquid into ears • Threats to execute prisoner secretly • Threats to harm family • Women detainees sexually abused and threatened with rape.

Sound familiar? It should. The descriptions and the photos of what happened at Abu Ghailb have all the hallmarks of a similar regime of terror and torture. Alongside the brutality administered in Castlereagh and in the prisons where the IRA pris-

tant opposition to US and British occupation of Iraq. The Coalition is desperate. They need 'intelligence' and they need to divide and rule Iraqis by buying off the elite, eliminating the insurgents and terrifying their poor and working class supporters.

After 11 September the US unilaterally and illegally declared that Taliban and Al Qaida suspects would not be covered by the Geneva Conventions. Now they have extended the torture regimes to Iraq. That is why Abu Ghailb was reopened as a specialist torture centre last July, staffed by US Military Intelligence. That is why Major General Geoffrey Miller was moved from Guantanamo Bay concen-

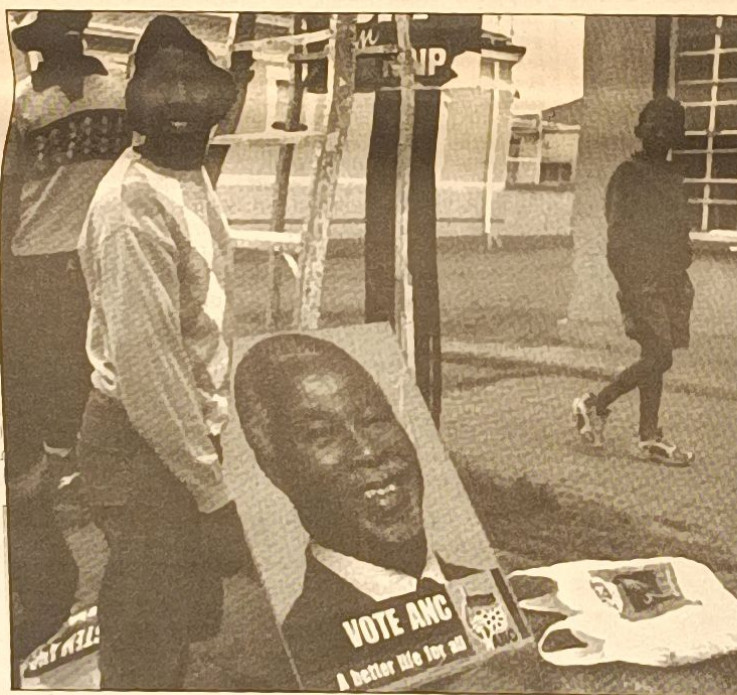
Elections after 10 years of ANC rule

All those people who claimed that the ANC had lost touch with the masses it helped to liberate had been proven wrong, said an elated Thabo Mbeki, its president, after it was announced that the ANC had won nearly 70% of the vote. The elections of 14 April 2004 came during the 10th anniversary of the people's victory over apartheid. Celebration of a decade of democracy was accompanied by a heated debate between those who said that ANC rule had improved the lives of ordinary people in South Africa and those who disputed this. The election result, according to the ANC, conclusively resolved this debate. Whom are we to believe: the ANC or its critics? Is it the case that despite Mbeki's government's neo-liberal economic and social policies the working class is generally satisfied with ANC rule? **TREVOR NGWANE** reports.

Ten years of democratic capitalism in South Africa have seen the rich get richer and the poor poorer. The capitalist class has a bigger share of profits today than it has had since 1981. All the major social and economic indicators – most based on data compiled by government agencies – show that the majority of South Africans have not benefited economically from the democratic order. The unemployment rate has grown to 40% in the new South Africa; 48% of the population – about 22 million people – live below the poverty line. In 2003 the Human Rights Commission, a statutory body established by the ANC government, publicly chided the regime for allowing poverty levels to rise. Those most affected by poverty are black, live in rural areas and are more likely to be women or children.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and other unions found themselves under attack and losing their power due to neoliberal (globalisation) restructuring in the workplace. COSATU's hands are, however, tied because of its formal political alliance with the ANC together with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the South African National Civics Organisation. The failure of these traditional mass organisations of the working class to defend the class has left a vacuum that has been partially filled by new social movements. These are mostly single issue campaign organisations that fight in defence of the interests of working class communities such as the Treatment Action Campaign, the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless Peoples' Movement, and the Anti-Eviction Campaign. It is these movements, and the left outside of the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance, that have opposed ANC policies in the new South Africa.

Criticism of ANC rule reached a crescendo during the elections. Even bourgeois commentators spoke of their concern about stability given the effects of ANC policies on the working class and the poor. The



media reflected a panic about 'voter apathy' with many people believing that most working class people would not vote due to disillusion and dissatisfaction. This was sparked off by a very low voter registration during the build-up to the elections. Some social movements were even calling for a boycott. This call was notably made by the Landless People's Movement (LPM) with its slogan 'No land, no vote!' The ANC was so worried that for the first time since the formation of this movement four years ago it arranged a meeting with the LPM, but this failed to persuade it to drop the boycott call.

The ANC, the country's elites and the bourgeois media launched a massive campaign to encourage people to vote. With respect to its own election campaign the ANC 'raised the bar' in terms of money spent. No pole in the whole of South Africa was left bereft of the ANC election poster depict-

ing a smiling Thabo Mbeki and the slogan 'A people's contract to create jobs and fight poverty'. Billboards, TV, newspapers, radio and famous personalities were extensively and expensively used to call for an ANC vote.

Cleverly, the ANC acknowledged its shortcomings in delivery by coining the slogan: 'A lot has been done, a lot more is still to be done'. Change would come step by step. For those workers loyal to the ANC, each house, each clinic, each road built rekindled their hope in their beloved party. The election campaign coincided with a vigorous media campaign by the ANC government, the bourgeoisie and the upper middle class calling on everyone to celebrate 10 years of democracy and to be proudly South African and eschew 'negative sentiment'. Thabo Mbeki took his state power to the streets, in the manner of a US presidential campaign, making dramatic gestures such as connecting, on the

spot, the electricity and water of people who had been cut off for non-payment. He also ordered houses to be built for people who had lost their shacks due to a natural disaster. Such action no doubt impressed the working class, who saw Mbeki's power in a situation where their own power of collective organisation and struggle was nowhere to be seen.

The opposition parties failed to take advantage of the ANC's poor record. All the party manifestos prioritised social and economic issues and contained scathing attacks on the ANC for its failure to deliver a better life to the masses. But they failed to persuade the working class that any of them is a viable alternative to the ANC. Instead, 40% of the eligible voters decided to sit at home and not vote. These 11.5 million eligible voters who did not vote outnumbered the 10.8 million who voted ANC. In this election a total of 16 million people voted as opposed to the 19.5 million who voted in the 1994 elections. The bourgeois press rationalised this drop in the number of people voting as a sign of a 'mature' democracy like the advanced capitalist countries, where fewer people vote.

Despite all this, why did so many working class people vote for the ANC? The role of the SACP and COSATU leadership was crucial to the ANC victory. Both organisations contributed massive material and human resources to the election campaign. Personnel were seconded to the ANC election team; leaflets and posters were issued by each organisation calling on its members to vote ANC. The SACP even claimed in its election pamphlet that an ANC vote would roll back privatisation and create a stronger public service. Yet Mbeki had stated very clearly that, after the election, the ANC would stick to its neoliberal policies, the main component being privatisation and a lean, mean state.

There is evidence that COSATU's leadership was willing to hold back and contain workers' struggle in order to help the ANC win. A four-month strike by airport baggage handlers against privatisation and the extension of working hours by the (newly privatised) airport bosses received minimal support. At least one leader of their union, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), told workers in a strike meeting that he had received express instructions to refrain from building the strike lest it 'embarrass' the ANC. One banner on a subsequent march by the strikers read 'Don't vote for the ANC', linking such an action with promoting privatisation and outsourcing. The strike settlement more or less coincided with the elections. The ANC won the elections, the SATAWU workers lost their strike.

Many on the left and in the new social movements were somewhat disoriented by the ANC election victory. Some of them sought to deny the ANC victory emphasising the large number of those who didn't vote, and opportunistically claimed those who didn't vote as their supporters because they heeded the boycott call. 'Tell no lies, claim no easy victories' advised the African revolutionary Amílcar Cabral. To claim those who stayed at home as supportive of left politics could be self-defeating. They might have stayed at home because they had lost hope in collective solutions and had chosen individualism. A bigger danger for the left is that this position can easily

go together with the view that the millions of workers who voted ANC can never be won to left ideas and politics. While many of them voted for the ANC out of (historical) loyalty and (misplaced) hope, this in no ways means that they are not frustrated and angry with ANC policies. Indeed, evidence seems to indicate that some members of the social movements voted ANC.

Many workers must have voted ANC, or stayed at home, simply because in their eyes there is no alternative to the ANC. Most of the parties who contested the election are capitalist and would do nothing very different from the ANC if they were to take power. Parties with left platforms are usually nowhere to be seen other than at election time. It is the new social movements who are always with workers fighting and giving direction to working class struggles. But these movements failed to present a unified and coherent position on the elections. Some called for boycott, others for spoiling the vote, or did not give any kind of direction to their followers or the working class at large. The one clear position of the LPM – 'No land, no vote!' – is problematic. It suggests that the working class can never use the vote to take forward its struggle, implying that workers can only vote after their needs have been met. It also has the unintended connotation of a qualified franchise where only those with land can vote.

Following the ANC's election victory the new social movements face state repression. Before the elections there were clear signs that the capitalist state in South Africa is more than willing to use repression against its opponents. Thanks to COSATU's last-minute lobbying in parliament the Anti-Terrorism Bill was not passed, but the ANC is planning to try again. On 21 March, Human Rights Day, 57 members of the Anti-Privatisation Forum were arrested for protesting at the site of the new Constitutional Court, billed as the ultimate guarantor of human rights in South Africa. On election day, 52 members of the LPM were arrested for demonstrating against the election. Their leaders were tortured by the police using methods made notorious by the old apartheid political police, such as placing a wet bag over the head of a detainee to suffocate them. Activists are learning to live and work under constant surveillance by the National Intelligence Agency and intermittent harassment by the police.

The social movements need to develop a strong working class politics, which will allow them to unite in struggle with each other and provide a solid political basis for unity between different sections of the working class and its allied classes. To win the masses they will have to attract employed workers and thus go beyond their present mostly unemployed constituency. This means they have to appeal to organised labour, to win COSATU members most of whom voted for the ANC. A careful and correct understanding of why workers voted ANC is necessary for this.

Winning the election does not change the class nature of ANC rule. Nor will it stop the ANC leading the capitalist neo-liberal attacks on the working class. Despite Thabo Mbeki's claims that the people have spoken, the ANC cannot and will not deliver because it serves the interests of the capitalists. This requires trampling on workers' needs. The job of the social movements is to build the only power that can challenge the power of the capitalists, that of the workers. There is a popular saying in South Africa that two bulls cannot live in one kraal (fenced camp). The struggle between the capitalist class and the working class continues in South Africa: before and after the elections. ■

With Labour or against? Left faces both ways

For the Respect coalition to command the support of genuine socialists and anti-imperialists in the European and London elections on 10 June it must pose a real challenge to Labour racism and imperialism. The reality however is that those behind the formation of Respect, George Galloway and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), are not interested in a real challenge to Labour, only in opposing Blair and 'New Labour'. In fact, they want to be able to reclaim the mantle of 'Old Labour'.

BOB SHEPHERD reports.

The SWP, Respect and Palestine

What is the position that socialists must adopt in respect of the struggles in Iraq and Palestine? It is not just enough to call for the end of occupation; socialists must explicitly support the resistance and the right of that resistance to wage armed struggle against occupation.

The SWP never supported the armed struggle of the Irish people nor the armed struggle against apartheid. Even today it does not explicitly support the Iraqi resistance, nor the Palestinian Intifada. SWP theoretician John Molyneux explains why in an article in *Socialist Review* (April 2004): it is because they are 'nationalist terrorists' and not socialists. According to Molyneux, socialists build movements by 'issuing leaflets, collecting petitions, organising trade unions and parties through to mass demonstrations, election campaigns and mass strikes.' As against this, terrorists use violence, and so Molyneux writes dismissively of 'nationalist terrorist formations attempting to represent oppressed nationalities - the IRA, ETA, the different Palestinian organisations'. He then goes on to echo imperialism's attempts to demonise the Intifada by saying that 'Sometimes, and the Palestinian Intifada is the best example of this, terrorist tactics do more or less merge with the mass resistance of the people'.

All this is just cowardice. The SWP just wants to distance itself from the legitimate violence of the oppressed because its Labour allies don't like it. And so the violence of the oppressed is 'terrorist'. In the past, the SWP attacked working class youth fighting the police in 1981. It condemned miners' hit squads that fought scabs in the 1984-85 miners' strike. It is very happy however to keep an alliance with the violent, war-mongering imperialist Labour Party.

From left to right:
Andrew Murray (Stop the War), Jeremy Corbyn
(Labour MP), Ken Livingstone (Mayor) and
George Galloway (Respect)

The SWP is attempting to have its cake and eat it by allying with both Galloway in Respect and Livingstone in the Labour Party (see FRFI 177. New left coalition for the Respectable). It is allying with factions of 'Old Labour' both inside and outside the Labour Party, facing two ways at once to give the impression that it is both pro-Labour and against it. This is classic opportunism; its purpose is to make sure there is no development of an independent anti-imperialist force in opposition to the Labour Party and to drag all political opposition back into the Labour fold.

In its lead article 'Your vote can punish Blair' on 3 April 2004, *Socialist Worker* announced that one of its leading figures, Lindsey German, also a national leader of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), would stand as Respect candidate for the Mayor of London. The article explained that in the mayoral elections everyone has two votes, and that this 'means voters in the capital have the marvellous opportunity of voting for Lindsey... as first choice and Ken Livingstone as second choice. That ensures Respect gets the maximum vote, while also ensuring there is no way for a Tory or Liberal to sneak in'.

Lindsey German herself went further in *Socialist Worker* on 1 May: 'There are lots of things that I agree with Ken Livingstone about. He was very good about opposing the war and the Bush visit... I voted for him last time when he stood as an independent and wouldn't have had a problem voting for him again... But people felt that going back into Labour meant he was not identified by his own anti-war and other good

policies but with much more Blairite policies'. She is at pains to make sure the readers are clear she has no principled opposition to voting Labour: 'it was partly his identification with Labour that made us decide to stand... That on its own wouldn't be enough. I wouldn't be in favour of standing against someone like Jeremy Corbyn who has a very good record even though they're Labour'.

In standing for Mayor, German makes very clear that it will have no adverse consequences for Livingstone. 'We will say, "Vote for Respect in protest at Labour's policies", but you can still vote to transfer to Ken Livingstone. I don't think that any other party, including the Greens, are arguing that'.

German is absolutely right about the Green Party. The position of its candidate is far more principled than hers - he has refused to call for a second vote for Livingstone and has said 'there is no way that I am campaigning for a Labour Party that took us into the war in Iraq and has downgraded our public services'.

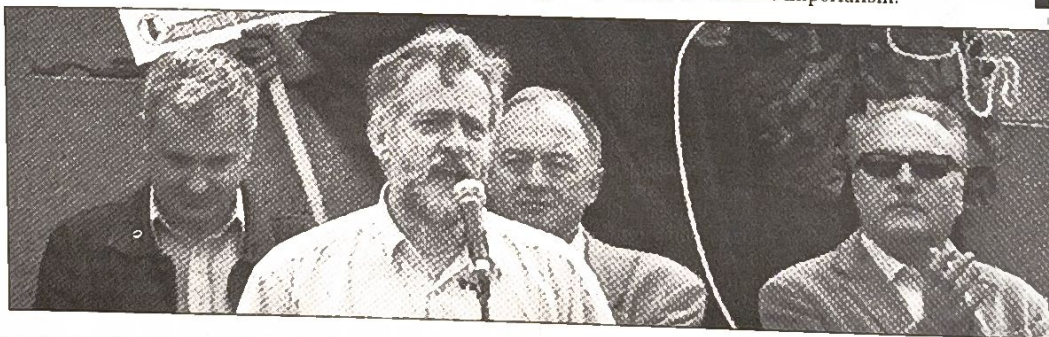
The SWP has put all its eggs in the Respect basket and has demobilised the STWC. When the US launched its murderous attack on Falluja in early April, it soon became clear that indiscriminate bombing and shelling was killing hundreds of Iraqi civilians. In the US the 'Answer' anti-war coalition organised nation-wide protests on the Easter Saturday, 10 April, in 20 cities. In Britain the STWC was silent, and only organised a few small protests on Saturday 17 April, with only a couple of hundred outside Downing Street and a few street events in various other cities.

For socialists there is a difference between establishing unity within a

single-issue campaign (such as supporting the Intifada) and creating an electoral bloc. In a single-issue campaign, it is not necessary for socialists to defend the positions of their allies on questions outside of the campaign. In an electoral bloc they cannot challenge the reactionary positions that their allies might have because that will break up the bloc and defeat its purpose. This the SWP has now discovered in its tortuous defence of Galloway and his support for the oppression of women (see below).

The outcome of the SWP's shabby, political opportunism is likely to be a fiasco. Even in London with George Galloway heading their list, a recent *Evening Standard* poll gave Respect less than 0.5%. This is the consequence of demobilising the opposition to the war and trying to court opportunist Labour politicians whether they are inside or outside the Party.

Genuine socialists cannot but agree with the position we put forward in FRFI 178, and we repeat it for those who need reminding. '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 that champions the interests of the oppressed... one which is open and democratic, and one which above all demands an irrevocable break from Labour imperialism.'



George Galloway, Respect and abortion

A recent article in *The Independent on Sunday* (4 April 2004) quotes George Galloway as saying that he is 'strongly against abortion. I believe life begins at conception and therefore unborn babies have rights. I think abortion is immoral... I believe in God. I have to believe that the collection of cells has a soul'. This reactionary position will be a surprise to many people but in fact it is consistent with his record as a Labour MP. The completely reactionary Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child lauds him as a 'courageous fighter' in defence of the 'unborn child'.

Galloway's fundamentalist Catholic position is being put into practice in the US where the fundamentalist Protestant George Bush, has banned US aid to any agency offering abortion advice and has withheld \$30 million from a UN population control programme because it supported 'reproductive rights'. A 'partial birth abortion ban' act made law last autumn has led to the US Justice Department demanding the medical records of thousands of women from hospitals. A New York hospital has already been fined because it refused to hand over

records. In Utah a woman with mental problems was charged with murder when one of her twins died during delivery. She had refused a Caesarean section and was accused of abusing drugs. Other states have charged women with abuse for taking drugs or drinking during pregnancy. Some 30 states have laws 'protecting' the unborn child which are used exclusively against the poor and oppressed.

The SWP have attempted to downplay Galloway's utterly reactionary views by saying that this is his personal position and not the position of

Respect. But Respect itself does not have a concrete position on abortion and anyway the official name Respect in the elections is, Respect - The Unity Coalition (George Galloway). Galloway's views will seem to most people to be the position of Respect. Women in Leeds quite properly picketed a Galloway meeting to defend women's rights; all genuine socialists should oppose him in his campaign for votes given he stands for the continued oppression of women. The RCG has always demanded the right to free contraception and abortion on demand. ■

From Hands off Ireland!
(Issue No 5) prior to the 1979
general election explaining
why we oppose Labour.

The Labour Party, Ireland and the General Election

The Labour Party reveals its pro-imperialist and racist character more clearly on the Irish issue than any other. In 1949, it was a Labour government which passed the Government of Ireland Act which was designed to strengthen the Loyalist ascendancy in the Six Counties. Twenty years later, in 1969, another Labour government sent troops into the Six Counties to suppress the struggle of the nationalist working class. Five years later, yet another Labour government passed the racist anti-Irish Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). In 1976, the same government withdrew special category status [for Irish prisoners - FRFI] and created the torture blocks of Long Kesh. In 1977, the same government announced the expansion of the RUC, UDR and SAS. Since December 1977, the SAS has been responsible for at least eleven assassinations in the Six Counties. The Labour government is presiding over a systematic terror campaign against the Irish people.

The so-called left wing of the Labour Party has done nothing to oppose this racist pro-imperialist government. Indeed left MP Stan Newens recently referred to the Republican movement as 'fascists' and Syd Bidwell signed the Select Committee report on immigration which is an openly racist attack on black workers in this country. And those MPs who have been touted by the Communist Party of Great Britain and the radical left as defenders of the Irish people have offered nothing more than the occasional speech at left gatherings and the occasional question in the House of Commons. On 15 March this year the PTA came up for renewal in the House of Commons. Only 23 Labour MPs opposed it. Three of these 23 were in favour of a three-month extension. All of those who spoke against renewal argued that the police already had adequate powers. None of those who spoke against the Act mentioned self-determination for the Irish, or called for the withdrawal of British troops, or attacked the torture programme of the British state. This was the left's campaign! Nothing but hot, or rather luke-warm air was offered.

There is no choice in this election for the working class. This election offers nothing more than a choice of which set of torturers to oppress the Irish people. Labour torturers or Tory torturers? In these circumstances the Revolutionary Communist Group cannot support the Labour Party in the election. During the campaign we will raise the Irish issue and expose the pro-imperialist, racist nature of the Labour Party. ■

'The people of the world will win' –

Fidel Castro's message for May Day

On May Day, Fidel Castro addressed over a million Cubans in Havana's Revolution Square. Referring to Cuba's moral victory at the UN Human Rights Commission and Cuba's motion for a UN investigation into the US' Guantanamo concentration camp, Fidel said 'a crushing blow was dealt to the enormous hypocrisy, permanent falsehood and cynicism the masters of the world use to try to preserve the rotten system of political and economic domination they have imposed on the world'.

Fidel described Camp Delta as 'one of the most horrendous examples of human rights violation ever to take place in this world', adding: 'They could have used their own territory for such a bizarre contribution to civilisation, but they did it on a stretch of land that they occupy illegally and forcibly in another country, Cuba, whom every year in Geneva they accuse of human rights violations'.

As for those countries which supported the US-sponsored motion against Cuba, Fidel described Peru as 'an example of the degree of servility and dependence into which imperialism and its neo-liberal globalisation have led many countries in



May Day, Havana 2004

Latin America'. As for Mexico, 'It is truly painful to see the great prestige and influence Mexico earned in the eyes of Latin America and the world, which stemmed from a genuine, far-reaching revolution, turn to ashes'. The US had historically stolen more than half of Mexico's territory and 500 Mexicans die every year trying to cross the electrified fence on the US-Mexico border 'all because of a brutal ruthless

principle: free passage for capital and goods; persecution, exclusion and death for human beings... Will such an inequitable and unfair situation really be solved by voting for anti-Cuban resolutions in Geneva?'

Fidel characterised the European Union as 'a Mafia mob allied with and subordinate to Washington' and the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe who now cosy up to the imperialists as 'a plague of

renegades, anxious for the credits and goods of consumer society'.

He mocked such countries' reaction to the Cuban proposal to investigate the Guantanamo Bay prison camp: 'Panic spread through the herd of hypocrites, especially those from the European Community... they had to confess their failure to act according to their principles and their hypocrisy, or do the impossible – disobey the empire'.

Fidel then expressed his support for the Iraqi people, pointing out: 'We do not support any government in Iraq or any given political system. This is the exclusive prerogative of the Iraqis'.

'The enormous and growing world sympathy with the Iraqi people was generated by the brutal bombings of Baghdad and other cities which sowed terror and death among innocent civilians, totally ignoring the terrible trauma which will affect millions of children, adolescents, pregnant women, mothers and old people all of their lives, bombings for which there is no possible justification, based as they were on barefaced lies. This sympathy is growing because billions of people have come to realise that it is a war of conquest to gain possession of the country's resources and raw materials.'



Fidel Castro

However, Fidel was confident that the people of the world would bring about change for the better in a world whose current economic system is unsustainable and compared the Iraqi people's resistance to that of the Vietnamese people and the Algerian people's war of liberation. That lesson of the ultimate invincibility of peoples' resistance is applicable to the struggle of the Cuban people themselves. 'We Cubans will continue... to wage our most resolute battle against those who give themselves the luxury of advocating political changes based on the physical removal of some of us... To those who persist in their efforts to destroy the Revolution, I simply say in the name of the crowd gathered here on 1 May, as I said at Giron and at other decisive moments in our battles:

Long live socialism!

Homeland or Death!

We shall be victorious!

Jim Craven

US ratchets up pressure against Cuba

As the US Presidential election looms closer, it is time once again for the US administration to declare open season against Cuba in order to garner maximum votes for George Bush from the reactionary Miami-based Cuban exile population – votes that proved crucial to Bush's fraudulent victory in 2000. But the transparency and cynicism of recent US manoeuvres against Cuba makes them no less damaging for the socialist island, particularly in the menacing climate of the current US 'War on Terrorism'. While Cuba remains on the official US list of 'terrorist states', any hostile act by the United States can only be viewed as an attempt to provoke a response which could provide a green light for US military action. However, Cuba continues to parry the thrusts of the US and its lackeys and expose the hypocrisy and brutality of imperialism, while consolidating key alliances with other countries of Latin America. **JIM CRAVEN** and **JUANJO RIVAS** report.

United Nations vote

This renewed spate of attacks began in the run-up to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (HRC) meeting in April, as the United States, using threats and bribes, touted round the United Nations for any country shabby or desperate enough to play what Cuban Foreign Minister Roque has called 'the role of the empire's lackey'. By such measures the United States was able to force through its annual motion at the HRC, criticising Cuba for so-called human rights abuses for its jailing of 75 counter-revolutionaries in April 2003. Yet despite its best efforts, the US won by just one vote, enabling Cuba to claim a moral victory. Last year Costa Rica

submitted the US motion as proxy; this year it was Honduras, lured by the possibility of a slice of a \$3.5bn US Millennium Challenge Fund. Roque made it clear that Cuba rejects the spurious resolution approved in Geneva and will not abide by any of its stipulations.

The obscenity of Honduras' role in this charade was highlighted by the fact that while Honduran President Ricardo Maduro was accepting US blood money, his wife was thanking Cuba for its assistance after Hurricane Mitch a couple of years ago, when Cuban doctors and medical aid were first to arrive. Roque launched a blistering attack on those who criticised Cuba's human rights record. In a pointed jibe

at Honduras, where reports of torture and the assassination of street children and prisoners are rife, he announced: 'Cuba will not resort to murder, nor will it apply torture or violence, but has the right to defend itself and punish those who collaborate with a foreign power that is attacking its country.'

Twenty-one countries voted with Cuba to oppose the motion, including China, Egypt, India, Russia, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, speaking for many of the poorest people in the world. Against Cuba stood the forces of imperialism – the United States, Britain and the other countries of the European Union, Japan, Australia, Sweden and their cronies – including Peru and Mexico.



Cuba responds

Cuba hit back swiftly, exposing the vile double standards that define imperialism's stance on human rights, with its own motion demanding an investigation into the abuse of human rights at the US military prison in Guantanamo Naval Base. It also called on the UN's special rapporteur on torture to report back from Guantanamo to the 2005 Human Rights Commission. The US responded with outrage, warning countries that their prisoners in Guantanamo would suffer if they supported the Cuban motion. Bush warned the countries of the EU 'not to lend themselves to Cuba's game'. And, inevitably, the other imperialist nations and their allies caved in; the Cuban motion was not discussed. Roque was withering: 'Third World countries are witnessing a pathetic spectacle, that of the accusers being accused; the consors of yesterday now displaying desperate gestures so that the situation in Guantanamo will not be brought before the Human Rights Commission'.

But Cuba has promised that it will continue to fight for an investigation into abuse at Guantanamo at the UN General Assembly in September at the next meeting of the HRC in 2005.

The cowardice of those countries that lined up with the US to attack Cuba at the United Nations was emphasised again in Fidel Castro's May Day speech to over a million Cubans in Havana's Revolution Square (see separate article). Castro pointed to the 'servility' of countries like Peru and Mexico, amongst others, who refused to stand up to imperialism. As a result, both countries immediately removed their diplomats from the island and, in Mexico, the Cuban ambassador was declared *persona non grata* and was given 48 hours to leave – learning of the decision, by telephone, just five minutes before it was made public. Peru and Mexico may, however, come to regret their slavish adherence to US policy: within days, 5,000 Mexicans

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Nepal – urban unrest intensifies

Gyanendra, the dictatorial king of Nepal and self-proclaimed reincarnation of Hindu god Vishnu is finding himself increasingly isolated as the insurgency against his brutal rule has spread from the countryside into the cities. Over the last two months there have been daily demonstrations in Kathmandu and other cities by thousands of students and workers demanding that he meet with the main political parties to sack the Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa and create a government of national unity.

The king conceded the first demand, sacking Thapa on 6 May 2004. He was unpopular and expendable, and could be easily replaced by another loyal stooge. But the king has yet to compromise on bringing about a political consensus and entering into serious talks with the five main opposition parties.

He is though in an untenable situation. Ultimately his only chance for survival will be to relinquish some of his powers to the democratic bourgeois forces in the cities. His rule only continues because he has enjoyed the backing of the imperialist powers which have financed his regime. His ever-loyal Royal Nepalese Army has also been invigorated with up-to-date weaponry, including two spy planes provided by Britain and high-tech surveillance equipment from Israel. But coming to an agreement with the five main political parties, in particular the Nepali Congress and the opportunist Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) will be a political necessity if the king wishes to survive.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has agreed to enter into discussions again with all political factions in an attempt to create a Constituent Assembly. Following the resignation of Thapa, CPN(M) leader Prachanda proposed the need to resume roundtable talks with the political parties, the king, civil society and the UN. It is still very unlikely that the king will sit down at the negotiating table with the Maoists. But the willingness of the CPN(M) to negotiate, and the increasing political turmoil, may force the king's hand and lead him to conciliate with the bourgeois forces.

Imperialism is also becoming increasingly worried by the escalating insurgency and is pressing the king to seek dialogue in order to contain the situation. Two states essentially exist within Nepal – the countryside and the cities. The countryside is in the hands

of the CPN(M) which, despite heavy losses, has recently consolidated control in its strongholds. It has just announced the formation of eight of the nine autonomous regional governments they want to establish in the country in preparation for the take-over of the central government in Kathmandu.



The West has also tied Nepal into the neo-liberal order by recently making it the latest member of the World Trade Organisation. This has coincided with the World Bank's decision to withdraw funding for a food-for-work programme which could mean starvation for more than 50,000 people. Imperialism is mounting a two-pronged attack on the revolution – one prong is a call for increasing intervention amongst the political forces, and the other is to escalate the war against the peasants. It is a war which includes US troops fighting alongside the RNA to terrorise villages and a war by the WTO and WB orchestrated attrition to stunt the social and welfare programmes now underway in the liberated areas.

The defeat of the fascist BJP in the recent Indian elections has reduced the immediate likelihood of a violent Indian intervention in Nepal. Coupled with the fact that the imperialists are bogged down in the Middle East, this could provide the Nepalese people with the necessary breathing space to carry their revolution forward.

Andrew Alexander

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took to the streets to oppose their government's anti-Cuban measures; in Peru, where the president's popularity has dropped to 7.7%, indigenous peasants marched en masse.

Miami Mafia demand more

Yet the reactionary Cuban exile mafia – who, after all, will be satisfied with nothing less than Castro's head on a plate and the total destruction of the Cuban revolution – have criticised the Bush regime for not being tough enough on Cuba. Step forward arch reactionary Robert Noriega, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, paid-up member of the Cuban Miami mafia and architect of the recent coup in Haiti, with a 450-page Report from the Commission of Assistance for a Free Cuba, which has the stated aim of 'hastening the day when Cuba becomes a free country' by boosting support for internal counter-revolution, increasing international campaigns against Cuba, radicalising subversive actions and new measures to strangle the country's economy.

The main provisions are:

- A \$59m fund to train and support mercenaries acting to subvert Cuba from within

- An \$18m programme to transmit US radio and TV propaganda from a C-130 aeroplane
- A further \$5m to promote anti-Cuban campaigns in other countries
- Restrictions on the right of Cubans abroad to send remittances to their families in Cuba and to visit them
- Visits by US citizens to Cuba, already severely limited and punishable by huge fines, to be restricted still further
- Foreign governments to be urged to step up anti-Cuba campaigns and discourage tourist travel to Cuba
- A Cuban Asset Targeting Group will investigate Cuban companies and foreign companies that trade with Cuba with the aim of destroying Cuban exports
- More resources to be devoted to implementing sections of the blockade legislation which deny foreign nationals who trade with Cuba access to the US or allow them to be tried by US courts

The new measures aim to starve Cuba of hard currency and foment turmoil – again a way for imperialism to create a pretext for invading the island. Indeed, much of the report is given over to

Ireland

Labour steps up pressure on IRA to disband

PAUL MALLON

The publication of the first report of the so-called Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) has put the disbanding of the IRA at the centre of the peace process. The subsequent announcement in early May by the British and Irish governments of a 'road map' to restore devolved power to the north of Ireland is little more than political posturing as loyalist attacks have continued on the nationalist community. With the summer Protestant marching season approaching, nationalists are bracing themselves for further loyalist attacks.

The Irish and British governments established the IMC in January; its remit is to monitor the ceasefire and report every six months. The body is outside of the Good Friday Agreement and demonstrates the power of Unionism and the British government to set the pace of political events in the north of Ireland. Following the alleged IRA kidnapping incident of dissident republican Bobby Tohill in Belfast on 20 February, the IMC's first report was published early – on 20 April. It details the level of violence ongoing throughout the north, condemns both loyalists and Republicans and levies financial penalties against both Sinn Féin and the Progressive Unionist Party (the political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force).

The primary concern of the report is not violence, however. Its purpose is to isolate Sinn Féin and so press it into agreeing to the disbandment of the IRA. That the report confirms the existence of the IRA is embarrassment enough for Sinn Féin, since it places the organisation in a difficult position with those it sees as its major allies – the SDLP and the Irish government, both of whom accepted the report in contrast to Sinn Féin. The IMC will continue to add to the pressure on Sinn Féin to make a choice: either break with and disband the IRA, or lose its bourgeois allies and with them, the chance of governmental participation.

In publishing the report, the Labour



Ian Paisley

government is also acknowledging that Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party will never accept devolved power alongside Sinn Féin. Speaking at his party's conference in Belfast in early May, Paisley declared 'This is war, war waged in every sphere!' The restoration of the Stormont Assembly has never seemed so far away even though further elections in October are mooted. Sinn Féin's strategy of reaching out to a 'progressive' side of Unionism has yielded nothing.

Sandy Row protest

The realities of 'peace' can best be seen in the Sandy Row district of South Belfast where loyalists have recently escalated their racist and sectarian attacks on residents of the nearby Whitehall Square apartment block. Sandy Row is a staunchly loyalist area and is regarded as being a stronghold of the Ulster Defence Association, responsible for the murder of hundreds of Catholics throughout the conflict in the north. Anti-Catholic leaflets have been distributed, and despite the fact that the apartment block houses only a handful of Catholic residents, local unionists have branded it as 'Vatican Square'.

On the evening of Wednesday 28

April a picket of over 500 loyalists gathered in a lynch-mob show of strength demanding the eviction of Catholics. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) made no attempt to disperse the hate mob. Late on Friday 30 April, residents were awoken by a Unionist band playing sectarian music. This was followed by a sustained attack on the apartments by loyalists wielding baseball bats and sledgehammers trying to gain entrance to the complex. Such intimidation has resulted in a number of Catholics leaving the area. On

Tuesday 11 May a gang of 40 masked loyalists drove into the McClure Street area of South Belfast threatening local residents while the PSNI looked on in riot gear. Nationalists living in interface areas in Belfast are on high alert in fear of loyalist attacks following this spate of incidents.

The Good Friday Agreement long ago ceased to have any meaning for those nationalists on the receiving end of sustained loyalist attacks and living in daily fear of their lives. Meanwhile, the IMC report has put further pressure on the republican movement to disband the IRA. Should this happen, who will defend the nationalist people against the loyalist bigots?

unemployment will be kept under 2.5%. Exchange rates for the Cuban peso and convertible peso will remain unchanged and bank savings and interest rates will be guaranteed. On 7 May, a joint statement by the Cuban government and the Communist Party of Cuba stated: 'The solid support given to the Revolution by almost the whole population makes it invulnerable to Mr Bush's putrid ideology. His cruel and cowardly measures will doubtless impose some degree of sacrifice on our people but they will not for one second slow down the march towards the humane and social goals it has set itself and no-one will be without help. Cuba will never return to the horrible, wretched, inhuman conditions of a US colony.' A week later, Cubans proved their willingness to resist as one million marched to the US Interests Section in Havana to protest against the new measures.

'They want to wipe out Cuba's example'

Whatever imperialism has thrown at Cuba, the Revolution has continued not only to resist and to survive, but to develop. Socialism is being extended within Cuba, politically, socially, economically and ideologically. The Battle

of Ideas and the projects associated with it have extended the Revolution more fully and profoundly to include even the most marginalised in Cuban society. At the same time, on the international stage, Cuba continues to speak for the oppressed of the world, to lead Latin America in the fight against the devastating US Free Trade Area of the Americas and to form alliances with other radical governments such as the Chavez government in Venezuela. Small wonder that the US Goliath perceives this tiny David of an island of 11 million people as such a threat to its plans for a '21st century of American domination'. For as Castro pointed out 'You label a tyranny the economic and political system that has guided the Cuban people to higher levels of literacy, knowledge and culture than those in the most developed countries of the world. Listening to you talk of human rights in Cuba has a hollow, absurd ring. This, Mr Bush, is one of the few countries in the hemisphere where not once in 45 years has there been a single case of torture, a single death squad, a single extrajudicial execution or a single ruler who has become a millionaire through having held power. You lack the moral authority to speak of Cuba.'

Palestine:

Blitzkrieg in Rafah as resistance strikes back

In the most appalling scenes of wanton destruction, of dead and wounded

Palestinian children, of refugees fleeing bulldozers and tanks with their pitifully few belongings, the world saw the real face of Zionism in Rafah: of unbridled racism, of naked fascism. One of the world's richest nations, its third or fourth military power, had responded with utter brutality against one of the poorest people of the world because they had dared give the oppressor a bloody nose. Dozens died; hundreds were made homeless. And in a final gesture of contempt, the Zionist storm-troopers destroyed a zoo because it was one of the few entertainments available to the children of Gaza. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.



Gaza

In two invasions between 13 and 15 May, and 17 and 21 May, 45 Palestinians were murdered in Rafah. 39 alone were killed in the second invasion, eight of them on a peaceful demonstration on 18 May, four of whom were children. The Zionists first claimed that there were armed militants in the demonstration, then that the deaths were accidental. The fact is that they deliberately targeted the demonstration since they regard Palestinians as little better than animals. In all, nine children were murdered during this period in Rafah, and in the second invasion over a hundred houses were bulldozed making nearly 1,500 people homeless on top of more than a thousand the previous week. Only seven of the dead were fighters – the rest of the victims were civilians. This was a brutal and completely illegal punishment, but one which earned the perpetrator no more than a ticking-off from the so-called civilised powers of the European Union and the US.

The Zionist terror campaign against the Palestinian people had continued throughout April. On 17 April, missiles fired from an Apache helicopter murdered Hamas leader Abdel-Aziz Al Rantisi, less than a month after another missile salvo had killed Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Once again, tens of thousands attended the funeral of a Palestinian leader. A 24-strong armed honour guard from Fatah's Al Aqsa brigades presented condolences; one of its members said 'We are united. We are brothers in the resistance to Israel. The revenge will be fast and quick. We respect him because he was

one of our leaders, a big symbol. We do not distinguish between factions now. We are one nation'. One of the mourners declared 'What else can we do? Bush says we are to have nothing except what Sharon gives us. The situation gets worse. We have more martyrs and less space to live in'. Another mourner singled out the US for giving the green light to the assassination: 'America is the father of terror, they are the number one enemy of the people.'

On 20 April, the Zionists killed seven in two assassination attacks in Gaza. The next day, nine were killed, all aged 18 or under; five of them were children who were throwing stones at Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APC) when they came to uproot orchards and demolish homes in Abraj Al Nada. Three days later, two girls aged 4 and 7 and a 16-year-old boy were shot in Beit Hanoun. During the first ten days of May, 22 Palestinians were killed. Invasions of Gaza destroyed 131 Palestinian houses in Rafah and Khan Yunis, rendering 1,100 people homeless.

On the night of Monday 10 May, dozens of armoured vehicles, supported by tanks and helicopters, invaded Beit Zeitoun looking for 'weapons factories'. Three Palestinians were killed and scores wounded, most of them civilians. Resistance was stiff and well co-ordinated. Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters purposely drew the army into areas freshly laid with roadside bombs. At around 6.15am on Tuesday 11 May one bomb weighing 50 kilos detonated under an APC, leaving six soldiers dead. Five more

Palestinians were killed in the aftermath as the Zionists lashed out blindly. More forces were sent in, ostensibly to look for body parts, in reality to punish the resistance. The next day, Palestinian fighters scored another success, blowing up a second APC with five Zionist soldiers inside. Heavy fighting continued through to Friday 14 May as Zionists started to destroy dozens of buildings along the Philadelphia Road in Rafah; two more soldiers were shot dead. Altogether, however, at least 30 Palestinians died during these battles, mostly civilians and several children including three aged 11, 12 and 14. It was a prelude to the even bloodier invasion that started on 17 May.

Divisions amongst the Zionists

Despite the terror, the Zionists are seriously divided about the occupation, and in particular over Sharon's disengagement plan. In mid-April, the bloody general's position seemed unassailable. When he had stepped out with George Bush in front of the world's press on 14 April to hear the US President describe his Gaza disengagement plan as 'historic and courageous', there seemed little to stop it from becoming fact. Bush completely endorsed it. In respect of the illegal settlements on the West Bank, the US president declared that 'realities on the ground and in the region have changed greatly', so that 'it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949'. The Zionists would therefore be able to annex parts of the West Bank

in advance of a final settlement. Later, Israeli embassy officials said the US had backed a plan requiring Israel to withdraw from only four token settlements in the north-west sector of the West Bank with a total of 500 settlers. They said diplomats had prepared four versions of withdrawal proposals, only for Washington to accept the initial one, which was least generous to the Palestinians. Finally, Bush told the world that Palestinian refugees could not be allowed to return to Israel, but only to the fragmented entity which the Zionists and their US allies will call a Palestinian state: 'It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there rather than Israel.'

The rest of the world could only look on in astonishment. In the space of a few moments Bush had ripped up decades of UN diplomacy and trampled over basic international law. There was no longer to be any pretence of negotiating with the Palestinian people. Arab state leaders wrung their hands – and did no more, as their survival is dependent on the good favours of US imperialism. The EU stated its opposition, but like the UN, it had been sidelined. The most bizarre opinion was Tony Blair's: he welcomed Bush's declaration as a step along the US Roadmap – when for the rest of the world, including the US and the Zionists, it spelled the end of that ill-fated document.

Yet within two weeks Sharon's victory had begun to look very hollow. By a large majority (59.5% against 39.7%), a referendum of his Likud Party on 2 May rejected withdrawal from Gaza. As one settler put it, 'we have told the world that we are here to stay'. Throughout the referendum campaign, the settler racists had made the running. Cabinet Minister Tsibi Livni publicly saluted the fanatic settlers of Kfar Dorom in South Gaza, saying that they embodied 'the enduring vigour' of Zionism and suggested that Sharon was betraying them. Another Likud activist, journalist Ohad Kamin, thought that 'Sharon is not only an enemy, he is the most dangerous enemy of Israel'. Children from the Gaza settlements were posted at ballot boxes to bring extra moral pressure to the voters. The outcome was chaos, with Sharon unable to continue with his plan, yet equally unwilling to resign. It was left to a US State Department official to complain in *The Washington Post* that 'the real objective in giving Sharon the blank cheque he left with was to shore up his political support at home. We paid a very high price and got nothing in return.'

In spite of the scale of the Palestinian casualties, the successes of the resistance were another major defeat for Sharon. There is turmoil within the Zionist ruling class. An Israeli army general, quoted in Israel's *Ma'ariv* newspaper on 11 May, but speaking before the invasion of Beit Zeitoun, summarised their problems:

'After the failure of the [Likud] referendum [on the disengagement plan], we don't have the slightest idea of what we are doing [in Gaza], what is happening or what is on the agenda. Is there going to be a pull out? Is there disengagement? Over what are we fighting? What are we supposed to be doing?' A demonstration of 150,000 Israelis on 15 May organised by the peace camp accompanied polls that showed that the removal of the Gaza settlers had the support of 70% of all Israelis. The protestors demanded that the butcher of Beirut implement his own policies. Among those who back the pullout is a well-known Israeli actor, Shlomo Vishinsky, whose 20-year-old son was one of the soldiers killed in Gaza: 'It's clear that no one wants to be in Gaza except the members of the Likud,' he wrote in the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*.

Sharon has promised to present a revised version of his plan to the Israeli cabinet. Yet the fundamentalist wing of his coalition is adamantly opposed to any withdrawal whatsoever, whilst the secular *Shinui* party is threatening to withdraw from the cabinet if Sharon backs down. The bloody general is now caught between the fundamentalist settlers who demand a Greater Israel cleansed of all Palestinians, and the large majority of the Zionist population who now want rid of Gaza as soon as possible. In such circumstances he could not allow the successes of the resistance to pass without immediate and murderous retribution. In so doing, he exposed to the world the fascist nature of the Zionist state. ■

Intifada facts

From 1 January to 22 May, 350 Palestinians died as result of Zionist action; of these, 110 were murdered between 1 and 22 May alone.

Children murdered during this period include:

- 1 May:** Hussein Abu Aker (8) shot and killed in Khan Yunis.
- Four more children shot and wounded in this incident.
- 3 May:** Ahmed Al Khawaldia (16) died of injuries sustained on 20 April in Gaza
- 4 May:** Jamil Abu Mustafa (17) killed by a missile in Khan Yunis
- 11 May:** Rami Mohammed Ja'ar (16) killed by a live bullet in the head
- Ahmed Salem Al Swairkim (16) killed by a live bullet in the head
- Unknown (11) killed by a live bullet in the head
- Yousef Kamal Hijazi (13) killed by missile shrapnel
- 13 May:** Hamed Abu Hamra (15) killed by a missile
- 18 May:** Asma Al Mughayar (14) killed by a live bullet in the head in Rafah
- Ahmed Al Mughayar (10) Asma's brother, also killed by a live bullet in the head
- Mohammed Al Shaer (17) and Ibrahim Al Balawi (17) killed by a missile going to prayers in Gaza
- 19 May:** Walid Abu Qamar (10), Mubarak Al Hashash (11) and Mahmoud Mansour (13) killed on a demonstration in Rafah
- Saber Abu Lebda (13) killed by a live bullet in the head
- 22 May:** A girl (3) shot dead in Gaza

Iraq: illusions shattered

continued from page 1

shoot any male of military age on the streets after dark, armed or not.' US fighters dropped 500 pound and 2,000 pound bombs on the city (bombs the size of Volkswagens). US snipers guarded the routes to the hospital and shot at anyone approaching, including clearly marked ambulances. The hospital recorded up to 600 Iraqi dead within five days, including 68 children in the first three days. General John Abizaid, head of US Central Command, said '95% of those killed were legitimate targets.' Among these were 40 worshippers killed in a mosque by a US missile.

By the end of April 2004 the resistance in Falluja was still intact. 800 Iraqis had been killed in the city during the month. The US claimed to have lost eight dead in the battle, but later reports suggest close to 100 US soldiers killed. At the end of April Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) head Paul Bremer and occupation force generals met with people purporting to represent Falluja. The occupiers were threatened with 100 Fallujas if they dared to invade the town. On 28 April UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, 'Violent military action by an occupying power will only make matters worse.' It is 'time for restraint', he added. British Prime Minister Blair said that the US action in Falluja was 'perfectly right and proper'. Falluja's youth dug trenches in a soccer stadium to bury their dead. Faced with being unable to defeat the resistance in Falluja the only alternative was to destroy the city. This would be at the cost of losing Coalition allies – excluding Britain and Israel – and losing the role of the once again politically useful UN as it seeks to rig up a transitional government due to take over from the CPA after 30 June. On 29 April the US announced that it had struck a deal with a former Republican Guard general to command a 1,100 Falluja Brigade to patrol the city; it includes resistance fighters. The US had said that it would not withdraw from Falluja unless the 'insurgents handed over their weapons and those who killed the four US contractors'. The occupation forces withdrew from the city empty-handed and the policy of excluding former Ba'athists from power was visibly reversed. Some US troops signalled their amazement as they withdrew. Those in the US administration who wanted to flatten Falluja lost out. The resistance could not be defeated without completely destroying Iraq. Guerrilla resistance won a political victory.

Army of Mehdi

At the end of March the CPA banned the newspaper of the Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. The newspaper was opposed to the CPA and the occupation. On 3 April US soldiers arrested one of Al Sadr's aides. The following day US Apache helicopter gunships strafed Sadr City, a poor working class Baghdad suburb and stronghold of Al Sadr's militia, the Army of Mehdi. On 5 April the CPA announced that it would arrest Al Sadr for the murder of a pro-CPA cleric. The US said that Al Sadr was an ally of Hamas and Hezbollah. Prime Minister Blair said Al Sadr was 'an extremist, a fanatic who doesn't want what the majority of the Shia want.' Al Sadr himself retreated to the Shia holy city of Najaf. By 6 April there were 57 dead and 236 wounded in Sadr City. Resistance flared up across Iraq from Mosul in the north to Nasiriya in the south. Shias of Sadr City organised an

aid convoy for the Sunnis of Falluja.

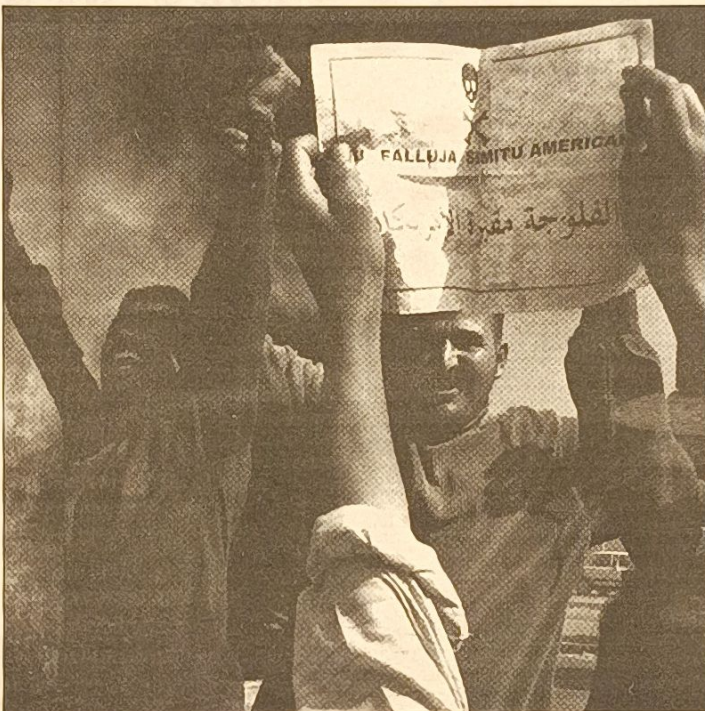
In Sadr City US-trained Iraqi troops refused to fight the militia. The Spanish army refused a US command to attack the militia. 12 Italian soldiers were injured in Nasiriya and Salvadorean and Ukrainian soldiers were killed. Other Coalition forces retreated to barracks. An Apache helicopter was shot down near Baghdad. On 17 April hundreds of Iraqi guerrillas attacked US forces in Husaybah, close to the Syrian border, killing 11 US soldiers. The next day US forces announced they were closing all roads north and south of Baghdad and that any vehicle travelling on closed stretches could be subject to lethal force: the US established a free-fire zone. British officers reported fighting 18 skirmishes in two days of clashes in Amarah, close to the Iranian border. On 21 April three police stations were blown up in the Basra region, killing 68 people including 20 children. Three US sailors were killed on 24 April when speedboats attacked Iraq's main oil export platform.

US forces surrounded Najaf but held back from launching an all-out attack while they sought to win the support of Shia clerics to isolate Al Sadr. They combined this with targeted strikes on his militia. On 4 May 150 Shia notables led by a member of the CPA-appointed Governing Council called on Al Sadr and his estimated 6,000-10,000 militia to vacate the mosques. This encouraged the occupation forces to press on with attacks on the militia in Najaf, Karbala and Kufa. Blair said he was considering deploying British troops in Najaf. Despite reluctance from within British Army command Blair wants to despatch more troops.

The occupation armies would dearly love to defeat the Mehdi Army to help reverse the impact of Falluja, but at what cost can this be done? There is fury across the Muslim world at the damage done to a holy shrine in Najaf by US munitions. Al Sadr's movement is not part of the Governing Council, but does have real ties with the people. In the absence of any government provision it provided services to ordinary Iraqis, secured mosques, universities, health and welfare centres, collected refuse, provided hospital meals, traffic police and religious seminars and enforced Islamic law. During the second week of May the US military started negotiating with 'stakeholders' in Najaf to form a security force to become part of the Iraqi army, including Al Sadr's militia. The US-appointed governor of Najaf offered to defer charges against Al Sadr if he disbanded his militia. Al Sadr responded saying he would disband the militia if religious authorities so ordered. The Coalition will combine promises to the Shia notables with attacks on the militia to try and make Al Sadr call off the resistance.

Israel as a laboratory

In the period from 1960 to the collapse of the Soviet Union NATO used Israel as a model for testing its methods for fighting a war against the Red Army in Central Europe. In three wars Israel combined speed of air cover with tank advances. In the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon Israel combined US fighter-bombers with aircraft radar and unmanned aerial vehicles fitted with TV cameras and thermal-image systems for the first time in the history of warfare. These drones skimmed the rooftops of Beirut, flying over the Palestinian districts feeding back images of population movements to Israeli ana-



'Falluja graveyard of the Americans'

lysts sitting at video consoles a hundred miles away*. This is how the occupation forces fought in Falluja with the consoles now networked to missiles.

The US military in Iraq asked for and were given the Israeli Defence Force's rules of engagement. The whole paraphernalia of racist brutality, so long directed at the Palestinians, is now directed at the Iraqis. Collective punishment, surrounding villages and towns with razor wire, burning and smashing down homes, assassination squads and torture are the 'rules of engagement'.

'A senior British Army officer' told the *Sunday Telegraph* (11 April) 'part of the problem was that American troops viewed Iraqis as *untermenschen* – the Nazi expression for "sub-humans"'. Hitler used the term in *Mein Kampf* (1925) for Jews, Romanians and Slavs. Compare Falluja with Lidice, a Czech village on the outskirts of Prague in 1942. The SS leader Heydrich was assassinated in Lidice by Czech partisans. They had left Leamington Spa in Warwickshire to undertake their mission. The Nazi response was to kill 340 of the 503 inhabitants of the village. Houses were set ablaze and razed to the ground. The Nazis repeated this form of collective punishment across Europe and Russia. There was systematic and mechanical devastation in Falluja as in Lidice. The Nazis were people we were told to despise, depraved beasts that must never return, but here they are wearing US and British uniforms. This is racism and fascism: it is what imperialism brings.

Mukaradeeb is a remote village close to Iraq's border with Syria. On 19 May it hosted a wedding party. That evening jets flew overhead. In the night, the celebrations over, US planes bombed tents that had housed the festivities. Then came helicopter gunships and armoured vehicles. Machine guns were fired at the guests. Two Chinook helicopters landed dozens of soldiers. The soldiers laid explosives in houses and blew them up. 41 people were killed, including 14 babies and children and 11 women. Marine commander Major General James Mattis said, 'How many people go to the mid-

dle of the desert...to hold a wedding 80 miles from the nearest civilisation?' Brigadier Kimmitt offered no apology, 'we operated within our rules of engagement.'

There were reports that US officers accompanied the Israeli army on its forays into the West Bank and Gaza. Informed analysis of the photographs of tortured Iraqis indicates professional direction by people with knowledge of Arab culture. We know that private contractors have provided interrogation advice to the US but we do not as yet know who they are. We do know that authorisation was given by Rumsfeld for specific interrogation techniques used in Afghanistan and Guantanamo to be used in Iraq. We also know that the US has flown captives from its war on terror (people denied any legal status) for interrogation in countries where torture is routinely used. Torture is an integral part of an occupying power ruling by force, it conforms to the US and British imperial objectives. Over 43,000 Iraqis have been detained by the occupation armies, of whom only 600 have received any kind of court appearance. Ultimately, the US and British governments are responsible. Thus far no British soldier has been charged for the 33 deaths, the injury and the ill treatment of Iraqis held in British custody.

No exit from Iraq

All this violence has failed to defeat the resistance. US military spending on Iraq is now running close on \$5 billion a month. The Pentagon has ordered 21,000 soldiers due to return to the US in April to stay on duty for a further three months, thereby breaching a commitment made to keep assignments to Iraq down to one year. Nearly 4,000 US soldiers are being transferred from South Korea to Iraq. The British government is considering doubling the British troop presence. Meanwhile, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Kazakhstan have joined Spain in announcing the withdrawal of their soldiers.

When the CPA signed Order 39 last September throwing Iraq open to foreign investment the capitalists dreamed of an El Dorado, but the only gold

rush is for the mercenaries – and the insurance companies. From 31 March to the beginning of May nearly 50 civilians were kidnapped in Iraq and since 9 March 20 western civilians have been killed there. Two US companies that benefited from contracts are Bechtel and Halliburton. Bechtel's Baghdad compound carries a sign warning employees to hide under their desks, preferably with a mattress on top, in the event of close-range gunfire. Half of Bechtel's staff assigned to Iraq now stay in Kuwait and Jordan. 'For those remaining in Baghdad, a British security company ArmorGroup, provides two guards for every employee.' (*Financial Times*). The going rate for a security guard is up to \$20,000 a month. There are 20,000 private military personnel in Iraq. This amounts to \$400 million a month in salaries or \$4.8 billion a year.

50% of the value of any business contract in Iraq is made up of insurance and security costs. None of the three banks (HSBC, Standard Chartered and the National Bank of Kuwait) given licenses in January to operate in Iraq has started business there. Although Shell has signed a contract to operate in Iraq, neither Shell nor BP will do so until the 'security situation' improves. One Lebanese company complains there are days when fewer than half the Iraqi workforce turn-up. Five employees have been killed this year. Foreign contractors have to screen workers at checkpoints before they start work. Consequently, an eight hours working day is reduced to four or five hours. Consultants sent from North Carolina to train the Iraqis in 'how democracy works' have upped and gone to Kuwait. Halliburton has had 34 of its staff killed. It has cancelled truck convoys because grenade attacks have made the roads too dangerous and now the US has declared them a free-fire zone. This is presumably what British Foreign Secretary Straw means when he talks about 'rebuilding Iraq': a comedy if it were not so tragic.

What is happening in Iraq has struck deep into the capitalist brain. Control over the Middle East has been essential to imperialism since the First World War. Martin Wolf warns, 'It is impossible to exaggerate the dangers attendant upon a US failure in Iraq: jihadis would conclude that they had now defeated a second superpower; friendly regimes would be shaken; and US prestige would be destroyed. Iraq is not another Vietnam. It is far more dangerous than that.' (*Financial Times*). The reversals in US tactics after Falluja coincided with the first appearance of the images of torture. The letter signed by 52 former British diplomats criticising the government, the press circling around Rumsfeld and Blair, smelling blood in the water, all testify to the profound anxiety in the US and British ruling classes. France and Russia are manoeuvring to ensure the US and Britain have a reduced role in Iraq in exchange for a new UN resolution sharing out the burden for reconstructing the country. The assassination of the president of the Governing Council, Izzedin Salim, on 17 May portends a perilous future for any interim government.

We should be clear that US and British imperialism cannot allow their position in the Middle East to be weakened. They will devise new methods such as restoring the Ba'athists with a new Saddam in all but name and recruiting and rewarding militias. They will consider dividing the country up between Kurds, Sunnis and Shias. They will try to kill twice, three times and more the numbers of Iraqis they have already killed. But they cannot yield to Iraq's right of self-determination unless they are forced to. Socialists and democrats in Britain must declare for the right of Iraq's people to resist and an end to all foreign troops in Iraq.

* Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*

Guatemala

Fifty years of struggle and repression in Guatemala

In June 1954, US planes bombed Guatemalan cities while US-funded mercenaries invaded from Honduras and the CIA bribed the Guatemalan army to turn against the democratically elected government of Colonel Jacobo Arbenz. Thus ended an unprecedented ten-year period of democracy and social reforms that began with the previous elected President Juan Jose Arevalo in 1945. **HELEN BURNES** reports.

The CIA coup was a response to legislation by Arbenz to expropriate the uncultivated land of the powerful US multinational the United Fruit Company (*La Frutera* – the predecessor of today's Del Monte corporation) and redistribute it to landless peasants. The coup, code-named Operation Diabolo (Devil), was ordered in January 1954 by US President Eisenhower. It was organised by CIA Director Allen Dulles and his brother John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State. The Dulles brothers both had shares in *La Frutera*.

Arbenz had played a key role in the civilian-military uprisings in summer and autumn of 1944 to bring down the dictator General Jorge Ubico. In December 1944 professor Arevalo won Guatemala's first ever free election. Describing his government as 'spiritual socialism', he began to democratise the political system, introduce moderate legislation to redistribute uncultivated land and double the number of teachers and schools, whilst carefully distancing himself from Guatemalan communists. After his election, Arbenz took over in March 1951. He deepened and extended the reforms, recognising the Marxist Guatemalan Workers Party, which infuriated a US regime already set into the frenzied anti-communism of the McCarthy era.

At this time, 2% of the population controlled 74% of arable land. Arbenz's modest redistribution plan aimed to develop a small farmer capitalist agricultural sector. In June 1952, 918,000 acres were expropriated and distributed to 88,000 families in two years. Only 15% of the 650,000 acres owned by *La Frutera* were subject to expropriation. The government offered \$627,527 in compensation, calculated in line with the company's 1950 tax declaration. *La Frutera's* counter claim to the US government was \$15.8m – clearly well over the value of land declared for tax purposes!

Arbenz ignored the call to arm the people until 25 June, but by then the army had betrayed him and refused to carry out the order. He resigned on 27 June. In the bloodbath which followed 21,000 people died. Thousands were thrown into jails and torture chambers. Trade unions and

peasant organisations were banned again and 72,000 people were registered as communists or sympathisers and lined up for elimination. In 1960 a military revolt of Arbenz supporters was crushed, but its leaders reformed to start a guerrilla campaign in 1962, adopting the strategy of the Cuban Rebel Army. In 1963 the Pentagon and the CIA launched counter-insurgency operations in Guatemala. In 1977, when the US Carter administration cut off military aid after a fallout with the Guatemalan government over what it called 'gross human rights violations', Israel stepped in to become Guatemala's principle arms supplier and primary source of counter-insurgency advice.

The violence of the counterinsurgency programme pushed thousands into the revolutionary guerrilla movement, which based itself on the most dispossessed and marginalised section of society, the rural indigenous people. Three guerrilla groups consolidated forces in 1980 as the United National Revolutionaries of Guatemala (UNRG). In the cities too, students were targeted, workers leaders, religious spokespersons, anyone who dared to criticise the iron grip of government control.

During the 36-year civil war, 200,000 Guatemalans were killed, 1 million made homeless, 100,000 fled to Mexico and tens of thousands 'disappeared'. Indigenous or Mayan people, who make up 50-60% of the total population, were around four-fifths of the victims, subject to scorched earth policies, land clearances, collective punishment and mass killings. Mass graves, sometimes containing several hundred skeletons are still being uncovered throughout rural Guatemala, particularly in the northwest highlands, with a high concentration of indigenous people. The worst years were the early 1980s, under President Romero Lucas, an indigenous man, followed by the racist dictator General Rios Montt, proud of his pure Spanish blood. They developed 'model villages' based on the strategic hamlet campaign developed in Vietnam. Indigenous peasants scattered throughout the mountains were forced to move into concentrated areas where they were under constant surveillance and control, prevented from subsistence farming and from supporting the guerrillas.

Civilians were also forced to join the Civilian Self-defence Patrols, and given arms to fight against the guerrillas, or ordered to execute those captured by the army. If they refused they were accused of being guerrillas, or sympathisers, and jailed and tortured or killed.

The Peace Accords signed in 1996 embraced demands which if met, would have alleviated the racist discrimination against the indigenous Guatemalans. However, once the arms were laid down the machinations of the rich ruling class began. They manipulated a national referendum to prevent the agreements of the Peace Accords from being endorsed in the Constitution. They remain on the statue book, to be enacted piecemeal according to the political whims of whichever government is in power.



200,000 Guatemalans have died in the civil war since the CIA coup overthrew Arbenz in 1954

Thirty six years of sacrifice and bloodshed, five years of congressional debate, and the Guatemalan people are still enslaved, exploited and impoverished. In 1998, the poorest 10% of Guatemalans possessed 1.6% of the national income or consumption. The richest 10% possessed 46%; a ratio of 29:1 (Human Development Index 2003).

Indeed, the depth of pessimism in Guatemala is such that the victory of presidential candidate Oscar Berger at the end of 2003, heading a moderate right-wing coalition, the Gran Alianza Nacional, was received with relief by many. Berger's victory kept out General Rios Montt, dictator between 1982-3 and founder of the Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG), a man responsible for the genocide of indigenous people. The Guatemalan constitution prohibits any ex-dictator from standing in an election, but Montt instigated a riot in Guatemala City on 23 and 24 June 2003 to force acceptance of his candidacy. A journalist was killed by Montt's mob of ex-army officers. Since the CIA coup, the politics of brute force has been rewarded. A Montt victory would have meant a second consecutive term for the FRG, whose President Portillo was elected in 1999.

Since Berger began his presidency in January this year, the daily newspapers have hounded and condemned the outgoing FRG administration for corruption, involvement

in drug trafficking, money laundering and stealing millions in public money which was siphoned off into secret bank accounts.

The amounts are astonishing, particularly for a country whose people suffer such obscene poverty, marginalisation and deprivation. In early March 2004, the national newspaper *Prensa Libre* listed the amount of public money stolen by the previous FRG government, the source of the funds, and the names of those involved. It amounted to over Q890 million (Quetzales), approximately \$111.25m. This could have paid for all of the following: food for 1.3 million children for 15 days, training of 10,000 teachers, purchase of 200 ambulances, 2,000 police cars and 8,000 school computers at Q10,000 each, and Q450 million investment in the national hospital network.

The information is in the public domain, so where are the criminal charges? On 9 February, Marco Tulio Abadio, the ex-Superintendente, escaped to Miami days before being accused of stealing Q53 million from

power. As the owners of huge *fincas* (plantations), they emerged as a section of the ruling class, challenging the traditional control of CACIF, which does not serve their interests.

The current preoccupation with the FRG witch-hunt helps President Berger to: 1) reduce the power of the military elite relative to CACIF; 2) distance himself and his coalition from the corruption of the previous government, in order to please voters and remain in power and 3) use the previous government's outrageous robbery of national resources as an excuse for failure to carry out election pledges and social investment.

The UNRG have lost a great deal of political influence in their transformation into an electoral party. They have just four representatives out of the 158 delegates to the Congress. Delegates receive a monthly salary of Q30,000, while the average rural wage for working from 6am-4pm in a *fina* is Q600 a month for men, and as little as half for women. By the end of this year, Guatemala's public debt will be more than Q1 billion. This sum does not include any new social investments promised by Berger which are desperately needed in the country. Funds donated by external countries and NGOs towards rebuilding Guatemala after the Peace Accords, were stolen by the FRG. The need for employment, for housing and for medical care is urgent. Violent crime is increasing and official statistics state that 72% of women suffer domestic violence. Only deep structural change to democratise the political system and redistribute the national wealth, along with social investment in education and health-care, can pull the majority of Guatemalan people out of the misery and marginalisation which they suffer daily. This is precisely the process of transformation which Arevalo and Arbenz began in the 1940s and which the CIA organised to destroy half a century ago. As Arbenz said at his moment of defeat 'some day the dark forces that oppress the downtrodden colonial world will be beaten'.

Guatemala compared to Cuba

	Guatemala	Cuba
Life expectancy (years)	66	77
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	43	7
Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births)	190	33
Births attended by skilled health personnel	41%	100%
Public expenditure on health (% of GDP)	2.3%	6.1%
Public expenditure on education (% of GDP)	1.7%	8.5%

(from Human Development Index 2003)

Che Guevara in Guatemala

Che Guevara arrived in Guatemala in December 1953, commenting on the 'real atmosphere of democracy'. He became a revolutionary. In February 1954 he wrote 'I have thrown my lot in with the Guatemalan government and, along with it, the PGT, which is communist'. His experience of the CIA coup taught Che valuable lessons which contributed towards the formation of his revolutionary strategy:

1. That the US government will tolerate nothing that challenges the interests of US capital.
2. The extent that they will go in order to get rid of any challenge.
3. The potentially treacherous role played by the standing army.
4. The need to empower and arm the people to defend their revolution.

Venezuela

Colombian mercenaries plot against Chavez government

The failure of the Venezuelan millionaire class, its US allies and other socially backward forces to wreck the Chavez government over the past five years, has not deterred them from continuing to finance acts of terror against it. In the latest episode, 88 Colombian paramilitaries were captured on 9 May at a ranch, El Hatillo, near Caracas. Later arrests brought numbers to over 131. There are reports of 1,300 Colombian members of the AUC fascist terror group entering Venezuela. Those captured were training for attacks on military bases, in preparation for a coup d'état against the government of President Hugo Chavez. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

On 17 May a huge rally in Caracas protested against the presence of these mercenaries and the constant interference by the US in Venezuela's internal affairs. At this rally President Chavez stated that 'the paramilitary incursion is an historic incident with worldwide resonance which only the local private media have tried to minimise... We cannot make the mistake of downplaying what has happened in Venezuela in recent days. We cannot let ourselves be influenced by the disinformation campaign put out by the media'.

His speech was very significant. In it he criticised the US government directly, calling it 'an invader and assassin imperialist force which marginalises the United Nations in order to humiliate the dignity of millions of human beings'. Accordingly, 'the Bolivarian Revolution has entered into an anti-imperialist phase'. As part of a new defence plan he announced that his government will strengthen the armed forces and called upon all Venezuelans to be part of the active defence of the country.

President Chavez in effect called for an extensive popular militia to counter US-sponsored terrorism. He talked specifically about expanding the army, creating reserves, and arming the people. He spoke of the need for active military officers, reservists and retired military supporters in the government to play a role in working with civilians in this expansion of 'the civic-military union'. This strategy was one that socialist President Allende of Chile did not adopt and ultimately he was killed in a US sponsored fascist coup d'état on 11 September 1973. The current US ambassador to Venezuela, Charles Shapiro, was the deputy chief of mission in Chile in 1973 when the bloody coup was organised. In April, Shapiro participated in a large meeting with the right wing in Caracas. The US has used similar tactics in Cuba.

The government's ability to create this unity between the people and the army follows from its constant work to organise the mass of the people in their own communities, the creation of 'Bolivarian circles' of the most diverse type. Many of these are already armed in their own self-defence. Their revolutionary necessity was demonstrated in the defeat of the attempted military coup of April 2002. Communications and Information Minister Chacon has stressed that the Bolivarian revolution is an all-inclusive project 'for all Venezuelans'.

The terrorists

President Chavez expressed the issue in explicitly anti-terrorist terms: 'We've struck a blow against coup-plotters, destabilisers and terrorists, in this endless struggle against terrorism, destabilisation and the enemies of democracy and the people.'

On 15 May, details of the large mercenary gang were given: the main leader Jose Ayala Amado is one of the heads of the Colombian AUC fascist terror group, in the Colombian province of Norte de Santander. Two other captured leaders come from the same state. Two AUC leaders escaped. The head of the Department of Police Intelligence, Miguel Rodriguez, confirmed that they had planned to attack the Urban Security Command of the Venezuelan National Guard as well as to steal its weapons. He said most were captured on a ranch belonging to a member of the Venezuelan opposition, Robert Alonso. A man had already been killed to silence witnesses in the area. Later, three more were seized at a coffee farm owned by Gustavo Cisneros, the richest businessman in Colombia, who runs the anti-Chavez media campaign. Six serving members of the Venezuelan military have been arrested in connection with the paramilitaries. Jorge Carneiro, the defence minister, reported documents found in more than 20 raids implicating 'important people in Venezuelan public life'.

The *Wall Street Journal*, as long ago as 29 January 2003, reported that counter-revolutionary Venezuelans and Cubans were receiving military training in camps in Florida, and regular provocations, sniping and bombing have occurred since 2002.

President Chavez has been very careful not to accuse President Uribe of Colombia in any way, even though it is well documented that these Colombian paramilitaries are little more than an extension of the Colombian military. However he stated that such paramilitary activity is indeed 'the brainchild of the Colombian oligarchy' of which Uribe has obvious material membership. Just one week after President Alvaro Uribe met with George W Bush in April, the Colombian senate passed a resolution against Venezuela condemning the so-called 'dictatorial regime' of Venezuela. The resolution calls for the Organisation of American States to apply the Inter-American Democratic Charter to Venezuela, allowing for intervention



Anti-imperialist march

if there is a 'breakdown' in government!

The civic military union

President Chavez is clear about the need to defend the constitution and democratic and peaceful development. The armed forces blocked a military coup attempt in preparation during the electoral process of 1998 and they stopped the electoral fraud at the beginning of the process. They have guaranteed six electoral processes in less than two years, avoiding fraud and - with the mass of the poor - defeated a coup from within their own ranks in 2002. They have been the main executors of Plan Bolivar 2000 and of the emergency plans to confront the consequences of the natural disasters that affected many Venezuelan villages.

In 1999 Chavez decided to use the armed forces in the social area. Plan Bolivar 2000 advanced quickly because of the actions of young army officers. It was a civil-military plan. 40,000 soldiers attended to the health of the people; opening roads with military engineering equipment; flying passengers in military planes to the poorest areas, charging them at cost.

With Plan Pescar 2000, the navy was involved with fishermen, organising co-operatives, repairing iceboxes and refrigerators, giving them courses etc. The National Guard had the task of mainly protecting citizens and controlling delinquency, but also programmes all over the country, even in indigenous areas that had previously never been served.

The National Guard developed Plan Casiquiare 2000. (Casiquiare is inhabited by thousands of indigenous people.) They brought medicines and doctors to examine children and vaccinate people and build houses. A formidable voluntary medical network was organised. Houses and schools were constructed. In other areas roads were completed at far less cost than private contractors could achieve. It was a social war.

A new stage

Now Plan Bolivar is at another stage. The military are returning to military training and have been replaced by civil action plans. It's no longer the government of three years ago; therefore the military limit themselves to co-ordination of special projects with local and regional governments.

With the attempted coup in 2002 hundreds of thousands of unarmed Venezuelans, many with no pre-conceived plan, went to barracks in different parts of the country singing the national anthem. They spoke to the soldiers and yelled to them: '¡Soldado, consciente, busca a tu presidente!' ('Soldier with conscience, find your president!') Never before had something like that happened. The demonstrators who surrounded Fort Tiuna on the third day, when it was already known that Chavez wasn't there, numbered 300,000 people or more. In Maracay the troops called upon the people to help them. This was possible because the previous social work in the neighbourhoods had built links with specific battalions. That the government returned to power showed very objectively that the great majority of the generals were not involved. It was a minority - no more than 20 per cent - who were able to mislead the rest. After the coup d'état the government acted very carefully to avoid any witch-hunt within the Armed Forces.

The military is becoming increasingly radicalised and involved in the revolutionary process. Many are angry because there are no prisoners, military or civilian, after the defeated 2002 coup, and because the media continue to lie and invent. Chavez however is strictly adhering to the 1999 constitution (FRFI 177), wanting a peaceful revolution. He is convinced that if he fails to make profound political, economic and social changes peacefully, other ways will inevitably come.

Bolivia
Leaders of the mass movement falter

At the beginning of May, indigenous Guarani people began blockading the gas transport systems of multinational companies in the Chaco region to demand the abolition of the 1996 law that sold off Bolivian gas reserves. While a tiny comprador bourgeoisie have been selling off the national water and gas reserves to imperialist multinationals, the vast mass of the working class and peasantry have been impoverished. Bolivia is South America's poorest country but it also has the largest natural gas reserves after Venezuela and the masses are determined that they are not going to be robbed by the Bolivian elite and the imperialists.

Mass anger erupted into insurrection last October and forced President Sanchez de Lozada from office, to be replaced by the current President Carlos Mesa who made all manner of promises to the people. However, Bolivian capitalism is in such a deep crisis that it has no reserves to make concessions to the people with and so his promises were worthless. Now the privatisation and sale of the gas and other resources must go ahead in order for the system to survive. Not even the most minimal demands of the poor are now possible within the system; it is either unrestricted neoliberalism or revolution.

On 21 April Mesa signed an agreement under which Bolivian natural gas will be exported to Argentina at 98 US cents per thousand cubic feet over a period of six months, yielding \$170 million to the multinationals and only \$25 million to the Bolivian state.

Unfortunately, at this important point the leadership of the mass movements has faltered. On 8 April a National Enlarged Meeting of the Bolivian Workers' Union took place in the mining town of Huanuni with the support of the peasants' unions and issued a call for an indefinite general strike beginning on 2 May. On 15 April mass mobilisations were mounted all over the country to prepare for the strike. There followed a student demonstration for increased university funding and a strike by transport workers and small shopkeepers against fuel price increases and new taxes.

At this point the Roman Catholic Church, human rights organisations and the leadership of the Movement Towards Socialism, previously strongly involved in the popular movement, began warning that things were going too far too fast. To frighten the masses they raised the spectre of a military coup if the social movement tried to force Carlos Mesa's government from power. By the time 2 May came the general strike gathered only limited support.

However objective conditions make a decisive clash between the bourgeoisie and imperialism on one side and the working class and peasantry on the other inevitable. The masses will not forget the lessons that have been learned from more than four years of struggle utilising every tactic from strikes to road blockades.

Ed Scrivens

Aspartame: Sweet Poison

Making a killing

The global market for artificial sweeteners was estimated to be \$2.5 bn in 2000. In the US alone, demand for artificial sweeteners and 'fat replacers' is estimated to reach \$1.2 bn in 2004, with \$1.7 bn predicted for the beverage additives sector alone by 2006. The main producer of aspartame, the NutraSweet Corporation, has world sales of about \$1 bn annually.

Aspartame is big business indeed; hence it remains on supermarket shelves despite over 90 adverse reactions that have been associated with it, some of which have been misdiagnosed as Alzheimer's, Lou Gehrig's and Graves diseases or Multiple Sclerosis. Reported reactions range from headaches or migraines, blurred vision and slurring of speech, at the most mild, to epileptic seizures, blindness, manic depression, cancer or death. A diabetic specialist, Dr HJ Roberts, claims aspartame can precipitate diabetes, diabetic convulsions and destroy the optic nerve. In 1991, the US Department of Health published a list of 167 adverse effects of aspartame, and in 1994 a further list of the reported adverse effects of food, 75% of which were linked to aspartame.

The official denial

According to the industry-dominated Calorie Control Council (CCC), 'apart from a taste of sugar, but with virtually no calories, aspartame brings nothing new to our diet. The components... occur in a very wide range of the foods we eat every day, including meat, fish, eggs, cheese, fruit and milk. More than 200 objective scientific studies underline aspartame's safety, and no well-conducted trial has shown there to be any concern whatsoever about its use. Leading scientific and health authorities in more than 100 countries throughout the world, including the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), experts of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Scientific Committee on Foods (SCF) of the EU, the European Parliament and the governments of all 15 member states of the EU, have approved aspartame for use in food and beverages'. Furthermore, aspartame 'is safe for the general population, including pregnant women and nursing mothers, children, diabetics and dieters'.

In reality, all research funded independently of manufacturers has linked aspartame to serious adverse effects. The SCF has ignored or dismissed as 'flawed' all independent research, and cited as evidence of aspartame's safety two NutraSweet-funded studies. Members of the SCF include the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), founded in 1978 by the Heinz Foundation, Kraft Foods, Pepsi, Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble. ILSI and CCC funders include Coca-Cola, NutraSweet, Ajinomoto, Domino Sugar Corp, Monsanto, and Wm Wrigley Jr Co.

In January 2003, *The Guardian* obtained a confidential report that showed how ILSI 'positioned its experts and expertise across the WHO spectrum of food and tobacco policies: at conferences of the FAO/WHO food policy committees and within the WHO'. Food industry experts were 'infiltrating' the WHO and FAO by placing scientists 'favourable to their views... who would promote an anti-regulation ideology to the public' via media articles. In 1996 Professor Ralph G Walton surveyed all

Since its discovery in 1965 by the American company GD Searle & Co, controversy has surrounded aspartame (E951, Canderel, NutraSweet, etc). Aspartame, originally intended as a biochemical warfare agent, is an intense, low-calorie, sweetening 'food additive', 180 times sweeter than sugar, and now found in about 9,000 (many unlabelled) products in over 100 countries. Its shameful history is yet another illustration of the way science has been expropriated into the service of capitalism and profit. Daily, over 250 million people eat or drink a wide range of aspartame-containing products including soft drinks, fruit juices, beers, chewing gums, dairy and baked products, 'health foods', confectionery, and pharmaceutical products, including vitamin supplements and cough syrups.

CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports on aspartame's far from sweet effects.

164 aspartame studies in the open medical literature. All 74 industry-sponsored studies found no problem with aspartame. Of the 90 independent studies, 83 showed one or more problems. Of the remaining seven, six were carried out by the FDA!

The hidden truth

Aspartame is a chemical mixture of L-phenylalanine and L-aspartic acid, two amino acids found in natural foods. However, aspartame is unstable, especially in solution or at high temperatures, and breaks down below body temperature into its constituents and methanol.

Phenylalanine and aspartic acid in excess are neurotoxins, as paediatric Professor Louis Elsas explained to the US Senate in 1987. They stimulate the central nervous system directly or through their conversion to other neurotransmitters, such as tyrosine and dopamine, and also lower the level of the neurotransmitter, serotonin. These trigger or exacerbate a wide range of neurological and neuropsychiatric disorders, such as attention deficit (ADD) or hyperactivity (ADHD) disorders, manic depression, insomnia, panic attacks, hallucinations, suicidal tendencies and seizures. Further, Elsas explained: 'acute and chronic ingestion of... aspartame' causes an increase in blood levels of phenylalanine which builds up in the brain. Although adverse 'effects on the mature brain are reversible', during pregnancy, 'the effects of such an increased foetal brain concentration would be more subtle and expressed as mental retardation, microcephaly (abnormally small head), or potential birth defects. In the rapidly growing post-natal brain (children of 9-12 months) irreversible brain damage could occur'. In phenylketonuria (PKU) sufferers, born without the enzyme to metabolise phenylalanine, mental retardation is a certain outcome. For this reason, all products containing aspartame should carry the phrasing: 'Contains a source of phenylalanine' by law. In

'developing' countries, this label is frequently missing.

Serotonin is part of the body's feedback system that helps it control carbohydrate consumption. Its inhibition leads to the situation whereby a 'diet' product causes increased sugar consumption and obesity! As Dr Erik Millstone (SPRU, University of Sussex), points out: 'the period since the 1980s has seen a rapid rise in the consumption of artificial sweeteners, but... no corresponding decline in sugar consumption in the USA, UK or EU as a whole, [implying that] in aggregate, the sweeteners are not acting as sugar substitutes, but as [sugar] supplements... The bulk of available evidence suggests that in relation to weight loss, artificial sweeteners are at best ineffective and at worst counter-productive.'

Methanol is known to cause blindness - it breaks down into formaldehyde (embalming fluid, germicide and carcinogen) and then into formic acid. The highly reactive formaldehyde has been shown to accumulate in the liver, kidneys and brain, where it binds to proteins RNA and DNA, causing irreversible genetic damage. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), there are no 'safe' levels of exposure to formaldehyde. Formic acid, which inhibits oxygen metabolism, accumulates in the brain, spinal fluid, kidneys and other parts of the body, due to its slow excretion. A small amount of aspartame also cyclises into diketopiperazine, another carcinogen. Although methanol is also found in beers and fruit juices, both contain large concentrations of antidotes such as ethanol, folic acid and/or fructose which prevent its conversion to formaldehyde and formic acid. On the other hand, soft drinks do not contain such antidotes, and in fact, usually contain other harmful chemical additives.

How then did this stand-alone poison come to be approved for public consumption all over the world in the first place?

You couldn't make it up

In 1965, Jim Schlatter, a Searle scientist working on a cure for peptic ulcers, accidentally discovered aspartame after licking his finger to turn a page. The US Pentagon placed it on an inventory of prospective biochemical warfare weapons, but by 1969 aspartame had become a 'food additive'. Initial studies carried out by Searle revealed aspartame to cause seizures and learning defects from brain damage. In 1972, psychiatrist and neuropathologist Professor John Olney informed Searle that aspartic acid, especially when combined with monosodium glutamate (MSG), caused holes in mice brains, indicating a risk of brain tumours with children. Searle removed these results from their presentation to the FDA: 'If we include this... in the original report, we stand a good chance of ending up with nothing... It [is] very important for us to get our sweetener into commercial channels as soon as possible to minimise the incentive of... work on other sweeteners.' In July 1974, the FDA allowed limited use of aspartame despite the serious contraindications, and despite the reservations of several FDA officials. Two Special Task Forces (1975 and 1977) confirmed these suspicions, and on 10 January 1977, FDA Chief Council Richard Merrill recommended to Attorney Samuel Skinner that a grand jury be convened to investigate Searle for 'apparent violations of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act... and False Reports to the Government Act and for concealing material facts and making false statements in reports of animal studies conducted to establish the safety of aspartame'. By July, Skinner was in employment with Searle's law firm, Sidley & Austin. Skinner's successor Thomas Sullivan and assistant William Conlon let the five-year statutes of limitation run out before any criminal charges were filed. [In 1979 Conlon also accepted a job with Sidley & Austin.] Director of the FDA's Bureau of Foods, Howard Roberts, immediately created another Task Force, and then left in 1978 to become vice president of the National Soft Drinks Association.

In March 1979, the FDA accepted Searle's 'studies' and called a Public

Board of Inquiry (PBOI), whose members were chosen by FDA Commissioner Sherwin Gardner (later vice president of the Grocery Manufacturers of America). The panel voted unanimously to ban it until additional studies could be done on its carcinogenic properties. The day after Reagan took office in 1981, Searle re-applied for approval. Reagan's transition team member Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Searle president, appointed a new FDA Commissioner, Arthur Hull Hayes Jr. On 18 July 1981, Hayes overruled the PBOI and approved aspartame for use in dry foods. By July 1983 aspartame was allowed in soft drinks, carbonated beverages and children's vitamins. Hayes then left the FDA under charges of 'impropriety' and was hired as a 'consultant' by Searle's PR firm, Burson-Marsteller for \$1,000 a day.

Searle defeated all subsequent attempts to petition, ban or label aspartame products with the support of the FDA, scientists and politicians such as Orrin Hatch, Al Gore (one of whose close relatives works for Monsanto) and Professor Paul Turner of the FSA. In 1985, the Monsanto Corporation acquired Searle for \$2.8bn, and NutraSweet became a wholly-owned subsidiary. This was a match made in heaven: Monsanto, the largest genetically modified (GM) organisms' manufacturer, now uses phenylalanine from GM bacteria in the manufacturing process.

In 1992 NutraSweet became the preferred supplier of aspartame to Coca-Cola and Pepsi, replacing another carcinogen, saccharin, in Diet Coke. Aspartame, three times cheaper than sugar, now also appears, unlabelled, in soft drinks. Coca-Cola have 'test marketed' certain cities in the US with aspartame in 'normal' Coke. In June 1996, the FDA removed all restrictions on the use of aspartame. There is now a plethora of other poisonous synthetic sweeteners. None has been subject to independent, long-term research. However, initial tests indicate that they all cause serious health problems including cancer. One natural herbal sweetener, Stevia, that has been used for centuries in Latin America and since 1970 in Japan, with not one reported side effect, has been banned by the FDA, EC and FSA, due to lobbying by aspartame producers.

Some may bemoan the 'conflict of interest' of the politicians and regulatory bodies such as the WHO, FSA, FDA etc, who are supposed to protect public health; they would be mistaken. There is no 'conflict' as there is only one interest: making more money. Fight parasitic monopoly capitalism! People before profit!

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Aspartame Consumer Safety Network: www.aspartamesafety.com/
Stevia: www.stevia.net/



Daily, 250 million people eat a wide range of products containing aspartame, despite its links to over 90 adverse reactions.

Highlighting deaths of women prisoners

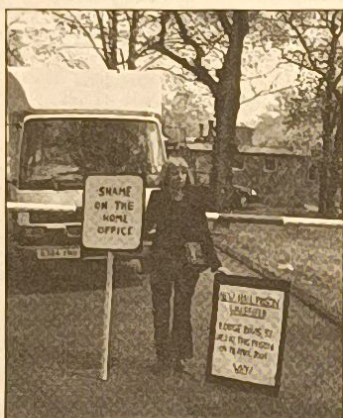
My only child, Sarah Elizabeth Campbell, 18, died on 18 January 2003, whilst in the so-called care of HM Prison & YOI, Styal, Cheshire. She had spent six months on remand in 2002 and, on 17 January 2003, was sentenced to a term of imprisonment and returned to Styal. The following day Sarah was taken, unconscious, to a Manchester hospital, and died later that evening without regaining consciousness. I had no idea that anything was wrong until a police officer telephoned, four hours later, to say that she was dead.

This year I have organised and led a series of demonstrations, as a public protest against the disturbing increase in the number of women prisoners who have taken their own lives whilst in the 'care' of HM Prisons. I must stress that I am equally concerned about the deaths of male prisoners but as a one-woman campaigner, and entirely self-funding, there is a limit to what I can do.

On 13 April 2004, a demonstration was held outside Brockhill Prison, following the death of Sheena Kotecha, 22, clinically depressed, and beginning her first prison sentence.

The second demonstration was held outside Holloway Prison on 26 April 2004, following the death of remand prisoner Julie Hope, 35.

Deaths of women prisoners continued and, on 4 May 2004, a third



demonstration took place outside New Hall Prison - Louise Davis, 32, died in April 2004. I was arrested for

breach of the peace and released without charge.

The fourth demonstration, at Send Prison, Surrey, was held on 11 May 2004. Victoria Paige Tapp, 23, a severely-depressed mother of two, died, despite having been on 'suicide watch'.

On 17 May 2004, the fifth demonstration took place outside Durham Prison, as a protest against the death of Sharon Miller, 45. I was again arrested for breach of the peace and released without charge.

Each demonstration has resulted in media coverage, and has been successful in raising public awareness about the shocking death toll of women prisoners. The next demonstration will be at Holloway prison in protest at the death there of Heather Waite, who died on the same day as Sharon Miller.

Pauline Campbell

Campaign Against Prison Slavery

The Campaign Against Prison Slavery (CAPS) was formed in February 2003 to fight against the exploitation of forced labour in British prisons. Our inaugural conference decided to target the ubiquitous high-street chain Wilkinson's, which uses slave labour in a number of English and Welsh prisons to package its goods. This company is owned by Tony Wilkinson, one of the country's richest men, worth around £300m.

LOW PRICE LOW PRICE LOW PRICE
Wilko sends work into prisons
Prisoners are paid just

£1.20 per day

CAPS has organised at least a hundred pickets outside Wilkinson's stores around the country, with leafleting carried out most weekends. CAPS has also leafleted several prisons to let prisoners' families know about the campaign. Other anti-Wilkinson's actions have ranged from graffiti, sit-ins, and trolley runs (groups of people loading up trolleys and then refusing to pay) to more playful ideas like shopping in handcuffs. CAPS even made a short film with a 'guard' and 'prisoner' shopping and looking for work in the store. Two designs of stickers have also been produced: one a facsimile of Wilko's own yellow 'Low Price' label informing potential customers just how little the company is paying its prison slaves; the other reads 'This product may have been packed by slave labour in British prisons'.

Wilkinson's first reaction was to deny it used prison labour at all; then it admitted it, but claimed only a minority of products are packed by prisoners, and that it was helping 'rehabilitate prisoners and increase employment skills'. A recent internal report on Prison Industries admits that contract labour shops have little rehabilitative value, that the work is mind-numbing and offers no useable employment skills. Furthermore, the profits of the private companies exploiting prison labour are being subsidised by the taxpayer to the tune of over £7m a year.

With regular actions and pickets of their stores, and growing public awareness of their involvement in prison slavery, Wilkinson's is certainly beginning to backpeddle. Its press spokesperson told a journalist that if CAPS could prove prisoners were forced to work they'd cease their use of prison labour. The proof is in the Prison Rules - prisoners can be forced to work for as much as 10 hours per day. So far Wilkinson's boast to withdraw has been an empty one, but CAPS is growing daily, and we're constantly thinking of new ways to target this greedy company.

Prisoners have a part to play in CAPS and we encourage all actions and initiatives that undermine their role as slaves for slave-labour companies. We also need accurate and up to date information on the companies making profits out of prisoners, and the best source of information for that is prisoners and their families.

Campaign Against Prison Slavery, PO Box 74, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 4ZQ. E-Mail: againstoprisonslavery@gmail.com. Website: www.againstoprisonslavery.org Tel: 07944 522001 Mark Barnsley

Yarl's Wood Inquiry: Ombudsman lets racists off the hook

On 14 February 2002 immigration prisoners at the newly opened Detention Centre at Yarl's Wood revolted against their incarceration and treatment. The 'state-of-the-art' centre was burned to the ground and unusable for over a year and a half. Prison Ombudsman Stephen Shaw was commissioned by the government to inquire into the uprising and report to it on ways to stop such embarrassing incidents happening again. Yarl's Wood re-opened in autumn 2003, with the first detainees being 60 single women and the long-term plan being to house 400 families awaiting deportation. In December 2003 an undercover journalist reported that these women were being subject to racial abuse and mistreatment. Again the government asked Shaw to investigate.

JOHN BOWDEN reports.

Shaw's investigation heard disturbing claims by an undercover journalist that staff at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre had racially abused and brutalised women awaiting deportation. The journalist claimed that guards employed by the private security firm Group 4 bragged openly of beating prisoners and referred to women detainees as 'bitches' and 'useless scrubbers'. Women prisoners were on occasion forcibly restrained and stripped naked by male guards. The journalist described how guards were routinely racist in language and behaviour towards the 60 women detainees in Yarl's Wood, which was all very reminiscent of complaints made by prisoners at the Group 4 owned prison following the uprising there in 2002.

Information and evidence provided by the *Mirror* reporter was unassailable and Shaw had little choice but to accept it as fact. However, in his final report he made the amazing claim that he uncovered 'no culture of racism or abuse at the centre' and recommended only superficial changes to the regime.

The civil rights organisation Liberty said

it found Shaw's conclusion 'staggering' and went on to say: 'The concern is that this will cause distress to families and lead to allegations of a whitewash...'

Lorraine Bayley, of the Campaign to Stop Arbitrary Detentions at Yarl's Wood, called for Group 4 to be stripped of responsibility for running the centre and said Shaw's report was being used to protect the company from the consequences of its own failings.

Stephen Shaw, one time liberal and head of the Prison Reform Trust, has always been known for his willingness to act as a PR man for the Home Office, as well as for his single-minded devotion to his own career. It was therefore inevitable that the Home Office would choose him as Prisons Ombudsman, safe in the knowledge he wouldn't rock the boat or fail to do his master's bidding. And he never has. However, the total lack of integrity in attempting to deny the systematic and endemic abuse of inmates at Yarl's Wood was truly astonishing and has now irredeemably discredited the office of Prison Ombudsman as an impartial arbiter of prisoners' complaints.

REVIEW

Who killed Patrick Quinn? The framing of Malcolm Kennedy

This little book would make a cracking good murder mystery, except that it isn't fiction. It's an account of a real brutal murder and a frame-up of an innocent man who was sentenced to nine years after three trials. The guilty have got off scot-free. The innocent man is still being persecuted by the Metropolitan Police and not being allowed to rebuild his life.

On the night of 23/24 December 1990 Patrick Quinn, 56, was beaten to death in Hammersmith Police Station. Officers allege that they found him lying in a pool of blood and that Malcolm Kennedy was sat on a bench in the cell. The police claim that only Kennedy could have broken 33 of Quinn's ribs, crushed his heart and larynx and killed him. Kennedy, who had been arrested for his own protection, as he was very drunk and incapable, tells a very different story. He says he awoke to see a police officer attacking a man in the cell. He tried to intervene but the officer knocked him unconscious. There was an injury to his head that was consistent with his account.

Quinn was an Irish Republican who was openly vocal about his political opinions. He had been arrested by PC Paul Giles, a Belfast Catholic who was openly anti-republican and expressed ambitions of joining the Special Branch. Giles's ex-wife, another partner and a neighbour claim he is violent. His ex-wife gave evidence that she washed his shirt, which was splattered with blood. Giles has left the police after alleged-

ly having a mental breakdown and avoiding giving evidence. Another officer involved, PC Emyln Welsh, has a record of an uncontrollable temper and domestic violence, with police having to attend when he assaulted his fiancée. Yet another officer, ex-Sergeant Edward Henery, has also left the police, avoiding 17 disciplinary charges including allegations of bullying and sexual harassment.

The book tells not only a story of what appears to be a police murder but of corruption and conspiracy and it exposes Britain's judicial system as thoroughly rotten. A police log-book has disappeared. A computerised record of police communications went missing for three years. Police uniforms were dry-cleaned before they went for forensic tests. One of the witnesses, Sgt Henery, was fined £500 for contempt of court for refusing to answer defence questions at one of the trials.

The real service this book does for the tragic Patsy Quinn and the innocent Malcolm Kennedy is that it makes public a hitherto unknown, possible police motive for this brutal killing. What didn't come out in the trials was that Quinn was known to Hammersmith police - a staunch Republican known for sticking up for himself. But there is an added twist to this almost unbelievable story, Patsy Quinn was the best friend of Joseph Fallon who had been killed by having his liver ruptured in Hammersmith Police Station three years earlier.

Jim Wills

Who Killed Patrick Quinn? The Framing of Malcolm Kennedy is published by Revolutions Per Minute, BCM Box 3328, London WC1N 3XX. £5

INSIDE NEWS

Victory for Scottish prisoners

Robert Napier was awarded £2,450 after taking the Scottish Executive to court for making him 'slop out' during his time in Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow. The Court of Session in Edinburgh ruled that the Executive had breached Napier's human rights by imposing such a 'degrading' and 'abhorrent' practice on him. The judgment is likely to prove embarrassing and expensive for the Executive if, as expected, thousands of other current and former prisoners follow Napier's lead and go to court over their own treatment.

Deaths in segregation units

Two inquiries are underway into the unexplained death of Arif Hussain (see FRFI 178). One is a Prison Service inquiry; the police are conducting the other on behalf of the coroner.

Since Arif Hussain died at the beginning of March there have been two further deaths in the segregation units of high security prisons - Anwar Islam in Long Lartin and Stephen Lloyd in Frankland.

Defend the Intifada

On 15 April, after months of increasing harassment by the state, two Victory to the Intifada members were unlawfully arrested on a demonstration of Marks and Spencer in London. These arrests are a result of both blatant and subtle forms of intimidation used by the police.

The blatant intimidation included having 16 police officers parading around our picket, even at the start when there were fewer demonstrators than there were cops and the constant use of the Forward Intelligence Team who listen in on conversations and continually photograph people's faces. When one Muslim demonstrator asked why she was having her photo taken she was told by the photographer: 'because you look like a terrorist.' The subtle intimidation has consisted of an accumulation of various restrictions which the police have tried to place under the Public Order Act and other laws. They've ranged from not tying flags and placards to the railings 'should officers need to remove them in an emergency and hurt themselves,' restricting the use of the megaphone and the chanting of the slogan 'victory to the intifada,' in case a member of the public should find it abusive. On all these points and others we have fought and won. The two arrests were made concerning the use of the megaphone - which they confiscated and then returned broken. We are awaiting for confirmation that no charges are to be brought.

The arrests and increase in harassment have had the opposite effect to that which the police had hoped for. The nightly news broadcasts of the horrific scenes of Israeli brutality and slaughter in Rafah during May have driven many new people to join the picket. As the Zionist onslaught against the Palestinian people has intensified, so has the British state's harassment of those showing solidarity with Palestine. In regard to the racist counter-demonstration by Zionist extremists Betar Tagar which began eight months ago the police have shown open collusion. It is precisely because the Marks and Spencer's pickets have been

paid leadership, on the other hand, has not been willing to organise serious and continuous activities. Its main event in the last two months of bloodshed has been a passionless and small demonstration against the Wall in Trafalgar Sq on 15 May. When VTI members asked for the M&S pickets to be announced they were told by PSC chief Betty Hunter 'no, I shall not be mentioning the Marks and Spencer pickets.' She gave no reasons, even when we explained the harassment we were facing by Zionists. Such sectarianism and inactivity has also been matched by the STWC, who after the massacre at Falluja, took almost a whole week to call a pitiful demonstration of about 300 people in Whitehall. To try and combat the left's inactivity, FRFI has continued to hold public meetings in London on topics rang-

ing from ethnic cleansing and the apartheid wall to a dayschool where there was lively debate on Iraq, Palestine and the building of an effective anti-imperialist movement in Britain.

Recent events in Gaza show how vital it is to build a movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people. The VTI pickets of M&S in London, Manchester and elsewhere are the only activities being regularly organised to show that solidarity.

In Manchester the weekly pickets of Marks and Spencer have also continued, despite intermittent abuse from Zionists. FRFI members and supporters recently went to a meeting of Manchester City's Labour Council to support a motion put by local Lib Dem and Green councillors to accept the democratic right to protest on the streets of the city centre. Debate on the

motion was blocked by the local Labour councillors who deemed it too sensitive an issue to be discussed in public and voted for it not to be discussed at all until after the appeal hearing of Manchester FRFI members, unlawfully arrested, had taken place! The appeal date for the Manchester picketers has now been set for 4 June 2004. The accused were not informed of this hearing date directly by the police or the council though, but by Zionists who confronted them on a picket and who were privy to the news!

Regular pickets of Marks and Spencer have now begun to take place in Leicester and in Canterbury where both have met good support from the local communities. Demonstrations against Britain's biggest Zionist sponsors are also continuing in Glasgow and the campaign against the war and Zionism has been spread by FRFI comrades to Strathclyde and Glasgow universities.

**Fight in support of the Iraqi and Palestinian people!
Fight against police harassment and intimidation!**



Picket of M&S, Oxford Street, London

continuous, with the goal and potential of forming a strong solidarity movement, that we have faced such harassment.

The Palestine Solidarity Cam-

Protest against police murder

On 22 May FRFI joined the angry and determined crowd that marched from Camden Town, north London to Kentish Town police station in protest at the killing a week earlier of Kebba 'Dobo' Jobe, a 42-year-old Gambian man. Kebba Jobe died while being arrested on the bank of the canal in busy Camden Lock. The demonstration held up traffic in Kentish Town before ending with a militant rally outside the police station. Friends, family and supporters united to call loudly for justice, and have pledged to hold a picket/vigil outside the police station every day from 6-8pm until some answers are provided as to how and why this murder was allowed to take place in broad daylight, with not one officer having so far been suspended for his part in it.

For more information contact Justice for Kebba Dobo Jobe Campaign on 07951 596 048 or 07949 158 898.

EVENTS

LONDON

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

Meeting on the war in Iraq

Wednesday 2 June

Meeting on Cuba

Wednesday 16 June

Meeting on Palestine

Wednesday 14 July

All meetings at 7pm, Room H102, Connaught House, London School of Economics, WC2.

Street stalls will also take place

every Saturday.

For further details tel: 020 6837 1688

or e-mail us at

victoryintifada@hotmail.com and

LEICESTER

Saturday 29 May, 19 and 26 June, 10

and 24 July: Picket of M&S,

Gallowtree Gate, 11am-1.30pm

Cuba stalls: Saturday 22 May 11am-

3pm; Saturday 17 July, 11am-1.30pm.

Both at Gallowtree Gate.

The stall on 17 July will be followed by a public meeting: Palestine, Iraq and Cuba - the struggle against imperialism at 2.30pm, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate.

Iraq/Palestine stalls: Saturday 5 June, 1-3pm, St Peters Shopping

Precinct, Melbourne Road, Highfields; Saturday 19 June, 11am-1.30pm, Gallowtree Gate; Saturday 3 July, St Peters Shopping Precinct, 1-3pm.

For more details contact 0781 728

4488 or 0781 774 0188

or e-mail: midlandsrccg@hotmail.com

MANCHESTER

Every Saturday: Picket of M&S

Market St, Manchester city centre

at 12 noon. Contact: victory_intifada@hotmail.com or 07816 547066

GLASGOW

Marks & Spencer pickets,

Saturday 12, 19, 26 June and

3, 17, 24 July.

All at M&S in Sauchiehall Street

between 12-2pm

FRFI public meeting

Wednesday 30 June 7.30pm

Imperialist hands off the Gulf!

Partick Burgh Halls

Just off Dumbarton Road /

Peel Street. All welcome

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

or e-mail: triscotland@yahoo.co.uk

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

Join the 2005 brigade

One year to go until Rock around the Blockade's next brigade to Cuba.

The plans of where the brigade will go and the visits and activities that the brigadistas will take part in are now being finalised. This gives us a year to fundraise for the sound system for the Union of Young Communists (UJC) that will be the main piece of material aid we will donate. The UJC recognises the importance of accessible recreational activities for their young people and uses the sound systems in the more disadvantaged or under-resourced areas. The sound systems previously taken to Cuba by Rock around the Blockade are used primarily for recreational purposes but also for political rallies and youth activities.

The brigade is a great opportunity for people to see at first hand how Cuban society works. Brigadistas, hosted by our comrades in the UJC, will have the chance to meet representatives from Cuba's mass organisations and visit a wide variety of social, cultural and educational projects. The brigade will donate the sound system to the UJC in Caimanera, the town in eastern Cuba closest to the US naval base on illegally-occupied land in Guantanamo. The 5,000 resi-

dents of Caimanera are defiant in the intimidating shadow of the US military presence and acts of provocation. Rock around the Blockade's 2000 brigade inaugurated our mobile disco in Caimanera with a noisy celebration of anti-imperialist resistance. We look forward to returning to celebrate with the revolutionaries there once again.

Here in Britain we are involved in regular activities in support of the Cuban Revolution, knowing that being part of building an anti-imperialist movement in our own countries is how we can best show solidarity with the Cubans.

In April, Rock around the Blockade in London held a meeting on the 60th anniversary of the IMF and World Bank. A speaker from the International League of People's Struggles gave a stinging history of what the IMF and WB have done and continue to do, pursuing neoliberal policies that disadvantage already oppressed nations in the interests of richer nations. The RATB speaker talked about the resistance of revolutionary Cuba to such policies and highlighted the educational, cultural and health indices that put Cuba so far in advance of other Caribbean and Latin American nations. Honduras, with infant mortality



May Day in Revolution Square, Havana

and maternal mortality amongst the highest in Latin America and literacy rates and life expectancy amongst the lowest, is the country that was used by the US to put the motion against Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The vote at the UNHRC was significant. Despite the threats and bribery of the US, Cuba only lost by one vote. Mexico and Peru voted against Cuba.

Rock around the Blockade was present at the million-strong May Day rally in Revolution Square in Havana to hear Fidel Castro's scathing indictment of Mexico and Peru's stance on human rights and feel the air of celebra-

tion in the streets. We also took part in the Second International Conference on Marxism in Havana in early May.

The Cuban people have shown time and time again that they will not bow to pressure or intimidation from the imperialists nor shirk their responsibility to put their heads above the parapet in defending human rights and social justice and denouncing those who treat the poor as expendable.

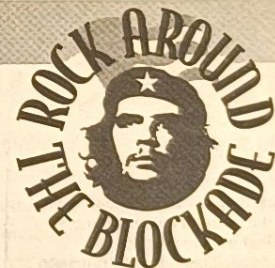
In May, RATB held two successful Rebel Music nights, in Manchester and in London, getting the forthcoming fundraisers off to a good start and creating enjoyable evenings with an

eclectic mix of live music, politics, poetry and other performances. Also in April, Rock around the Blockade members appeared in the BBC programme *Outrageous Fortune: the Bacardi Family*, helping to expose the links of the Bacardi rum family to the Miami mafia.

RATB's next meeting in London is on Wednesday 16 June at 7pm in room H102 in Connaught Building at the London School of Economics, Aldwych WC2 (nearest tube Holborn). We will be discussing the inter-linked issues of the terrorism emanating from the US towards Cuba, the role of the Bacardi corporation and the Boycott Bacardi campaign, the case of the Miami 5 - five Cubans in gaol in the US for trying to expose the US based counter-revolutionaries - and the treatment of prisoners by the US on the illegally occupied Cuban soil in Guantanamo Bay. All welcome at this meeting and entrance is free.

RATB will be busy over the summer with stalls at festivals, including people working at Glastonbury for the Workers' Beer Company and raising money for the sound system, petitioning/leafleting sessions on Saturdays and meetings. Friday 2 July in London is the next Rebel Music club night at Electrowerkz in Torrington Place, next to Angel tube station N1.

Get involved in the work of Rock around the Blockade. Contact us for further information



about any of the above and about events in your area.

We neglect to defend the Revolution in Cuba at our peril.

office@ratb.org.uk, or tel: 020 7837 1688. Write to BCM Box 5909, London WC1 3XX

Subscribe to our egroup if you are not already on the list and you will receive regular Cuba updates: viva.cuba-subscribe@yahoo.com or visit our website: www.ratb.org.uk

Join RATB if you are not already a member and receive our regular newsletter (£10 waged, £4 low-waged, £2 unwaged, students or pensioners - cheques payable to Rock around the Blockade and PO to be sent to the address above).

Send off for our T-shirt with an image of Che Guevara on the front and a quote by him on the back, 'a true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' for £7 and a badge with a picture of Che Guevara and the words 'Rage against the US blockade' for 50p (both including p&p).

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name

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Fight police harassment

In the previous FRFI I described how I was stopped and searched, threatened and issued with an on-the-spot fine of £80 whilst strolling home one evening. The power to give on-the-spot fines for offences under section 5 of the 1986 Public Order Act was granted to police in January this year. I refused to pay and instead took up the issue in court. Charges against me have now been dropped. This demonstrates the importance of standing up against police intimidation and the corrosion of our civil liberties, whatever the circumstances. I hope this encourages other readers to do the same.

BARNABY MITCHELL
North London

Keep up the good work

We are very pleased to know you continue to develop political work and disseminate information about the role of Cuba and Venezuela in the anti-imperialist struggle.

We congratulate comrades of Rock around the Blockade who have distributed information about the five heroes, political prisoners of the Empire. It is important to continue organising debates and workshops in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and against the threats that we face from the neo-fascist policies of Bush and his genocidal measures against us.

I hope that your valuable work to help Cuba and all those just causes in the world will be part of building a better world, without the interference of imperialism, and that your organisation continues to grow in strength.

Sending revolutionary greetings from this land of *Patria o Muerte*
REINALDO MANCEBO
Havana, Cuba

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

Torture by the British Army – an ex-soldier writes

The mistreatment and torture of prisoners by British troops in Iraq is not unique. Neither is it just committed by rogue elements, as the top brass allege.

In fact, during the 1950s *The Daily Mirror* published a major article alleging that during the campaign in Kenya soldiers in the Devonshire Regiment were paid £5 reward for every ear they brought back to base. This earned the regiment the ignominious nickname 'The £5 killers'. Similarly, the *Sunday Times* reported atrocities in Aden in the 1960s. The whistleblower, Corporal Lennox, was himself arrested, tortured, jailed and dishonourably discharged from the army. The army and previous Labour and Tory governments have in the past been forced to conduct many cover-ups over torture. I will mention Ireland and Aden as examples.

During the 1960s and early 1970s I did six active tours of duty as an infantry soldier. My experience was that mistreating prisoners is routine, not an

exception. The population has to be terrorised, so they don't support the militants. Why else did they have psychological warfare units at the school of infantry, Warminster, Catterick Garrison, and Maresfield, East Sussex, where sensory deprivation and torture techniques were taught?

When I was only 17, I was posted to a colony called British Guiana (now Guyana). The army performed a coup d'état and ousted the legitimate leftist government led by Cheddie Jagan; power was handed to the colonial governor, Sir Richard Luyt.

One day my rifle section was ordered to go to a police station in an area called Berbice. We had to guard a prisoner who was a Hindu priest, I think his name was Pandit Tiwari. He was to be questioned by MI5 and we were told to keep the cell door open, not to feed him and keep him awake. When it was my 'stag' (turn on guard) I looked into the cell and I was sickened by what I saw. There was this very old, skinny man, obviously very ill,

who had been beaten up. I called the corporal. After all these years I cannot recall every word of the row we had, I said something like 'What about the Geneva convention?' I was told the convention didn't apply as this was a police action and to carry out my orders or I would be on a charge. I was bullied for a while after this and another incident I tried to stop and was called a 'coon lover' and a 'fucking pinko.' So I knuckled down and did my job. I was powerless anyway.

In Aden, like the courageous Corporal Lennox, I saw many atrocities and was actively involved in some. One day at Fort Morbut with three other soldiers I was given the command to give a prisoner the 'helicopter treatment.' A hooded Arab man was frog-marched from the interrogation centre to a waiting navy Wessex helicopter. The aircraft rose hundreds of feet into the air. The Adeni was dragged to the open doorway, the hood removed and the officer yelled at him in Arabic

above the noise of the rotor blades. The man was crying and pleading with us in English 'Please don't!' He was dangled out of the doorway. Then he was pulled in, re-hooded and beaten with a rifle butt. All the time the officer was yelling at him in Arabic. The aircraft had slowly descended and was only about six feet from the ground. We picked up the Adeni and hurled him out. As he thought he was falling from hundreds of feet he messed and wet himself in fright and he got another beating.

The Union Jack is a disgusting and dishonourable flag. It truly is a butcher's apron. I am sorry for my part in these shameful acts. But there are others who are more guilty, lefty Labour MPs like Tony Benn, who was a Cabinet Minister and still is a loyal Queen's Privy Councillor. He knew about it and did and said nothing. How can the left put this arrogant disgusting man on an anti-war platform?

THOMAS ATKINS
East London

Solidarity with Basque freedom fighters

I'm writing this from my prison cell in the aftermath of the Al Qaida attack on the train in Madrid on 11 March, just days before the Spanish elections. The very first report, minutes after the explosion, blamed the Basque freedom fighters, ETA.

It soon became evident that ETA was not responsible and that, rather, the bombing was a reprisal for Spain's support for the Iraq war. However, this was less politically convenient for Prime Minister Aznar, and so all news reports were limited to the disaster itself and the victims. Some of us (including the two freedom fighters here) had access to

uncensored information on BBC World News, but most people took as gospel the first accusation that ETA was responsible and it looked as though things would go Aznar's way in the election.

Within the prison tension was mounting. Prisoners verbally abused a Romanian prisoner and me over our friendship with the freedom fighters, and that evening mounted an unprovoked attack on one of the freedom fighters. The guards did not stop this attack and the aggressors were not punished.

Next day, despite overriding proof that Al Qaida was responsible for the attack, the

guards still insisted it was ETA and called a 10-minute demonstration, an overtly political move, designed to whip up hatred against ETA in general and the freedom fighters here in particular. I refused to take part. The demonstration over, all hell was let loose against me from the prisoners which the guards made no attempt to defuse; I was beaten and may have a detached retina as a result.

The guards 'saw nothing', despite numerous cameras and that they were only yards away, and I was then taken into protective custody for 48 hours. The guards told me that I

deserved what I got for not joining the demonstration and respecting the feelings of other prisoners! But I will never sacrifice my principles or beliefs and should the occasion arise I will do exactly the same thing again.

Fortunately the people on the streets of Spain realised that they were being lied to and on the Sunday, Spain said *adios* to Aznar at the polling stations. We're out of protective custody now, the freedom fighters and I. There will, however, be no apologies for the abuse or the injuries, even though everyone knows for sure that ETA wasn't involved.

In solidarity with all freedom fighters everywhere!

SUSI GOOCH
MOD Mujeres, Villeria, Alicante, Spain

Explosion at torture weapons factory

The recent explosion which destroyed the Stockline Plastics factory in Glasgow, killing nine people, shocked the nation. There was, however, very little mention in the bourgeois media about this company's dubious past.

In 1995 Channel 4's *Dispatches* series revealed how Stockline's parent company, ICL Technical Plastics, had sold electro-shock torture equipment. *Torture Trail* claimed the former managing director, Frank Stott, had offered to sell electro-shock batons to the producers, who were posing as British agents acting on behalf of Lebanese security services.

These electro-shock batons are known as 'the universal tool of

the torturer'. Applied to the base of the spine, they turn the victim's central nervous system to jelly in seconds. According to Amnesty International, torturers also apply them to armpits, necks, faces, inside legs, soles of the feet, on the genitals and inside the vagina. Torturers like these weapons as they inflict maximum pain and leave no traces. British law classes them as illegal weapons, in the same category under the 1968 Firearms Act as machine guns.

During the programme Stott went on to claim that he made the weapons in the local factory with the full knowledge of the local police, selling them to the

Chinese government (with DTI support) less than a year after the Tiananmen massacre, brokering agreements with the apartheid regime in South Africa and various Middle East regimes.

Following these revelations Stott was prosecuted by the Procurator Fiscal in Glasgow. He was fined £5,000 after pleading guilty to possessing the weapons.

Following the explosion, the media made no mention of the company's sinister parent company, talking instead vaguely of a 'plastics' factory and so covering up for its lucrative trade in illegal weapons of torture.

GORDON MITCHELL
Glasgow, Scotland

Plastic bullets – correction

I read an article by Jim Wills in FRFI 173 (June/July 2003), entitled 'Killer Cops', in which he refers to new plastic bullets and their launchers. He goes on to say in the last column: 'The nationalist community in Ireland can testify just how deadly these "less than lethal" weapons are. Scores have been killed and hundreds crippled and maimed...'

I have taken an active interest in this issue – protesting outside the Northern Ireland Office etc – and am in possession of a publication by the Committee on the Administration of Justice, *Plastic Bullets: a briefing paper* (June 1998), a copy of which I have enclosed for the benefit of Mr Wills, which states on page 1: 'The weapon has been responsible for the deaths of 14 people'.

Another three deaths were caused by rubber bullets: Francis Rowntree, 22 April 1972; Tobias Molloy, 16 July 1972; Thomas Friel, 22 May 1973.

The copy of FRFI that I have read I found to be empoweringly informative, which is why I have commented upon what I'll describe as Mr Wills' excited exaggerations, which could undermine the credibility of other articles.

Good luck in your efforts.

FRANCIS LANE
Southeast London

Parliament Square protester criminalised

On 10 May, a 60-foot long display depicting the humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq was trashed by the Metropolitan Police. Anti-war protestor Brian Haw, who has camped under his display boards opposite the Houses of Parliament in London since June 2001, was detained for three hours.

At around midnight, an officer used the Terrorism Act to request that Brian, and two female supporters, move away from a suspiciously parked vehicle. All three complied. Another officer then demanded that Brian move still further from his display boards. When Brian questioned this, he was pushed, forced in to the back of a police van, sustaining injuries to his wrists, and detained on suspicion of obstructing and

assaulting a police officer. Police tore down the boards and banners, and commandeered a commercial vehicle to remove them. The reason given was the apparent security threat posed by the parked vehicle. However traffic continued to flow passed Parliament Square.

For three years, Brian's non-stop protest has been a thorn in the side of the pro-war Labour government. During the summer, tourists from all over the world who come to visit Parliament cross the road to view the images of British and US imperialism's victims. Now there is the threat of new legislation banning protest in the vicinity of Parliament.

Brian is keen to point out that the timing could not have been more convenient for Mr Blair. The

following day, Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao visited Westminster during his visit to London. How convenient for Blair, under pressure to raise human rights issues with his Chinese counterpart, that Wen Jiabao was not driven passed some very eye-catching evidence of UK imperialism's contempt for humanity.

The following day, the police unceremoniously dumped the damaged boards and banners back on the pavement. Two new placards now rise above the trashed display. The first reads, 'THE POLICE DID THIS. WHO TOLD THEM TO?' The second, 'TONY BLAIR: THE MET ARE NOT YOUR ARMY'.
BARNABY PROBERT
London

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.*

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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Britain's slave labour camps

The super-profits of British imperialism have always been based on the exploitation of the oppressed nations and their émigrés. The 'opening up' of China to world markets and international (mainly UK and US) capital has led to privatisation, layoffs, high levels of unemployment and poverty. In these free-trade export-processing zones workers are cheap, taxes practically non-existent and labour and environmental regulations not enforced. One of the first 'export zones' was established in 1980 in Fujian Province; however, by 2000 rural incomes were \$350 per annum, less than \$1 a day, and urban incomes not much better at \$750.

When the US National Labor Committee investigated 21 factories in China in 1997, it found forced overtime, 60-96-hour working weeks, 10-15 hour shifts, crowded dormitories, and below-subsistence wages. There are four million clothing workers in China, the vast majority of them young women, migrants from rural areas, 17-25 years old. Many are unaware of their legal rights and none had heard of imperialist companies' 'codes of conduct'. Many are fired once they turn 25 or if they become pregnant. Virtually all attempts to establish independent unions have been crushed. A living wage in China would be 87 cents per hour; however, imperialist companies, through their sub-contractors, pay as little as 13 cents an hour.

Millions of rural poor in interior provinces of China migrate to cities looking for work. There they suffer appalling exploitation and mistreatment, causing them to move again and ultimately to migrate.

The Chinese migrants at Morecambe Bay had started work before dawn with a long walk to the shores past warning signs in English they couldn't read. They were paid £6 a

On 3 May, a badly decomposed body was recovered off the shores of Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. It was thought to be that of the 21st victim of the tragic drowning on 5 February 2004 of 20 mainly Chinese cockle-pickers. Another three missing people, who have not been in contact since February, bring the possible toll to 24 dead. Working a back-breaking 15-hour shift for £1 daily reward, in perilous conditions, in the dark, on notoriously dangerous mudflats, picking cockles in strong winds and waters not much above freezing, their horrible deaths were the last price they paid to support an industry worth £20 million annually. Most of them, like the 58 people who died inside an airtight tomato truck at Dover in June 2000, were from China's southeastern province of Fujian. This tragedy lifted the veil on the exploitation of migrants to maintain the profits of British agribusiness. CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.

bag for their cockles, while English workers got up to £15 a bag. After £2-£3 unspecified 'administration fees', and other deductions, they ended up with around £1 a day. (*The Guardian*, 9 February 2004) Their work was highly irregular, depending on the tides, as was their sleep. They had no safety equipment or vehicles to help them get off the sands safely. About 30 Chinese migrants lived in three houses leading Lancaster City Council to serve overcrowding notices.

These conditions were not unique: a week later, 54 Greek Roma gypsies, including 10 women, were rescued from a flower farm in Penzance, Cornwall. Local 'fixers' had promised them expenses, food, 'proper flats' and a choice to leave if they didn't like the work, for £34 a day. Instead they were housed in a

barn with no heating or proper plumbing: 'we were working like slaves every day...picking flowers... [We got] dog food cans for dinner, and not even one per person.' Their 'gangmaster' refused to pay them, claiming they were in his debt for the costs of bringing them from Greece and when they tried to escape sent in heavies who beat them up with sticks. Working 'legally' as part of the £50 million annual daffodil harvest, the migrants were paid six pence per bunch of a dozen handpicked stems. They worked from first light until dusk - nine hours of backbreaking work in all weathers, picking flowers for Winchester Growers, Britain's largest flower producer, who supply supermarkets and florists, and for Bold Line, which supplies pickers to growers through Greek 'contacts'.



Britain's agribusiness profits from immigrant labour on poverty pay

About 5,000 migrant workers are exploited annually in Cornwall alone, as slave labour by British companies, keen to hire cheap labour in order to guarantee their profits.

Empire World Trade (EWT), Britain's largest fruit packers, supplying major stores like Tesco and Sainsbury was revealed (*The Guardian*, 29 March 2004) to employ South African migrants in what Anti-Slavery International called 'bonded labour'. They were charged £55 weekly rent to share three or more to a room in crowded dilapidated and dirty houses, motels or caravans. The intermediary agency, Staffmasters Ltd deducted rent, an 'administration charge' per shift and 100% interest on the £1,500 'loan' (for visas and flights), leaving them with as little as 78 pence a week. EWT makes £77

million annually.

The hypocritical and racist Labour government has responded by announcing it is to 'beef up checks on illegal immigrants'. Such 'checks' on Chinese restaurants led many of the shellfish pickers at Morecambe Bay to flee to their doom. The profits of the 'unknowing' companies will escape such 'checks' as they seek other 'gangmasters' to replace the ones they lost, and keep things ticking over nicely. Racist immigration laws and the constant threat of deportation that prevent the Chinese, Greek and other migrant workers from seeking better conditions and protection or redress from their despicable treatment is the sole responsibility of the Labour government, and they are primarily to blame for the deaths at Morecambe Bay.

Multiculturalism or Britishness Anti-racism and internationalism still the only way forward

The ruling class is ever flexible in protecting its own interests. In the past the brute assertion of 'Britishness' was sufficient for social control. In recent times 'multiculturalism' has been adopted as a convenient code by the racist British state. Now we are set to return to the older model. When Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), argues that it is vital to 'assert a core of Britishness' we know that nationalism is being brought to the forefront again. Government circles are preparing to discard the notion of multiculturalism and resort once again to a 'core culture', the quintessence of Britishness, teaching subjects to 'be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Her Heirs and Successors according to law.' (Oath, Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, 2002).

Multiculturalism is a strategy to hide the real racism of the British state and, by offering crumbs of capitalist prosperity to a layer of the minority ethnic communities, serves as a means of curbing militant resistance to racism. It is an 'inclusiveness'

which facilitates social control. Focusing on ethnic differences, it undermines class-consciousness. Nonetheless, it resulted in limited concessions to the anti-racist struggle: community centres for minority ethnic groups, religious days celebrated in schools, public service leaflets in translation and so on. It made crude racism unacceptable.

Multiculturalism no longer serves the requirements of the ruling class. Today Britain is acting out its old imperialist role, with brute force and military might in the service of capital in Iraq and elsewhere. There is a direct impact on domestic politics as the government prepares the electorate to face the economic and human cost of the massive mobilisation of the armed forces. Terror attack scares and the eradication of civil rights are part of the process of softening up the British public to support imperialism. Islamophobia and hostility to asylum seekers and immigrant workers are manipulated by government and media in a rising tide of race hatred. Racism, the partner of national oppression, is particularly relevant to the US/British war coalition. The occupation of Iraq is

repeatedly justified in terms of the superiority of western values, democracy and neo-liberal free trade. Blair adviser Robert Cooper says in *The New Liberal Imperialism*, 2002, that today there are civilised, barbarian and savage states in the guise of post-modern, modern and pre-modern states. He provides theoretical support for Blair's visionary belief that it is the duty of Britain as a post-modern state to be a guardian of superior British civilisation across the globe.

Another influential thinker Samuel P. Huntington, author of 1998 best-seller *The Clash of Civilisations*, rationalises racism, claiming: 'People and nations are attempting to answer the most basic questions humans face: "Who are we?"... People use politics not just to advance their interests but to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against'. The 'we' that Huntington speaks of is the mythical 'we' of all racists; Hitler's 'volk', the nation, the ethnic group, the tradition and shared values of a distinct people.

In 1968 the Labour government

tried to enforce Britishness by introducing the blood link, patriality, which removed the right of British overseas passport-holders to settle in Britain unless they had a (white) grandparent in Britain. In 1969 the same government showed contempt for family ties and removed the right of admission to Britain for the spouses and fiancés of immigrants. In opposition, the Labour Party then opposed the Tories' 1971 Immigration Act but embraced it fully when back in office 1974-79. This Act designated black Commonwealth citizens 'non-patrials' and denied them entry except on work permits. Arrivals at Heathrow Airport were subjected to humiliations including disgusting 'virginity' tests carried out on Asian women entering to marry British Asians. Anti-deportation campaigns multiplied in protest against punitive immigration controls that denied rights even to children born in Britain.

The first-ever issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* (November-December 1979) carried a report on an anti-racist campaign in Leeds, the Chapeltown Rasta Defence Committee. A 15-year-old Rastafarian

schoolboy was suspended for refusing to cut his hair. The local authorities then threatened to take him into care for not attending school. Many white boys at the school had hair as long or longer than his. The youth won his case following a determined campaign joined by the community, the Bradford Asian Youth movement and the Manchester Revolutionary Communist Group. The crude racist harassment by the local Labour-run education authority was typical of the period. It was the fight-back, culminating in the uprisings of 1980 and 1981, that led to the creation of race relations officers, advisors and the establishment of the CRE itself as one of the largest non-governmental organisations in Britain.

As a campaigning body, the CRE has been far more successful in promoting multiculturalism than demanding racial equality. But today the uses of multiculturalism are over, it would seem, and there is a return to the rotten old nationalistic roots of the Labour Party. In 1965 Roy Hattersley, then Labour's deputy leader, said Britain must limit immigration in order to create new British subjects: 'Without integration, limitation is inexcusable, without limitation integration is impossible.' He meant then, and Trevor Phillips means today, that support for the British government is the prime duty of all citizens. We say anti-racism and internationalism are the only way forward for all of humankind.

Susan Davidson