

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 183 February/March 2005

(unwaged 50p) 80p



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Solidarity
price
£1

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TRAGEDY AND FARCE IN IRAQ

Cowboy hats, fur coats, fireworks, nine dress balls and sparkling wine celebrated the second inauguration of President Bush. The 55th presidential inauguration cost a record \$40 million plus \$17.3 million for security. To the singing of 'The Star Spangled Banner' and invocations to 'God and freedom', Death rode out from the multitude. If anyone in Baghdad wanted to watch the proceedings on TV they were frustrated by power cuts. TREVOR RAYNE reports on the reality behind the window dressing of imperialism in Iraq.

The US and British governments present the 30 January elections for a national assembly as a step towards democracy for Iraq. They are not democratic nor do they transfer power from the occupation armies to the Iraqi people. The elections, devised by the occupation forces, are intended to confer legitimacy on the occupation, to consolidate an Iraqi political alliance willing to negotiate with and serve imperialism against the growing national resistance movement. If their outcome proves otherwise, this will be yet another stumble in imperialism's collapsing Middle East strategy.

Interim government Prime Minister Allawi refused repeated requests from Shia, Sunni and Kurdish political par-

ties and from his president to postpone the election for security reasons. He refused because the US government told him to. Three weeks before the elections the commander of US ground forces said that significant parts of four of Iraq's 18 provinces were not secure enough to hold a vote. *The Independent's* Robert Fisk points out that these four provinces contain half of Iraq's population. *The Daily Telegraph* (17 January) reported: 'Many people know next to nothing about the candidates, or even how they will be able to vote... Only a few leading politicians from each list have dared to identify themselves.' Dozens of election officials resigned and 100,000 were still needed. Locations

of many polling stations were to be kept secret until polling day. International observers stationed themselves in Amman, capital of Jordan.

With the US troop presence increased by 12,000 to 150,000 and the British contingent raised to 9,000, the elections took place in a battlefield where Iraqi deaths run at approximately 100 a week, which the occupying power refuses to count. On 22 January the interim government announced emergency powers, imposing a night-time curfew over the election period, bans on travel and use of cars, closure of Baghdad International airport and increased powers of arrest. Polling stations were to be ringed by consecutive circles of Iraqi police, then Iraqi troops and, where deemed necessary, an outer circle of occupation forces. No vote held under such conditions reflects the will of the Iraqi people.

The director of Iraq's new intelligence services said, 'I think the resistance is bigger than the US military. I think the resistance is more than 200,000 people'. This resistance now mounts an average of 70 attacks on the occupation forces each day. In November 135 US soldiers were killed, including 71 in Fallujah. A fur-

ther 600 were wounded in Fallujah, this is a casualty rate of 10% of the US troops sent into the city – a proportion far higher than the US military has experienced in combat in recent years. On 7 December the US military admitted to its 1,000th death in combat. By 21 January this had risen to 1,070 dead. There are over 10,000 occupation troops in Baghdad. They seldom venture out from their bases. Over 1,000 Iraqi National Guard and 1,000 police have been killed. In January the governor of Baghdad and the deputy head of the city's police were assassinated. The Iraqi forces, constructed by the occupiers, are hopelessly infiltrated. Whatever their different politics the resistance groups are backed by many Iraqis and whether the imperialists like it or not one of the newly elected body's chief responsibilities (if only to itself and its survival) will be to negotiate with the resistance. It is scheduled to write a new constitution before 15 October and hold elections for a new government in December 2005.

Last year a Coalition Provisional Authority poll showed that 82% of Iraqis wanted the occupation forces out either immediately or after the January 2005 election. Most of the

main parties say they want a timetable for the occupation forces' withdrawal. The Sunni population will not vote; two of its organisations, the Muslim Scholars' Association and the Iraqi Islamic Party, called for an electoral boycott in December. The two leading Kurdish parties, in an alliance for the election, expect to gain 75-85 of the 275 seats. Their main concern is to retain semi-autonomous powers and get a share of the oil reserves near Kirkuk and Mosul. The Kurdish parties are the main supporters of the occupation. Their militias are armed and trained by Israel.

In a proportional representation election based not on constituencies but on total share of the vote, the bulk of the seats will go to the Shi'ite Iraqi List led by Prime Minister Allawi and the United Iraqi Alliance endorsed by Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Allawi's slogan is 'A strong leadership, a secure country'. His law and order platform combines with defence of Iraq's borders against Syria and Iran and the prosecution of the Saddam Hussein regime officials. Allawi characterises his main Shia opponents as serving Syria and Iran. He unveiled his slate of candidates to a small audience of

continued on page 3

Palestinian elections: Democracy under occupation – a contradiction in terms

The outcome of the Palestinian presidential election on 10 January was never in much doubt; the winner, Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was the favoured candidate of imperialism and the Zionists. The only unknown was the turnout, how many of the poor and oppressed would boycott the election? Could Abbas, after the election, declare with any credibility that he had a real mandate from the people?
BOB SHEPHERD reports.

The final result saw Abbas gain 483,039 votes, 62.3% of the turnout. His nearest challenger Mustafa Barghouti, leader of the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI), but running as an independent, gained 153,516 votes, 19.8% of votes cast. Of the other candidates, the representative of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine gained 27,118 votes (3.5%) and the Palestinian People's Party, the former Palestinian Communist Party, gained 20,774 votes (2.68%). Three independent Islamic candidates won a further 36,457 votes between them – 4.71% of the total vote.

This seems to be a resounding victory for Abbas, but figures from the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC) show the real state of affairs. Out of a total of approximately 1.8 million eligible voters, the turnout was only 46%. The vote for Abbas totalled just over 28% of all eligible voters – not, then, a resounding mandate to push through the agenda of imperialism. This is in complete contrast to the last election for President in 1996, when on a 75% voter turnout Yasser Arafat won 78% of the vote.

It is clear that the call to boycott the election by Hamas and Islamic Jihad had a significant effect.

The main candidates

Mahmoud Abbas was the favoured candidate of imperialism. One of the main planks of his election campaign was his opposition to the armed resistance. This is consistent with his political history. In his brief tenure as Palestinian Prime Minister in 2003 he had labelled the armed resistance as 'terrorism'. Abbas has been in the political leadership of the PLO for many years; he was a central figure in the negotiations that led up to the Oslo Agreement in 1993. In 1995 he was involved in the infamous Beilin-Abu Mazen Understanding which came out of discussions between the PLO and Zionists associated with the Labour Party. The Understanding allowed Israel to maintain a permanent military force in the Jordan valley, and agreed to rename Abu Dis, a village outside Jerusalem, as Al Quds to get round the Palestinian demand that East Jerusalem be the capital of a future Palestinian state.

On the question of Palestinian

refugees and the right of return, the Understanding said: 'Whereas the Palestinian side considers that the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes is enshrined in international law and natural justice, it recognises that the prerequisites of the new era of peace and coexistence, as well as the realities that have been created on the ground since 1948, have rendered the implementation of this right impracticable'. In other words, the right of return no longer applied.

Mustafa Barghouti was the main opposition candidate. He is the leader of the PNI, which he set up in 2002 alongside Edward Said. He is influen-

they term the 'militarisation of the Intifada'. They have been politically linked with the ISM and pacifist campaigners from the USA and Europe who are also opposed to the Intifada. Barghouti represents the middle class who returned after Oslo who have been excluded from positions of power by the old PLO elite running the PA.

Running of the election

Israel did not stop its repression and killing in the period leading up to the election. On 4 January, only five days before the election, the Israeli army killed seven children in Gaza, blown to smithereens by an Israeli tank shell. A few days before the election a 17-year-old election worker was shot dead by an Israeli sniper in Gaza as she put up election posters. The day before the election the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* carried an article headlined 'Quietly carrying on building' reporting how settlements are expanding across the West Bank. According to the article Israel is drawing up plans to expand 120 settlements with the agreement of incoming US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

It was in this context that Israel agreed to a token withdrawal of some checkpoints and roadblocks in the 72 hours before the election to allow free movement of candidates and voters. However, this did not extend to Rafah, the main border crossing between



Abbas with Condoleezza Rice: the alliance is sealed

tial in the prominent Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) Palestine Monitor. One of the main planks to his campaign was opposition to corruption in the Palestinian Authority (PA). Barghouti is one of the leading figures in the NGOs movement centred in the West Bank. The majority of these were set up in the period following the Oslo Accords when large numbers of well-educated, middle class Palestinian refugees returned, believing that the 'peace process' would lead to a viable Palestinian state.

Barghouti was endorsed as a candidate by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine on the basis of his support for the four points of their Democratic Programme. However Barghouti and the PNI are politically opposed to the armed resistance, what

Egypt and Gaza, where thousands of Palestinians have been prevented for over a month from re-entering Gaza and were excluded from the election process.

There were approximately 1,000 international and 22,000 local observers to monitor the legitimacy of the election. This did not prevent the massive obstruction of voters in East Jerusalem. Out of an estimated Palestinian population of between 200,000-300,000 only 5,365 were registered to vote at the city's five polling stations! Of these stations, one didn't open at all, and three others opened four hours late at 11am instead of 7am. As *Al Ahram Weekly* reported, these polling stations were completely controlled by Israel: 'On Israeli demand voting took place in Israeli-owned and run post offices. Israeli-



Zionist settlers kick and taunt a Palestinian woman in the street in Hebron, West Bank

employed post office workers were charged with the task of verifying the identities of potential voters. Ballots were cast in Israeli-provided boxes, which were then taken to be counted by Israeli-employed postmen. Armed Israeli police, both dressed in military gear and plainclothes guarded the stations, and on the whole the area was tightly guarded by Israeli security forces'.

The majority of Palestinians from East Jerusalem who did vote had to travel outside of the city into the West Bank to vote at polling stations there.

As it became clear that voter turnout was rather low, the CEC, under pressure from Fatah, agreed to change the voting procedure to allow people to vote who weren't on the electoral register or residential roll to cast a ballot, and to extend the voting time for a further two hours. This resulted in at least 30,000 votes being cast by people not on any register and by PA security forces bussed in to vote in the last two hours of voting. All these were the natural constituency of Abbas.

Repercussions from this blatant attempt to boost Abbas's vote came on 15 January with the resignation of 46 members of the CEC. This was in protest at widespread voting irregularities and intimidation by PA officials.

Election response

In their analysis of the election the Palestine Information Centre, which is associated with Hamas, declared that Abbas had to 'improve the living conditions of ordinary Palestinians, the bulk of whom have fallen prey to poverty and unemployment, as well as fighting the phenomenal corruption permeating through the entire PA apparatus'.

This position reflects the class base of much of Hamas's support, the poor and oppressed of Palestinian society. It is clear though that Abbas will be unable to deliver any permanent relief for the oppressed as he represents the interests of the Palestinian bourgeoisie whose class interests demand they come to an arrangement with imperialism and the Zionists.

The response to Abbas's victory from the US, Israel and Britain was predictable and reinforced what the

imperialists want from him. Bush invited him to visit the White House and told him he was 'committed to helping him tackle key issues like security, terrorism, economic growth and building democratic institutions'. He urged Abbas to 'take on' armed groups such as Hamas. In response to the resistance attack on the Gaza border crossing, which killed six Israeli security workers, the Israeli justice minister, commenting on the 'restrained' Israeli military response, said 'In order to try to prevent the next attack we have to try to strengthen Abu Mazen as a leader, based on the assumption he can control the terror groups'. Britain was reported to be funding and advising on the setting up of an elite 750 strong police unit in Gaza.

It is clear what imperialism wants from Abbas, the neutering of the armed resistance and the ending of any militant opposition to Israeli occupation. However the low voter turnout, a large part of which was in response to Hamas and Islamic Jihad calling for a boycott, shows that this will be no easy task. Abbas's tactics are to use this short period following his election victory, when he still has some authority, to attempt to negotiate for both Hamas and Jihad to call a ceasefire.

In pursuit of this he was engaged in intensive negotiations with both organisations in Gaza in January and they agreed to suspend armed actions to allow him time to negotiate a comprehensive ceasefire with Israel. Hamas demanded as a response to any ceasefire the release of all Palestinian political prisoners. However Israel has consistently refused to agree to any official ceasefire with the armed resistance and as Khaled Al Batch, spokesperson from Islamic Jihad, stated, 'In the last *hunda* (ceasefire) we gave time to Abu Mazen to discuss what Palestinians would get from Israel. Sharon said he had no interest in the *hunda* and what he gave us was more assassinations... This time if there is no position from the Americans guaranteeing that Israel will respect the *hunda*, then we will have no choice but to go on protecting our people, because there is no one stopping the Israelis'.



Palestinian families continue to suffer daily harassment by the Israeli army

TRAGEDY AND FARCE IN IRAQ

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US security guards. At a press conference Allawi handed out \$100 notes to invited journalists. The main parties of the United Iraqi Alliance are the Islamic Al Daawa, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the secular Iraqi National Congress led by Ahmed Chalabi. Their candidates reflect the traditional leadership of Shi'ite society: prominent tribal and religious figures. They say they oppose both the occupation and the armed resistance. It can be expected that they will seek to enshrine religious codes in law, for example those governing women. Followers of Moqtada Al Sadr, whose Mahdi militia fought US and British troops last year, are on the United Iraqi Alliance list. The leader of SCIRI is Abdul Aziz Al Hakim who spent most of the past 20 years in Iran which trained and armed the Badr Brigade that Al Hakim leads. Allawi's defence minister called United Iraqi Alliance 'an Iranian list'. King Abdullah of Jordan joined in, accusing Iran of infiltrating one million people into Iraq to vote.

Bush administration neo-conservatives had a plan for Iraq based on the 'Lewis Doctrine', named after Bernard Lewis, historian of the Middle East. This imagined a westernised polity imposed from above, much in the manner of Kemal Ataturk's Turkey. This is proving to be a complete folly of strategic thinking driven by ideological prejudice.

Time for a rethink

In so far as they have a withdrawal strategy the occupation forces intend to replace themselves with reliable Iraqi forces, while retaining a military presence to ensure that US and British multinational corporations control Iraq's and the Middle East's oil. As yet 120,000 Iraqi troops out of a target 273,000 have been trained and many are unreliable. Before his departure from office the US Secretary of State Powell said of US troop numbers in

Iraq, 'It is not possible right now to say that by the end of 2005 we'll be down to such and such a number. It really is dependent on the situation'. When asked by President Bush how the war was going, Powell is quoted as responding 'We're losing'. Bush asked Powell to leave.

Presidential inaugurations and flag waving cannot long hide the dismal reality of the US and British positions in Iraq. In December the Pentagon said that over 5,500 US soldiers had deserted since the war started. Some have gone to Canada seeking refugee status, just as in the generation before 55,000 crossed the border rather than go to Vietnam. Part-time soldiers of the US National Guard comprise 40% of the US contingent in Iraq. National Guard recruitment is down. In December the US National Guard announced it was tripling bonuses for new recruits and soldiers re-enlisting after it was revealed that it had fallen 10,000 below its standard strength of 350,000. The general at the head of US reserves said current deployment policies meant his units were 'rapidly degenerating into a broken force'. Extended tours of duty are sapping morale. Only minor punishments were imposed on 18 US soldiers who disobeyed orders to drive unarmoured fuel tankers in October. In this context the revelation that Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld had letters of condolence to fallen soldiers' families signed by auto-pen caused outrage. The US military intends to add robots armed with machine guns to its occupation army.

According to *Newsweek* magazine the US is rethinking military tactics in Iraq. 'What everyone agrees is that we can't just go on as we are. We have to find a way to take the offensive against the insurgents. Right now we are playing defence. And we are losing', observed a senior US military officer. Under consideration is 'the Salvador option'. This refers to the use of death squads in Central America 20 years ago, supposedly to target resistance leaders. In El Salvador over

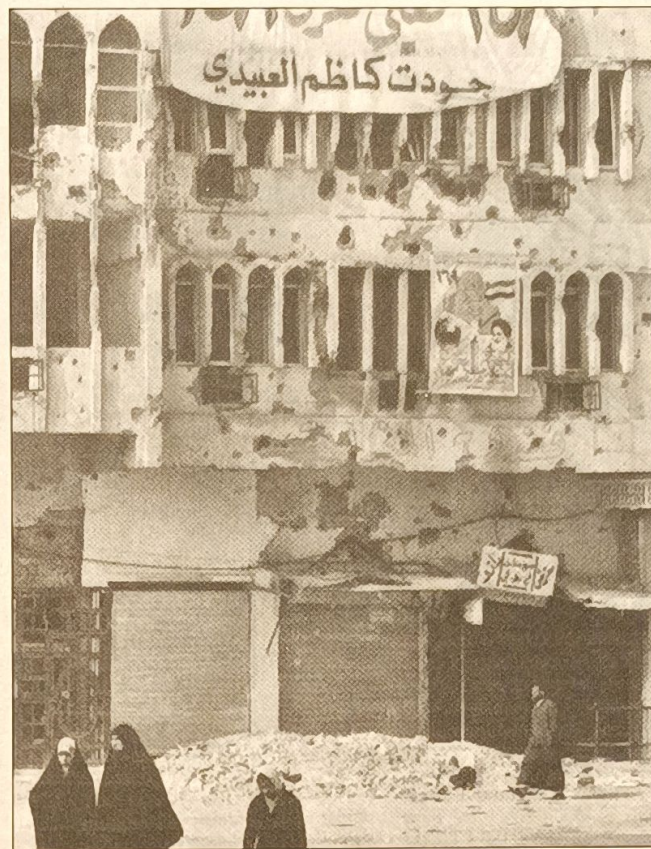
80,000 people were killed or disappeared and one million made refugees out of a population of 5.5 million. The Salvador option would result in similar population liquidation exercises on the scale of Fallujah all across Iraq.

British rotten apples

On 18 January, during the court martial of three members of the British Royal Regiment of Fusiliers for assault and indecent conduct, photographs of abuse of Iraqi prisoners were published. The photographs were taken several months before the events at Abu Ghraib were recorded. Torture conforms to the needs of an occupation force in alien and antagonistic territory. Labour Prime Minister Blair condemned the photographs as 'shocking and appalling'. Chief of the British Army General Jackson 'utterly condemned' the abuse. Foreign Secretary Straw said the photographs were 'disgusting and degrading...but this kind of activity was confined to a tiny handful of British soldiers'. Leader of the Opposition Howard said the photographs in 'no way reflect the true character of Britain's armed forces'. Liberal Democrat Kennedy lamented that circulation of the photographs would 'increase the dangers for our troops'.

This 'few rotten apples in the barrel' line is nonsense. As is the way with apples and barrels, a few bad apples suggest the whole barrel is contaminated. Precisely because the British armed forces have a long history of imperialist ventures into other peoples' territories they have a long history of the use of torture. The malleability of human beings in the service of racism and imperialism is exhaustively demonstrated across the former British colonies and Ireland. The almost identical sadistic humiliation of prisoners at Britain's Camp Bread Basket with those at Abu Ghraib, forced use of public nakedness and simulated homosexual acts, indicates cultural and psychological profiling of men in Arab culture. The purpose is to find the most precise way of causing maximum psychological pain thereby extracting information from the captive as efficiently as possible. It is publishing the photographs that the military sees as a crime. Consequently, soldiers are being ordered by their officers to hand over all personal photographs taken in Iraq. A British high court has accepted evidence obtained through torture by another country, thereby endorsing torture as a legitimate means of gathering information and evidence.

On 20 January a bomb attack 20 miles south of Basra injured nine British soldiers and several Iraqi civilians. It was claimed as a reprisal for the British torture of 'our brothers in prison'. The British Ministry of Defence state that the number of British troops flown home from Iraq with serious injuries is nearly 800. A quarter of the British Army in Iraq is drawn from the Territorial Army. 11,000 Territorial Army soldiers have served in Iraq. In January Territorial Army Lance Corporal George Solomon refused to serve in Iraq, condemning the war as 'bankrupt, unjust and immoral'. He said that up to half



Baghdad before the elections

of Territorial Army soldiers do not agree with the war.

For the US people the war on Iraq is costing over \$1 billion a week, plus the pain of having sons and daughters killed and maimed and the loss of democratic rights. For the US ruling class the war threatens its international credibility as the unrivalled global power and US dominion over world oil supplies. It faces a choice, whether to reduce its military commitment with the minimum loss of credibility or whether to escalate with the risk of a greater defeat. The needs of US capital dictate that it must contend with and subdue rival imperialist powers and overcome any political threat to its domination. Any withdrawal from Iraq would only result in greater

US bellicosity elsewhere until the US ruling class is challenged both within and without the US. For now there are serious misgivings about the Bush administration within the US state. The CIA and FBI are responsible for leaking information about the government's encouragement of torture at Guantanamo and in Iraq, and the role of Zionists acting as spies within the US administration.

In Britain the Labour Party and government think that they can put the massive anti-war demonstration and sentiment behind them and win a spring election comfortably. They must be challenged and the war must be made the electoral issue - this is an opportunity to break with Labour imperialism once and for all.

TARGET TEHRAN

As US military convoys sped around Iraq's capital in April 2003 car bumper stickers appeared in the US: Boys go to Baghdad, men to Tehran. Seymour Hersh's report in *The New Yorker* suggests the men may get their chance yet. A former senior intelligence officer told Hersh, 'The Bush administration is looking at this as a huge war zone. Next we're going to have the Iranian campaign. We've declared war and the bad guys, wherever they are, are the enemy. This is the last hurrah. We've got four years, and we want to come out of this saying we won the war on terrorism'. Hersh was told that US special forces are already in Iran targeting sites for air strikes and commando raids. Vice President Cheney has elevated Iran, one of the original 'axis of evil', to 'the top of the list'. The Pentagon did not deny the claim that US soldiers were inside Iran.

Iran is thought to be three years away from being able to produce a nuclear bomb. A nuclear-armed Iran is 'unacceptable' to the US government and Israel. Iran has 70 million people, nearly triple the number of Iraq. It is predominantly Shia and can exercise influence over Iraq's Shia people as well as the Shia population of Saudi Arabia, whose territory contains large oil

reserves. Iran itself has 8% of the world's oil reserves and gas reserves second only to Russia's. 40% of the world's traded oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz that Iran can block. Iran borders or is close to Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, Pakistan, India, Turkey, and the Caspian Basin: it is strategically critical for Central Asia. Tehran supports groups in the Middle East that the US and British governments consider as terrorists.

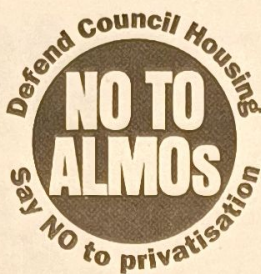
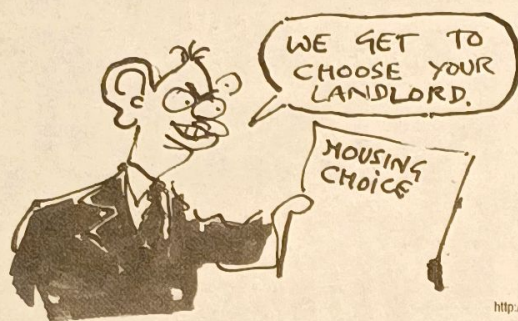
Inside the US the same people who drew up the Helms-Burton Act against Cuba and the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, stipulating regime change, propose an Iran Freedom and Support Act, with the backing of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. These reactionaries want to restore the monarchy, under the ousted Shah's son who lives in Virginia. Britain, France and Germany are seeking to lure the Iranian government away from its nuclear programme with offers of trade benefits. Foreign Secretary Straw said in November, 'I don't see any circumstances in which military action would be justified against Iran, full stop'. No doubt his Prime Minister will remind the Foreign Secretary that circumstances can change unexpectedly.

FALLUJAH

The November attack on Fallujah will symbolise the brutality of the occupying army and the servility of the interim government. The US claims to have killed 1,200 'insurgents' in Fallujah for the loss of 71 of its own soldiers. No figures for civilian casualties are given - nobody counts them. When the attacking forces captured the hospital they tied up all the doctors and confiscated their mobile phones to prevent them communicating with anyone. At Christmas one of the few eyewitnesses to report from Fallujah said the city was 'completely devastated...I did not see a single building that was functioning'. He saw bodies rotting, being eaten by rabid dogs.

There are over 210,000 refugees from the city. Any citizen that returns must pass through one of five gates where they are biometrically catalogued with fingerprints, retina scans and DNA samples. Every person must wear an identity badge at all times. Young men may have to do forced labour: construction, waterworks, rubble clearing. Cars are forbidden. Returning residents complain that money and valuables have been stolen. Eight weeks after the assault began US planes continued to bomb Fallujah. Many resistance fighters withdrew from the city on 17 November, having at one point cut the invading army's supply chain.





http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/dch_resource.cfm

Housing crisis hits most vulnerable

BARNABY MITCHEL

Today six million people live in roughly 2.5 million council homes. Half of the five million council homes that existed 20 years ago have been sold off thanks to the Right to Buy scheme introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Tory government and continued under Labour. In 1970 172,000 council homes were built for working class people in Britain. In 2001 only 487 council homes were built. The number of newly-built social houses for rent has fallen from 42,700 in 1994-1995 to around 21,000 in 2002-2003. This desperate shortage of affordable housing for the poorest people in Britain is forcing ever more people into temporary housing or homelessness.

In FRFI 177 we reported on the council housing crisis. The government continues to blackmail council tenants all over Britain to 'choose' to have their homes sold off to private companies, offering just three options: to sell their home to a housing association (RSL) or a private finance consortium or to set up an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO).

Tenants have rejected the three government 'options' in one in four of the votes so far. Tenants have defeated 30 transfers. Yet Housing Minister Keith Hill insists there is no fourth way for council tenants to bring their homes up to the decent homes standard by 2010. Yet at the 2004 Labour conference, members voted overwhelmingly against the government by backing the so-called 'fourth option' – direct investment in council housing. Campaigners continue to fight to keep council housing under public control and for the investment needed to improve council homes.

Campaigners have exposed ALMOs as the first step to privatisation of council homes. This was confirmed in a new paper from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, which proposes giving ALMOs complete ownership of council homes perhaps as early as 2006. (*The Guardian*, 3 September 2004) A new pamphlet for the Fabian Society argues that the transfer of the remaining 2.8 million council homes should be made mandatory by the end of 2007, with tenants losing the right to veto housing transfers. The author of the pamphlet, Jeff Zitron, who runs a housing consultancy specialising

in housing transfers, donated £10,000 to Labour in 2002.

Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are not-for-profit organisations, but they are private sector landlords in legal terms. When homes are transferred, tenants become less secure assured tenants. RSL rents are on average 17% higher than council rents. According to a report by the Citizens Advice Bureau published in 2003, possession orders given to social landlords by local courts are increasing by 12% every year.

Labour plans to sell off even more social housing. Alan Milburn, Labour's election supremo, proposed plans to extend the Right to Buy to all Housing Association tenants as part of Labour's election manifesto. Other members of the government have been more cautious, fearing opposition from within the Labour Party and trade unions before the election. The result is the 'Social Home Buy Scheme', which opens up housing association properties to partial purchase by residents. Over time residents can buy outright.

This plan is, like ALMOs, privatisation by stealth.

The official number of homeless households has topped 100,000 for the first time; an increase of 7% over last year and an increase of 123% since the Labour took office in 1997 – representing over half a million people without a proper home. This ignores unregistered homeless people and those living in sub-standard or overcrowded homes in the UK. The rate of homelessness among the UK's black and ethnic minority population is disproportionately high.

In December 2004, the government announced cuts to the Supporting People budget, which is where the majority of funding of projects for 1.2 million vulnerable people comes from, including the homeless, victims of domestic abuse, people with mental health problems and the elderly. Budgets for all 150 councils administering the £17 billion scheme were cut in December 2004, in most cases by 5%. As more people become homeless, so support for them is being slashed.

Education notes Labour's projects fill pockets

New Education Minister and friend of Opus Dei Ruth Kelly looks set to have her hands full, with a White Paper on 14-19 education, a Green Paper on young people and a White Paper on skills all to be presented soon. One thing is certain: every new Labour project will make money for one the many thriving education businesses.

Capita, for example, has profited by £114m on contracts from the Department for Education and Skills since the last election. The latest little earner is the Maintenance Allowance Contract, which pays 16 to 18-year-olds from low-income families £30 per week to remain in school. Together with schools and colleges, Capita will share £37m to administer the grants. With 100,000 students still waiting for their claim, future business is assured.

But the real money is in exams. One school, Thomas Telford, earns £2m a year from the ICT exam it set up. Meanwhile Edexcel's A-level fee rose by 6.8% to £70.50 per student last year. Schools and colleges are spending an estimated £380m a year on exams, of which £100m is a central grant. So government keeps on feeding the greed of the edubusinesses and English school kids remain the most tested and examined in the world.

This Labour government has been seduced by private sector myths of enterprise, profit making, flexibility, and deregulation. In truth, of course, private firms in the public sector are subsidised, either fully or in part, by taxes. Their work force and capital infrastructure is largely paid for by central government. They are more expensive and even less efficient than the public sector,

Call-it capitalism

BARNABY PROBERT

UK call centres now employ more people than the coal, steel and car industries combined with a growth in recent years that has exceeded all forecasts. In July 2000, the *Financial Times* reported that analysts Business Strategies expected employment in UK call centres to rise to 665,000 by 2008. By the first quarter of 2003, a Sector Skills Council survey estimated 867,000 call centre employees, a three-fold increase on 1998 figures.

Many telephone operators are paid less than the minimum wage before commission, in an industry where incidents of racism, abuse and summary dismissal are rife and rarely come before industrial tribunals. In January 2004, a Health and Safety Executive report compared some call centres to Victorian mills, with little trade union representation. Incomes Data Services, in its seventh annual report on the UK call centre industry, claims 'call centres without a recognised trade union now form a minority of the industry'. But their survey of 300 centres was largely confined to financial services, public sector and not-for-profit organisations with large inbound customer service call centres serving industries already benefiting from union representation.

But in the many small or medium-sized call centres to which large companies outsource their sales or marketing work, high staff turnover and lack of trade union representation leaves workers powerless to challenge often illegal practices and working conditions.

Even call centres serving industries with a strong history of union representation can face difficulty in securing recognition. More than half of the 466 staff at BSKYB's Livingston call

centre signed a petition supporting broadcasting union Bectu. By the time balloting for recognition began, over 100 staff had joined the union. However, after management threatened to move the call centre abroad if Bectu won recognition only 47 employees voted in favour. At the FirstInfo railway call centre in Plymouth, posters advocating union recognition were removed from noticeboards. When management at a large broadcasting call centre such as BSKYB Livingston show such determination to scupper recognition, what hope is there for workers in smaller, less regulated call centres with no union involvement?

The guarantee of evening or weekend work close to home means that many single parents, students and others are economically conscripted into this type of work. Flexible working hours are a perceived benefit of call centre employment. In reality, the picture is varied. At one Plymouth call centre an employee was refused a transfer to the day shift so that he could spend time with his partner and child in the evening on the basis that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'.

One call centre which does guarantee flexibility is Heathmill in north London, which pays commission only and allows staff

to clock in and out at any time of the day or night. Potential staff are lured with the promise of 50% of commissions paid in cash at the end of each day on confirmed sales. Should confirmed sales cancel at a later stage, any commission paid is deducted from the employee's bank account at the close of the month.

One sales campaign involves calling the United States on behalf of a global pay advance loans company. Pay advance, or 'pay day', loans are a multi-billion dollar industry condemned by the Consumer Federation of America as 'legal loan sharking'. It is legal because you are charged an extortionate fee, rather than an excessive interest rate. The \$200 loans sold from Heathmill's call centre cost an \$89 fee on pay day after the first fortnight, a further \$89 fee if repayment of the balance is deferred to the end of the next fortnight, and also a \$35 'membership fee'. So on a \$200 loan taken over one month, \$213 fees are deducted from the borrower's wage cheque – equivalent to an annual interest rate of 1278%. Using a casual workforce in a British call centre to sell loans to desperate people in the States shows how global capitalism uses the low paid to fleece the low paid.



Blocked projects

100 years ago progressive teachers and socialist groups struggled to establish a state education system free from religious control. Labour is attempting to reverse that. Sir Peter Vardy, described by the *Times Education Supplement* as a 'Christian fundamentalist car dealer', has been handed two large local secondary schools – Emmanuel College in Gateshead and The King's Academy in Middlesbrough. The Vardy Foundation, which runs the schools, accords equal status to 'creationism' and theories of evolution. Both schools are favourites of Tony Blair. 200 more such schools, known as City Academies or private state schools, are planned. For a fee of £2m, payable in random instalments, private benefactors are handed effective control of brand-new state schools, selecting the governors, appointing the senior management and managing the school's practices without having to worry about the national curriculum. The initial

£20m for each school is paid by central government, as are the annual £5m running costs. Academies are not bound by national agreements on teachers' pay and conditions. Shamefully, several Labour councils have backed these plans. However, parents are fighting back. In Conisbrough near Doncaster, Sir Peter Vardy and the elected Labour mayor made a grab for Northcliffe comprehensive school. Unimpressed with the big sell, the glossy brochures and patronising promises of success, parents and teachers organised protest meetings. Parents expressed horror at the prospect of their children being educated with 'these extreme kind of Christian ideologies' and without any kind of local accountability. The parents won and Northcliffe was saved. But Blair and his grovelling MPs will not stop their relentless sell-off and giveaway of state schools unless more parents protest and organise.

Susan Davidson

Ireland: Unionists step up pressure on Sinn Fein

PAUL MALLON

On 20 December 2004, a Belfast bank was robbed of £26.5m. Unionist politicians swiftly claimed that the IRA was behind the raid. The allegations have served to put even more pressure on the Republican movement following the failure of talks in December to restore the Stormont assembly when Unionists demanded that the IRA allow the decommissioning of its weapons be recorded on photographs. For the Republican movement this was a step too far – for the moment, at least.

On 6 January 2005, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Chief Constable Hugh Orde waded in to support the claims of IRA involvement in the robbery. In doing so, Orde followed in the tradition of the old RUC: he had absolutely no evidence for what he said. Raids on several Republican homes yielded nothing. They showed however that PSNI approach to policing is no different from that of the old RUC. Despite this, the claims have impressed the SDLP and the Irish government, who now also see the IRA as the guilty party. The whole episode has embarrassed Sinn Fein because it needs

to sustain its alliance with these bourgeois forces.

Documents released by the British and Irish governments show how far the Republican movement was prepared to go to meet Unionist demands in December. The IRA leadership was prepared to 'conclude the process to completely and verifiably put all its arms beyond use' and to 'move to a new mode that reflects its determination to see the transition to a totally peaceful society brought to a successful conclusion.' The IRA publicly restated these positions on 9 December. Following this, Sinn Fein was also prepared to endorse and participate in police boards.

During the talks Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams became the first Republican leader since Michael Collins to meet the head of the police of the Six Counties when he travelled to London for a two-hour meeting with Orde on 29 November. Adams stated that 'we want all these matters sorted out. We want this to work. We are stretching ourselves and our constituency'. The reality on the ground indeed shows how far his constituency is being stretched. On 5 December, an 18-year-old nationalist escaped with his life following a knife and claw hammer attack by a loyalist mob in north Belfast. He required 40 sta-

ples to back and arm wounds. Eight days later, a 15-year-old girl was beaten unconscious as she walked home in a vicious sectarian attack by a loyalist gang using cars to scout the area for potential targets.

Discrimination lives on

Since its establishment, the economy of the Six Counties has been propped up by heavy subsidies from British imperialism in order to maintain loyalist supremacy and privilege. The pattern continues to this day. Catholic workers are still nearly twice as likely to be unemployed than Protestants. One in three jobs in the north is in the public sector – the highest proportion anywhere in Britain. The service sector has grown as manufacturing jobs have been lost, and it is now very dependent upon continued public sector growth. Any cut in public expenditure would therefore have a significant impact on employment and with it loyalist privilege. With the Six Counties' economy under strain, there is a sense of loyalist instability, and this has stimulated the sectarian attacks regularly reported in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Catholic communities across the north cannot allow their guard to drop when confronted by this supremacist tradition in unrest.

Bhopal – still waiting for justice

ANDREW ALEXANDER

In the early hours of the morning on 3 December 1984, methyl isocyanate (MIC), a lethal toxic gas, leaked from a chemical plant in Bhopal, India. Within the next 24 hours 8,000 people had died. A further 15,000 were to die over the next few years with an estimated 500,000 left with chronic and debilitating injuries. Twenty years on and a person still dies every single day from the effects of the accident.

It was quite possibly the biggest industrial accident in history. An avoidable accident, resulting from the relentless pursuit of profit that capitalism has spread around the world. Throughout the 1970s India increased its exposure to the free-market and sought more foreign direct investment. A lot of it was found through the transformation of world agriculture labelled as the 'Green Revolution', which brought to India agricultural multinationals such as a company called Union Carbide.

Within the conditions created by capitalism individual corporations can take full advantage of the cheap labour and lax safety laws that exist within poor countries, this is exactly what Union Carbide did in India. Union Carbide, now owned by the US chemical giant Dow Chemical, created in Bhopal a plant that was lacking in the most basic of safety procedures. This was not because the expertise did not exist for the correct and safe handling of dangerous chemicals, but because the finance was not injected to enforce such standards. The Bhopal factory was designed as a copy of a Union Carbide plant in West Virginia, but without the same computerised safety equipment and levels of training. Many of those working in the plant expressed concern about safety but their words fell on deaf ears amongst the management, situated safely away in the US. Even in the summer of 1984, a Bhopal-based journalist wrote an article on the dangers of the plant for a leading Indian newspaper entitled: 'Bhopal on the brink of disaster,' yet the article spurred no action from Union Carbide or the Indian government alike. In fact, despite the warnings and anxieties, it has become clear that a refrigeration unit, which could have prevented the accident, was turned off in order to save a mere \$40 a day.

If Union Carbide's actions weren't bad enough, their actions afterwards eclipsed them in their inhumanity. As soon as news of the accident broke, Union Carbide withheld key medical information on the leaked gas and dispensed unsound medical advice in order to keep to their official line that MIC was 'nothing more than a potent tear gas.' The President of Union Carbide, Warren Anderson, under international pressure, went to Bhopal to see the devastation caused. He was arrested by the local police but after four hours of pressure



Demonstrators call for the extradition of Warren Anderson, Chairman of Union Carbide

from the US government was released on bail and fled straight back to the US. He now lives in luxury in New York and Florida, safe in the knowledge that he'll probably never be extradited to India for his part in this crime. Union Carbide (now Dow) has yet to take responsibility for the accident, claiming that they only part-owned the plant with an Indian subsidiary and can't accept responsibility, this is a lie. They finally conceded a paltry compensation deal worth \$470m with the Indian government in 1989, washing their hands of the poison they have left behind. The compensation package is worth a meagre \$500 per victim over a 20-year period, which even in the cash-starved slums of Bhopal is nothing more than a cruel insult.

Furthermore, the plant has still to be dismantled despite continuing to pollute the water supply and even though it would only cost a mere \$30m to decommission, according to a Greenpeace report. Surely Dow's yearly sales of \$32.6bn should stretch to cover the pollution that is debilitating and killing to this day, causing children to be born with hideous and painful disfigurements? We should compare this to another scene of death and destruction, the World Trade

Centre, and see the double standards in rebuilding after tragedy, or after the Lockerbie bombing, in which victims' families received £4m. To add further insult to injury, the Indian government retains almost half the compensation money in the Indian national bank. It is the Indian government, along with Union Carbide and their imperialist US cohorts who should be held responsible for the continuing and unnecessary suffering in Bhopal. Perhaps it is because the Indian ruling classes know little of the debilitating pain, breathing difficulties, neurological disorders, depression and poverty of the victims near the plant. But then, why would a government that propagates an economic system that condemns 5,000 of its citizens to death every day from malnutrition and preventable diseases care about the victims of a tragedy that occurred 20 years ago? Imperialism ties the interests of the ruling classes in the oppressed nations with the oppressor nations, and it is the poor who end up trampled upon by both. Twenty years on and justice is still being awaited by the people of Bhopal. Unless there is any radical shift in the political system in India, they may well have to wait even longer.



If they do this to their own, what are they doing to the Iraqis?

THOMAS ATKINS

Since 1990 1,800 soldiers – more than two a week – in or around military bases in Britain have died of 'non-natural' causes. It is true that over 170 First Gulf War veterans have committed suicide – five times as many as were killed in combat – but the majority of the deaths involve teenage recruits, serving in rear echelon units.

There are harrowing allegations of murder, rape, racism and torture inflicted upon youngsters, not by an enemy force, but by their own non-commissioned officer (NCO) instructors.

Thirteen soldiers are alleged to have killed themselves at Catterick, Yorkshire, since 1996. Lance Corporal Derek McGregor, it is said, killed himself in 2002. He had been beaten senseless by military police just prior to his death and the post mortem revealed black eyes, cuts to his stomach and bruising to his legs and scrotum.

The most horrifying allegations come from the Royal Logistic Corp training depot at Deepcut in Surrey. To date there are at least 173 accusations of serious misconduct – including eight allegations of rape, includ-

ing gang rape, and 61 of other assaults.

Some incidents mirror the sexual humiliation of Iraqi POWs by Coalition troops: recruits, male and female, forced to stand at attention stripped naked, in the middle of the night, whilst darts were thrown at them; a female soldier urinated on; another forced to strip naked and run around the parade square. A female soldier who reported gang-rape was threatened by regimental police until she withdrew the charge.

June 1995: Private Sean Benton, whilst on guard duty, was found with five gunshot wounds to his chest, fired from his own 5.56mm SA80 assault rifle. Ballistic experts report that only one round was fired from close range, yet the army insist it was suicide. The army laundered his shirt before forensic police could examine it.

November 1995: Private Cheryl James, 17, whilst on guard, was found with a gunshot wound to her head. The army says it was suicide. They 'lost' the bullet before it could be examined. Witnesses claim Private James was being forced to have a sexual relationship with an NCO.

September 2001: Private

Geoff Gray, 18, whilst on guard, was found with two gunshot wounds to his head – yet five bullets were missing from his SA80 magazine. Ballistic experts report it is impossible to shoot yourself twice in the head with a SA80, yet the army claims it was suicide and has 'lost' the records of the issuing of weapons the night he was killed.

March 2002: Private James Collinson, 17, whilst on guard, was shot upwards through the chin. The army says he killed himself. The army cleaned his SA80 before it could be checked for fingerprints.

The families of the dead soldiers are campaigning for a public inquiry which is being resisted by the government.

As Leon Trotsky, who founded the Soviet Red Army, observed, 'an army is always a copy of the society it serves – with this difference, that it gives social relations a concentrated character, carrying both their positive and negative features to an extreme.'

Therefore, if a society is racist, its army will be extremely racist. The same with class privilege, sexism, homophobia, brutality and all the rest of the muck and filth of capitalist society.

Tsunami: disaster compounds imperialist devastation

On 26 December 2004, a huge earthquake off the northern coast of Sumatra triggered one of the most powerful tsunamis in living memory. Within 15 minutes, it had swept nearly 220,000 people to their deaths in the north Sumatran province of Aceh. Half an hour later, 8,000 died on the coast of Thailand around the tourist resort of Phuket. Within a further hour, another 10,000 had died along the coast of eastern India, and more than 30,000 in Sri Lanka. The scale of destruction was massive: the city of Banda Aceh, with a population of 400,000, was almost completely destroyed, one in seven of its population dead. 4,000 miles away, tsunami waves hit the coast of eastern Africa, leaving 150 more dead. **ROBERT CLOUGH** reports.

Waves 30-40 feet high pulverised towns on the shores of Aceh, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In Aceh, mosques were often the only buildings left standing as the waters receded because they were built of stone or concrete. 800,000 are now homeless in Aceh; in Sri Lanka, 100,000 fishermen have been left unemployed as thousands of fishing boats were smashed to pieces. Tens of thousands of fishermen in Thailand are also affected, and up to 100,000 people may lose their jobs because of the impact on the tourist trade.

The dreadful pictures from Aceh, Thailand and Sri Lanka generated a huge outpouring of basic human solidarity throughout the world. In marked contrast was the response of the leaders of the two most powerful imperialist powers, George Bush and Tony Blair. The former took three days to offer any public comment on the disaster. Blair was in Sharm el Sheikh on the Red Sea having his customary multimillionaire-funded holiday. The leader who had taken two hours to respond to the deaths of John Peel and Jill Dando and little more than three hours to that of Princess Diana, waited four days to offer any public comment on the tsunami victims.

Hollow promises of aid

No less mean-spirited were the aid offerings from both the US and Britain. The initial US offering was a paltry \$15m; when Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary of humanitarian affairs called this 'stingy', Secretary of State

Would an early warning system have made a difference?

In the aftermath of the disaster, it was revealed that the principal countries bordering the Indian Ocean had decided in 2003 not to invest some \$4m in an early warning system. It is not enough, however, to have the technology; more important is to have clear and practised procedures for evacuation. Cuba has shown how it can be done with the evacuations it has to organise in anticipation of the frequent hurricanes that hit the island. But these are possible because Cuba has a socialist system where protecting the lives of working class people is the first priority, and where there is as a consequence a high level of social organisation. In societies ravaged by imperialism, such procedures would be an impossibility.

perialist nations cancel the debt of those most affected by the tsunami, the shutters went down. Gordon Brown's much-publicised tour of Africa in early January promising an end to world poverty was revealed as a hollow PR exercise: all that was on offer from the Paris Club was the temporary suspension of debt repayment.

These minimal levels of aid are, however, typical. In 1990, the UN agreed an aid baseline for Western countries of 0.7% of GNP. Few have met it; Britain's contribution is 0.34%, that of the US a miserable 0.17%. As it is, aid is always used to promote the strategic interests of the donor country. For instance in the US, the 2004-09 joint plan between the State Department and USAID aims to 'align diplomacy and development assistance' with Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy, the document which makes the case for pre-emptive wars and the need to support global intervention. Two criteria are seen as critical: 'relevance to US national security' and 'greater aid effectiveness'. One outcome is that aid to

ment... We will not walk away... we will work with you to (find a way) out of the miserable poverty that is your present existence', his sole purpose was to gain support for the forthcoming war on Afghanistan. Yet the record is that only 3% of aid to Afghanistan has been for reconstruction, whilst 84% has been to pay for the military occupation. It is estimated that no more than 20% of promised aid has reached Afghanistan over three years after the end of the war. To date, only \$29m has been spent on aid to Iraq out of the billions supposedly available.

The media and the tsunami

Once it became clear that there was huge sympathy for the victims of the tsunami, the media went into top gear to prevent it from acquiring any political character. As John Pilger says, these were 'worthy' victims – unlike the 100,000 Iraqis who have died as a result of the murderous onslaught on their country. Hence the press has de-

- The US has promised \$350m in aid. The cost of a F-22 Raptor fighter jet is \$225m. The total cost to date of the US war on Iraq is \$148bn, a daily rate of \$270m, or three-quarters of promised tsunami aid.

- Britain's promised aid has now risen to £200m. This compares to the £1bn military aid it gave to Indonesia to buy Hawk jet fighters.

- The \$4bn promised by the international community in emergency aid compares to the \$44bn spent on debt repayments last year by Thailand, Indonesia and India.

and why they are as they are. Tales fabricated by the Indonesian military about the Aceh Freedom Movement threatening to abduct relief workers have been recycled uncritically, as have stories about Tamil Tigers 'abducting'

Aceh

Aceh is the northernmost province of Sumatra, home to a population of four million. For nearly thirty years, the Acehnese people have fought the brutal Indonesian state for their freedom. The liberation struggle started in 1976; in 1990 casualties escalated when the Suharto regime turned Aceh into a free-fire zone. Between 1990 and 1998 at least 4,000 civilians were murdered. Torture was routine, as was the practice of leaving mutilated bodies by the roadside as a warning. There was a brief respite when the Suharto regime fell; in 1999, a million Acehnese attended a rally demanding a referendum on independence. In May 2003 martial law was imposed, foreigners were banned from the province and countless checkpoints set up; in early December 2004, Indonesian army chief General Surtarto announced that the army

had killed 3,215 Acehnese in the intervening 18 months. The overwhelming majority of these were civilians.

It is not only torture and repression that Acehnese people face. Indonesian troops use checkpoints to extort money and possessions from the Acehnese people. The military also receives money from Exxon-Mobil to protect its massive gas plant in the province; this earns the Indonesian government \$1.2bn per annum, most pocketed by officials in Jakarta. It is one reason why the Acehnese people are demanding their independence. The military is now hoarding aid to sell it on the open market. It is also checking refugee camps and taking away anyone suspected of being a supporter of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). After the tsunami, the army killed seven Acehnese at Lam-pook trying to recover motor

cycles and other belongings from the beach. GAM has offered a ceasefire and negotiations to discuss the best way to get aid to survivors. The Indonesian army claims that GAM is threatening to kidnap relief workers and steal the aid. Indonesian President Yudhoyono assured the world that 'the security operation conducted by Indonesia's military and police will protect, secure the humanitarian efforts'. However, chief of the UN operations in Aceh, Joel Boutroue, retorted 'We don't believe relief workers are targets. I don't see at this stage any hampering of our movements'. The reality is that the Indonesian army is determined to crush the Acehnese people and will rely on the imperialist media not to ask too many questions about its methods.

Victory to the Acehnese people!



Protest against imperialist-funded Indonesian repression in Aceh

Colin Powell denied this and pledged a further \$20m. The British government initially promised £50m; as private donations exceeded this within a few days, so it was forced to agree to match the money raised privately. But when it came to demands that the im-

Pakistan jumped from \$1.7m in 2001 to \$275m in 2004. Top of the list of recipients, however, is Iraq (\$18.5bn); next, Israel at \$2.6bn. The other criterion, effectiveness, is tested by the use of funding to support privatisation, economic liberalisation and austerity.

History teaches us that promised aid anyway never arrives in full since it is usually announced for the purposes of political expediency. Hence when Blair declared at the 2001 Labour Party conference: 'To the Afghan people, we make this commit-

ment... We will not walk away... we will work with you to (find a way) out of the miserable poverty that is your present existence', his sole purpose was to gain support for the forthcoming war on Afghanistan. Yet the record is that only 3% of aid to Afghanistan has been for reconstruction, whilst 84% has been to pay for the military occupation. It is estimated that no more than 20% of promised aid has reached Afghanistan over three years after the end of the war. To date, only \$29m has been spent on aid to Iraq out of the billions supposedly available.

Instead the media have focused on individual human stories which, harrowing though they are, do not tell us anything about the general conditions of the people affected by the tsunami,

children from refugee camps in Sri Lanka. The reality is that Tamil Tigers have proved highly effective in organising reconstruction. When Colin Powell visited Aceh days after the tsunami, the media reported his horror, but did not tell us that aid flights into Banda Aceh had to be suspended for hours for the benefit of his security arrangements. Nor have there been reports as to the unpopularity of the Sri Lankan government's acceptance of 1,500 US Marines to help relief work. Instead the media wants to present the story as one about the passive victims of a natural disaster who are grateful for whatever support may come their way.

The truth is that millions face even more desperate conditions than they did before the tsunami. They will be forgotten once media attention turns elsewhere. Their countries will continue to be bled dry as debt repayments kick in again. The aid they receive will be outweighed not just by debt repayments but by the unequal terms of trade. Cancelling the debt of the developing countries is therefore just the first step in ending imperialist domination; we need to join with those who are struggling against oppression throughout the world. ■

GLOBAL WARMING

The theoretical basis for climate change can be explained with what is known as the *greenhouse effect*.

When the energy from the sun reaches the earth, some of this energy is absorbed by the earth's surface, some of it is reflected back towards space unchanged, and some is absorbed and then re-emitted as heat. In a greenhouse, the glass acts as an insulator preventing the absorbed energy from leaving so that it heats the greenhouse and its contents. Water-bearing objects (such as plants) absorb this heat and produce water vapour. Since water vapour also traps heat, the greenhouse becomes warmer still.

This explains global warming. Industrial capitalism has generated huge quantities of the warming gas carbon dioxide. Other gases rise in the atmosphere and serve as a glass-like barrier reducing the proportion of energy reflected back into space. In 200 years carbon dioxide concentration in the Earth's atmosphere has increased by 35% – one third of this in the last 40 years alone – and global average temperatures have risen by 0.6 degrees centigrade.

The greenhouse effect tells us that this sharp rise in the concentration of warming gases in the environment, added to heat absorption by water-based objects such as the polar ice caps will make the average temperature rise uncontrollably. It has now been discovered that the rate of carbon dioxide accumulation in the atmosphere has suddenly jumped without any simultaneous jump in carbon emissions. 'A feedback mechanism, where the effects of global warming start to speed up the process itself, could be kicking in much earlier than anticipated, with the potentially disastrous consequences of extra rapid climate change'.* This includes the accelerated release of methane, 23 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere, from melting permafrost, causing further temperature rises. It is estimated that by the end of this century average

profits before action

In a world dominated by imperialism, the needs of the ruling class are not only always put before those of the mass of the people, but also before the needs of the environment. Any attempt to alleviate climate change or global warming by the G8 or the EU or any other amalgam of imperialist powers needs to be seen in this context. LOUIS BREHONY reports.

temperatures will rise by between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees centigrade.

By summer 2070 the Arctic ice cap may have disappeared: it has already shrunk by 15-20% in the past 30 years alone and the trend is speeding up. Local environment, Inuit and other communities will be seriously harmed, and natural energy sources will be harder to reach. By 2050 sea levels may rise by half a metre. This would mean that 20% of Bangladesh will disappear beneath the sea displacing 15 million people, mostly poor peasants; the fertile lands of Egypt's Nile delta will be submerged leaving 7 million homeless and 12% of the country's arable land under water; and 30 million will be displaced in eastern China with the destruction of its alluvial plains. Hurricanes and cyclones will become both more frequent and more severe. According to the UN, one billion people live under threat of severe flooding, and by 2050 this number will have doubled. Even developed nations will be threatened, particularly the Netherlands and the US's Mississippi delta, although these countries can afford to spend large sums of money on sea defences.

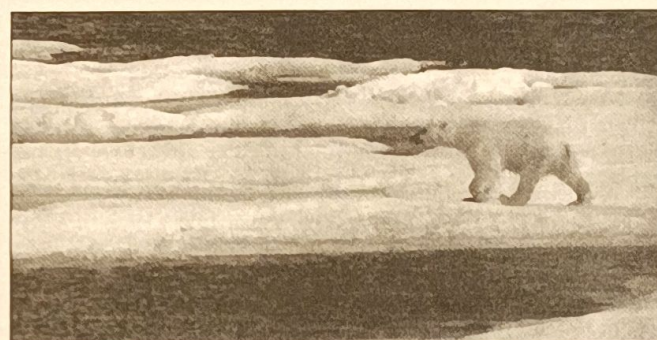
Britain is also affected. The country was totally unprepared for the violent tropical storms and floods that hit southwest England in summer 2004 and the north in January 2005. In the most recent storms winds hit at over 124mph, virtually unheard of in this part of the world. As a result of

this sharp turn towards catastrophic weather, insurance claims have doubled in last six years, forcing the British Association of Insurers to admit that 'we are starting to feel the beginnings of climate change' (spokesperson Dr Sebastian Catovsky on *Sky News*). A report by the British Meteorological Office suggests that large parts of Britain, including London Docklands, will soon be in peril.

The Kyoto protocol

The Kyoto Protocol aims at getting the richest capitalist countries to cut overall emissions of gases such as carbon dioxide 5.2% below 1990 levels by 2008-12. It has to be ratified by countries accounting for 55% of developed nations' greenhouse emissions to take effect. The protocol is completely inadequate. But even this conservative step is too much for the Bush administration which has refused to ratify it in order to help maintain US imperialism's position as the world's dominant economic power. The US is the world's biggest polluter. Between 1980 and 2001, US carbon dioxide emissions increased an average of 0.9% per year. Russia recently approved the Protocol on 3 November 2004. Putin's government is aiming to present Russia as a cleaner, friendlier capitalism in order to make and sustain new alliances as inter-imperialist rivalries develop.

Tony Blair recently became President of the imperialist G8 and is mas-



By summer 2070 the Arctic ice cap may have disappeared

querading as the head of global capitalism's efforts to tackle global warming. In an article in *The Economist* on 1 January he boasted of Britain's supposedly progressive attitude towards pollution. He leapt to the defence of British Petroleum, one of the world's biggest polluters. What he didn't mention is the fact that 'green' Britain is actually set to miss one of its own, conservative, targets – the 20% cut in carbon dioxide levels that is supposed to be achieved by 2010. In response he sought a 3% increase in the amount of carbon dioxide Britain would be allowed to emit under European legislation and followed this up by a public threat to sue the European Commission if Britain did not get its way.

At the Davos World Economic Forum, Blair revealed the true limits

of any attempt at climate control in an imperialist world when he warned that governments could not be expected to push through changes that would seriously damage their economic prospects. 'If we put forward as a solution to climate change something that involves drastic cuts in growth or standards of living – it matters not how justified it is – it simply won't be agreed to', he said. This is the truth. Profit and unsustainable living standards come before action on the environment on imperialism's agenda.

The annual Climate Change Convention takes place in February and the key question is supposed to be what concentration of carbon dioxide could be reached 'without a dangerous rise in temperature'. The current EU estimate is twice the pre-industrial level. This it believes would lead to a maximum global temperature rise of 2 degrees centigrade. But this is still an enormous rise, and it reflects only the short-term effect. Sea levels will rise for 300 years even if carbon emissions ceased now. This is all in the name of profit. Only with the destruction of imperialism and the building of socialism, a society that values the needs of the majority rather than a small elite, can the environment be saved from man-made destruction. ■

* *The Independent*, 27 December 2004

Capitalism's car culture



The deaths caused by cars in Britain since 1945 outnumber the deaths of British soldiers during the Second World War. The annual carnage on Britain's roads is equivalent to 30 commercial aircraft crashes. Motor vehicle traffic accidents account for nearly half of all accidental injury fatalities in children in Britain. Children from the most disadvantaged families, with inadequate play facilities and more traffic exposure, are five times as likely to be killed on the roads. Each month 268 children die or are seriously hurt in road traffic accidents. Each week six under 18-year-olds die. Each day in

Britain, on average nine people are killed and over 100 are seriously injured. In 2001, road traffic accident casualties in Britain were 313,309 of whom 3,450 were killed and 37,110 seriously injured. The media underplays these dangers and directs us to concentrate on specific tragedies (for example, the Paddington rail crash, 31 killed) or to exaggerate other dangers to children (the average number of children abducted or killed by strangers per year in Britain is seven).

Car culture is out of control in Britain: the rising volume of traffic is associated with a subsequent increase in pollution, accidents and congestion.

If all cars in Britain in 1998/1999 were lined up nose to tail, they would go around the world twice. There has been a decrease in children walking and cycling to school and an equivalent increase in car journeys. Car travel accounted for four fifths of the total distance travelled in Britain in 1999/2001 with 60 to 84 per cent only having one occupant. Britain has the lowest cycle use per person in Europe.

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 introduced wide changes to the sentencing powers of the courts and established the Sentencing Guidelines Council to promote clarity and consistency in sentencing across the country. The Act increased the maximum sentence for the offence of causing death by dangerous driving, causing death by careless driving whilst intoxicated and aggravated vehicle theft where the aggravating feature is causing death, from ten to 14 years. Note that death caused by driving offences is not considered manslaughter in Britain; very rarely, very serious cases can carry the charge of culpable homicide. The concept of suspension from driving is virtually ignored in the law. Once their sentence is over, most motorists who have killed can very soon drive again.

Environment

Air pollution causes 12-24,000 premature deaths per year in Britain. It plays a part in childhood asthma and respiratory disease and has been implicated as one possible contributory factor in sudden infant death syndrome.

It is widely agreed that greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by 60% by 2050 in order to avoid catastrophic climate change. Between 1990 and 2002, greenhouse gas emissions from British road freight rose 59%. Road transport causes one fifth of Britain's carbon dioxide emissions and the improvement in fuel efficiency for individual vehicles is balanced out by the growth in traffic volume. At the 1997 Kyoto summit, industrialised countries agreed to cut overall emissions of carbon dioxide by 5% by 2012. The agreement in Bonn in 2001 by about 180 countries will lead to a cut in levels by just 2%. As part of the European Emission Trading Scheme, trade in carbon credits and debits has developed and companies can buy 'spare' emission capacity from other bigger companies whose emissions are below their suggested levels.

The average carbon dioxide emission in grammes of carbon dioxide per passenger kilometre is: plane 330, car 114, bus 77 and rail 73. Moving a tonne of freight by rail produces 80% less carbon dioxide than moving it by road.

Public transport

Public transport fares in Britain are the third most expensive in Europe and the bus services in Britain receive less government subsidy than in any other country in the EU. With respect to fatalities per passenger kilometre, buses, coaches and trains in Britain are seven times safer than cars.

A double-decker bus carries the same number of people as 20 fully laden cars and a double track urban railway can move 30,000 people per hour in each direction compared to a two-lane road which can only move 3,000-6,000 people per hour in each direction. Bus mileage in London is currently higher than at any time since 1960s and the growth in London, Brighton, York and Southend has masked falls elsewhere. Figures for Britain show that 89% of British households have a bus stop within six minutes walk of their home and half the British population are within 30 minutes walk of a train station. However, in 1998/99 52% of households had access only to one bus per hour and ten per cent have no daily service.

The real cost of motoring has stayed the same since 1975 while the real cost of public transport has risen by 50-80 per cent. In capitalism's endless need to search for more profits, satisfying the multinationals which dominate the oil, car and road lobbies is more important than people's health and safety.

Hannah Callier

Labour tramples on human rights

House of Lords judgment

Nine men who had been detained without trial in British prisons and mental institutions since shortly after the passing of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) 2001 contested the lawfulness of their detention. They had lost previous legal challenges, so appealed to the Lords for a definitive ruling.

Britain is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 5 of the Convention forbids detention without trial, while Article 15 allows signatory states to opt out of certain of its other provisions in very specific emergency circumstances. These were defined in a 1969 ruling as there being an 'actual or imminent' public emergency, threatening 'the whole nation' and the 'continuance of the organised life of the community', for which 'normal measures or restrictions...are plainly inadequate'. Following the 11 September 2001 New York attacks, the British government claimed that it faced such an emergency. It therefore derogated from Article 5 of the Convention, in order to give itself the power to imprison indefinitely suspected terrorists against whom there was intelligence information, but insufficient actual evidence to bring any kind of criminal prosecution.

The House of Lords was told that there was no evidence of 'a real and imminent danger to public safety' in Britain, and that no other country in Europe, including Spain, which suffered a major terrorist attack in Madrid in March 2004, had considered it needed to opt out of Article 5 in the wake of 11 September 2001.

The judgment focuses in particular on the government's discriminatory and irrational decision to apply indefi-

nite detention only to foreign nationals, while British citizens deemed to be 'suspected terrorists' continued to be dealt with only under the Terrorism Act (TA) 2000. Though massively draconian in itself the TA does not allow for indefinite imprisonment without charge.

Furthermore, under the ATCSA powers, foreign nationals detained as 'suspected terrorists' could be released if they agreed to be deported. One of the first men to be detained did this. That the remainder did not do so, indicated to the Lords just how strongly they feared torture if they returned to the countries from which they had sought asylum in Britain. Yet if their international terrorist potential was so great that it justified their indefinite imprisonment, surely it would have been highly irresponsible for the British government simply to allow them to leave, thus potentially endangering the citizens of other nations?

The House of Lords ruled that the derogation from Article 5 should be quashed and the relevant section of ATCSA declared incompatible with Articles 5 and 14 (discrimination) of the ECHR. The judgment consists of the opinions of nine Law Lords, one of whom, Lord Hoffman, makes it clear that in criticising the discriminatory nature of ATCSA, he 'would not like to give the impression that all that was necessary was to extend the power to United Kingdom citizens as well.' He concludes that 'The real threat to the life of the nation...comes not from terrorism but from laws such as these.'

European rights and British wrongs

Britain was one of the first signatories to the post-Second World War European Convention on Human Rights, but it was not until the Human Rights Act (HRA) came into force in 2000 that the rights enshrined in the Convention became part of British domestic law. Prior to then anyone who wanted to complain that the government had infringed the rights set out in the ECHR had to take their case to the European Court.

The implementation of the HRA means that laws passed and decisions made in Britain have to be compatible with the ECHR and breaches of it can be ruled unlawful without the need to go to Strasbourg.

Already incensed at the many times Britain had been found guilty by the European Court of violating the rights of prisoners, subjecting poll tax non-payers to unfair trials and torturing Irish people, the Tory Party, *Daily Mail*, *Sun* et al opposed this further 'European interference' in British affairs. Indeed, although it was Labour that brought in the HRA, it has turned into a millstone around Prime Minister Tony Blair's neck and he has been quoted as wishing he could opt out of Article 3 (prevention of torture) in order to deport asylum seekers more easily.

The ECHR is a bourgeois charter. It confers no right to eat, right to be housed, right to education, right to health. But it does outlaw torture, slavery, arbitrary detention, unfair tri-

On 15 December 2004 Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett resigned, following an investigation into the allegation he had fast-tracked a visa application for his married lover's nanny. He thus missed having to comment on the House of Lords ruling the following day that indefinite detention of suspected terrorists under his Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act was discriminatory, disproportionate and incompatible with the Human Rights Act. This judgment was a blow to Labour; however, with or without Blunkett as its front-man, the government will continue to pursue a vicious authoritarian agenda, trampling on human and civil rights, and has already set about finding new measures to compensate for this setback. NICKI JAMESON reports.



Demonstration against detention without trial outside the Royal Courts of Justice

als and discrimination, and it protects freedom of speech, freedom of religion or conscience, freedom of assembly, the right to marry and the right to family life. As imperialism moves deeper into crisis and the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' becomes more overt, these protections are now coming under attack, with the more virulent section of the middle class apparently happy to sacrifice its own democratic rights and freedoms in order to defend its privilege.

Rolling back rights – whose law and order?

The ATCSA detainees' lawyers drew not only on the ECHR, but on what Lord Bingham describes as 'the long libertarian tradition of English law, dating back to chapter 39 of the Magna Carta 1215, given effect in the ancient remedy of habeas corpus, declared in the Petitions of Right 1628, upheld in a series of landmark decisions down the centuries and embodied in the substance and procedure of the law to our own day.'

Laws in any state are made by those in power and are designed to preserve the status quo. We live in an unequal society and our laws are designed to keep the rich rich and the poor poor. 'Equality before the law' is essentially a myth. However, the development of law over the centuries since the Magna Carta, as the bourgeoisie gradually took power away from the monarchy and aristocracy, and then strove to prevent that power being seized by the working class, has created a legal framework that enshrines

some fundamental rights. These have been to the advantage of the working class as well as to that of the bourgeoisie.

Such reforms are now under attack, in particular those implemented in response to the mass movements of the post-war period. In July 2004 the Home Office launched a five-year strategic plan entitled *Confident Communities in a Secure Britain*. Blair announced that it marked the end of 'the 1960s social-liberal consensus on law and order' that had enabled some to take 'freedom without responsibility'. The results of this 'consensus' he is so quick to dismiss include the abolition of the death penalty, outlawing of race and sex discrimination, legalisation of abortion and decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Destroying society – policing the crisis

Over the past 25 years, since Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher came to power, there has been a massive shift away from a society in which a sizeable section of the working class could rely on lifelong employment, affordable housing and welfare provision. Public services have been privatised and are unashamedly run for profit; large sections of manufacturing industry have been destroyed; trade union membership and organisation are now largely the domain of white-collar workers; council housing has been sold off; free health and education progressively run down.

This onslaught on previously relatively stable working class communities has resulted in unprecedented levels of alienation, poverty, crime, vandalism, family breakdown and drug abuse.

Fear of the worsening of the situation means the government is able to win popular support for draconian policing measures. The real reasons such measures are so vital to the state is that they assist in the preservation of inequality, shield the middle class from having to deal with the uglier face of a divided society, and ensure that any resistance from the oppressed can be easily put down. However, if stated overtly, this reasoning would clearly be unpopular with working class voters and further increase their disenchantment. Therefore, the vast network of repressive laws and punishments that is being assembled is introduced under the guise of providing assistance equally to everyone, with particular emphasis on the respite it offers to beleaguered working class communities.

All modern repressive states have used similar tactics to gain the support of the more privileged section of the working class.

Firstly, the state and its media create 'bogeymen' of various varieties, to deflect anger away from the real problems of poverty, inequality and destruction of services. These can vary from paedophiles or 'terrorists' whose threat is vastly exaggerated in order to whip up increased fear, to those who are actually doing no harm, such as asylum seekers, 'benefit cheats' and teenagers. Camden Council in north London recently commissioned a highly subjective MORI poll of local residents, in which it listed four types of 'anti-social behaviour' and asked if residents had witnessed or reported them. The four types of behaviour were dropping litter, 'drunk or rowdy behaviour', 'teenagers hanging around' and 'people sleeping rough'. There was no suggestion that the hypothetical teenagers or rough-sleepers were actually doing anything anti-social; it was their mere existence that residents were being asked if they had witnessed, and if so reported.

Secondly, and connected to this, there is a deliberate overlapping between what are variously labelled as 'anti-social behaviour', 'crime', 'disorder' and 'terrorism'. So, the imprisonment of the ATCSA detainees because 'they cannot be deported' becomes 'all asylum seekers are terrorists', while the use of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 on political protesters renders peaceful dissent 'anti-social', and the constant inter-

Confident Communities in a Secure Britain – July 2004 – main measures

- Fixed penalty notices for increased range of minor crimes, including under-age drinking, petty theft, shoplifting and misuse of fireworks
- ASBOs to be processed within hours, less restriction on media reporting of those who break them, specialist anti-social behaviour courts and prosecutors to be created
- Number of Community Safety Officers to rise to 24,000 by 2008
- Doubling of electronic tagging to 18,000 people and the introduction of satellite tracking of offenders
- More 'naming and shaming' of repeat offenders
- Everyone entering or leaving the country, after 2008, to have their photo taken and facial mapping technology to be used.

change between different powers to stop and search under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and Terrorism Act 2000 conflates all these headings and obscures the use of both sets of powers as a general means of harassment of young black and Asian men in particular.

Thirdly, problems of crime and disorder are presented as due, not to poverty and alienation, but to a lack of sufficiently strong policing. The state then offers the possibility of 'tough' solutions to this problem. Many working class people, whether they actually believe this portrayal of the problem or not, are understandably desperate for solutions to crime in their communities; local newspapers are full of community campaigns for increased policing, more CCTV cameras and more ASBOs. Anyone who complains can then be vilified as a 'liberal' and decried as 'out of touch with reality'. Civil rights organisation Liberty recently felt compelled to apologise to residents on a Brent estate where it had taken up a case against the 'naming and shaming' of a group of young men by the local council.

Fourthly, the government relies on the oft-repeated myth that 'if you are not doing anything wrong, you have nothing to fear'. This same nonsensical mantra has been repeatedly used in response to criticism that stop-and-search, omnipresent CCTV, the removal of the right not to have your silence when arrested held against you in court, DNA testing etc are repressive and attack fundamental rights. Hundreds of well-known wrongful convictions give the lie to this; not to mention the thousands about which we know nothing. This same nonsense is currently being parroted in relation to the introduction of ID cards, facial mapping and a database that will track every child.

Good riddance to Blunkett

David Blunkett became Home Secretary in 2001. His predecessor, Jack Straw, appeared until then to have been the most authoritarian and right-wing Home Secretary in living memory, outdoing current Tory leader Michael Howard, who previously appeared to have been the most draconian incumbent of the post. Blunkett's 'achievements' in office under the joint pretexts of fighting international terrorism and preventing domestic crime and disorder include:

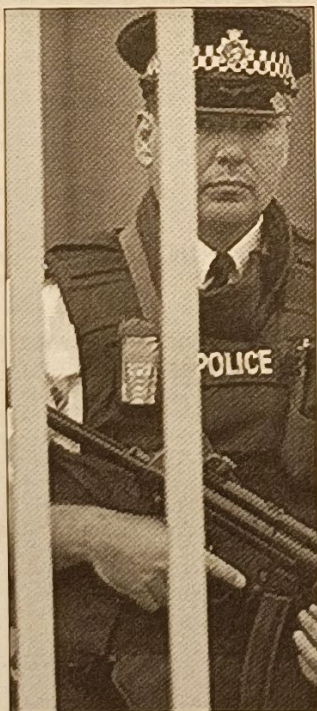
- **Anti-Social Behaviour Orders** – widespread and growing use, both against individuals and covering whole areas, where groups can be dispersed and a 9pm curfew is in place for under-16s.
- **Enlarged police force**, with increasing range of powers at every level, reaching down to local 'community support officers' and street wardens who can hand out on-the-spot fines for offences such as riding a bicycle on the pavement (£30), being drunk and disorderly (£40) or buying alcohol for a minor (£40).
- **Terrorism Act 2000** – 701 arrests between 11 September 2001 and December 2004, resulting in just 17 convictions, although hundreds of people arrested under the pretext of terrorism were subsequently charged with minor criminal offences or immigration violations.
- **Asylum seekers** – repeated attempts to remove welfare benefits, despite popular opposition and adverse court rulings, disperse them around the country and imprison them in various types of detention centre.
- **Sentencing** – longer minimum periods for life sentence prisoners, weekend custody, more electronic tagging.
- **Extradition** – one-sided treaty with the US allowing suspects to be sent to the US with no proof of any criminal offence.
- **Prisons** – highest ever recorded figure for imprisonment in England and Wales – 75,544; nearly 11,000

'As imperialism moves deeper into crisis and the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' becomes more overt, these protections are now coming under attack, with the more virulent section of the middle class apparently happy to sacrifice its own democratic rights and freedoms in order to defend its privilege.'

under-21-year-olds in prison; 17,000 prisoners sharing cells built for one person; prison places costing the tax-payer an average of £37,305 per annum.

As Blunkett left office, ironically ousted as a result of the sole occasion on which he had assisted a low-paid overseas worker to come to this country, he snivelled that he had been driven by love. Meanwhile, pro-government commentators somewhat bizarrely lamented the passing of a champion of the working class. Labour hacks and anonymous 'friends' harped on about how gritty, northern, working class David Blunkett truly understood the man in the pub and on the street and could represent their views in a way that Tony Blair could only dream of.

Blair's lack of connection with the working class is of course not at issue, so although Blunkett's claim to champion the poor is based on a fabric of lies (see letters page), it is undoubtedly true that Labour ministers from working class backgrounds do play a vital role for Labour. While Blair courts business and the middle classes, Blunkett or Deputy Prime



Under Labour, police are being given increased powers of repression

Minister John Prescott can speak directly to the labour aristocracy.

Parliament and the courts

With Blunkett gone and Charles Clarke only a day in post, it was left to 'Blair's babe' junior minister Hazel Blears to argue weakly against Channel 4's Jon Snow, when interviewed as to what the government would do now about the Belmarsh detainees. 'Parliament will decide' she repeated over and again as Snow equally doggedly

repeated that the Lords are the 'highest court in the land' and they have 'ruled against you'.

The Lords had indeed ruled that Labour's law was unlawful, that it should not have been made. But it was now down to Parliament to unmake that law. The courts enforce the law and high courts such as the Lords act as a watchdog to ensure the laws passed are compatible with other laws already in place, and with international conventions. Here they found that the law made by Blunkett was not compatible. But, unless the detainees' lawyers make a successful application under the ancient law of habeas corpus for them to be freed immediately, they will remain in prison while Parliament unmakes the unlawful law and makes a lawful one instead.

On 26 January new Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced his plans to replace indefinite detention with 'control orders'. These orders, which have quickly been nicknamed 'anti-terrorist ASBOs', will be applicable to both foreign nationals and British citizens, suspected of terrorism. Clarke described 'a range of controls restricting movement and association or other communication with named individuals; the imposition of curfews and/or tagging; and restrictions on access to telecommunications, the internet and other technology. At the top end, control orders would include a requirement to remain at their premises.' These orders are strongly reminiscent of the banning orders and house arrest of apartheid South Africa, and ironically are still likely to require derogation from part of the ECHR.

During his time in the Home Office Blunkett repeatedly fell out with the judiciary, including the Lord Chief Justice and House of Lords. None of these institutions are bastions of liberalism, but they played the role assigned to them, scrutinising the law and government decisions when requested, and inconveniently told the Home Secretary that it was unlawful to starve asylum seekers and incompatible with the ECHR for him to retain personal control over the release dates of prisoners. His response to the latter ruling (again by the House of Lords) was that 'life means life' and, as he could not retain control over when life sentence prisoners who had completed their 'tariff' (minimum period) should be released, he would indeed change the law, forcing judges to impose longer tariffs in the first place.

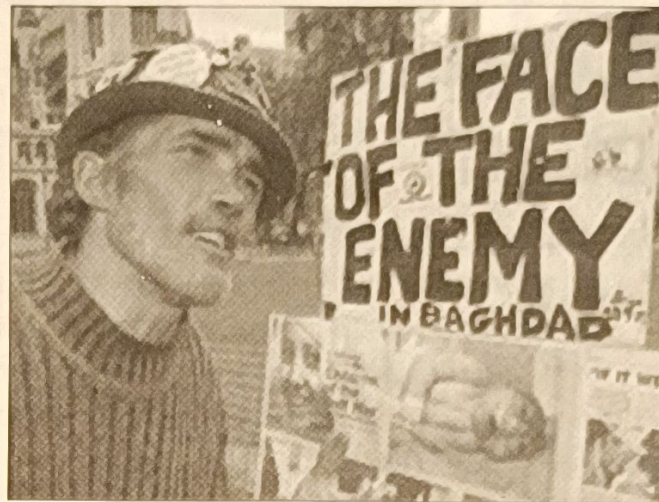
Announcing the 'control orders', Clarke made his stance clear as to who should wield the power to detain: 'I believe that this is a proper Executive responsibility that should be borne by the Executive – in this case, by the Home Secretary – and not by the courts'.

The future

The Queen's speech at the opening of Parliament on 26 November 2004 announced 30 bills and draft bills, some proposed in the Confident Communities plan in July, and others, such as ID cards, which had been touted around for several years.

The Identity Cards Bill will create a national register and powers for compulsory ID cards; passports and driving licences to passports and driving licences within five years. Other bills in the pipeline include: a Higher Education Bill – introducing £3,000 top-up fees; the Criminal Defence Service Bill, which will cut legal aid spending and reduce defendants' access to legal representation, and yet another Immigration and Asylum Bill. This will give asylum seekers only one chance to appeal; families will have benefits stopped if their claims fail; children from these families will be taken into care, and asylum seekers can be forcibly returned to 'safe' countries if they have already lodged claims there.

In addition, the government announced the setting up of the Serious



Brian Haw has held a picket against the war in Iraq for the last three years. A new law is being introduced to prevent his demonstration outside Parliament

Organised Crime Agency, a sort of British FBI, compulsory drug testing of people arrested and 'further legislation to tackle anti-social behaviour'.

Also on the way are plans to imprison people considered to have 'dangerous and severe personality disorders', whether or not they have committed a criminal offence, while the 'extended sentences' and other provisions which have already been made law by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 are due to come into force in April 2005.

Before he left office Blunkett, had even planned to put a clause into the Organised Crime Bill which would have the express purpose of evicting Brian Haw, who has protested outside Parliament against British warmongering for the past three years. The clause bans permanent daytime demonstrations and megaphones in Parliament Square and makes it a criminal offence to defy the law. Appropriately, the measure was announced not by Blunkett but by one-time anti-apartheid direct action demonstrator, Peter Hain, now Leader of the House.

When the emergency becomes routine

One of the most worrying pieces of legislation in the pipeline is the barely discussed Civil Contingencies Bill. Like the TA and ATCSA, this purports to be a response to 'serious threats to the nation', be they man-made or natural, and gives government unprecedented power in 'an emergency' to prevent people from leaving or entering any area, to deploy troops, ban gatherings, requisition property and disregard existing legislation.

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

level. Regional Co-ordinators will be assisted by Regional Military Commanders, police Chief Constables and Regional Controllers from a local council. This group will have colossal power to impose its will on the region it oversees. This is a blueprint for martial law.

A brief glimpse at the British policing methods employed in the north of Ireland, or in colonial Hong Kong tells us that as soon as a police force has 'emergency powers' it will not save them for emergencies, but will use them routinely. *Statewatch* magazine points out that the new law will 'allow governments enormous discretion and allow them to mix ongoing business in normal times with powers that are intended to deal with peacetime emergencies. This new "normality" could see parts of cities or whole towns subject to exceptional laws and controls in the same way that emergency laws have been in place in Northern Ireland for more than thirty years'.

The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie

In the 20th century fascism only arose when capitalist states could not otherwise continue in the face of strong, communist or socialist working class resistance. However in Britain today, as indeed in the US, it appears that the ruling class has concluded that even in the absence of any such movement, the level of disintegration and alienation caused by a deregulated economy and stark inequality is potentially so great that in itself it poses a serious danger to the continued operation of capitalism. It has therefore set about reversing earlier reforms, confronting such rights as are provided for under European and British law and building up a mighty repressive apparatus. We need to inform ourselves about this build-up, guard against complacency and prepare for the struggle ahead!

Use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders against political protesters

- Pro-Palestinian activists outside Caterpillar construction company's offices in Solihull arrested under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act
- A Rugby man who has campaigned against the council over health and safety and corruption, was served with an ASBO, which he then broke, leading to his imprisonment
- Anti-DSEI protesters – two adults and a baby prevented from holding a banner and handing out leaflets outside Reed Exhibitions, the organiser of DSEI (Defence Systems and Equipment International); the world's largest arms fair, under blanket ASBO in force in Richmond town centre
- Anti-McDonalds protesters in Leicester Square, central London, dispersed using Section 30 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act
- Manchester Victory to the Intifada group threatened by local council and police with imposition of an ASBO. In the event the Public Order Act was used instead.

Useful campaigning or informative links:
<http://statewatch.org/asbo/ASBOWatch.html>
www.defyid.org.uk

CUBA AND VENEZUELA

building a new movement in Latin America

On 14 December, Hugo Chavez, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and President Fidel Castro of Cuba signed a document to extend and modify the Integral Co-operation Agreement of 30 October 2000. Beyond the economics, this social programme sets the basis for continental action, mutual support against imperialism and cooperative trade between oppressed nations, within the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). **JUANJO RIVAS** reports.

2005 is the deadline set by the United States for the implementation of the neo-liberal Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) – or its carbon copies on bilateral and regional levels. The FTAA aims to 'denationalise' the economies of Latin America, subordinating them to the dictates of foreign capital. By their example, Cuba and Venezuela have put themselves at the head of a hemispheric movement of resistance to imperialist interests, for the benefit of the poor and against the seemingly invincible might of market-based solutions.

The Integral Co-operation Agreement commits both countries to:

- open state bank subsidiaries on each other's territories;
- encourage the development of joint cultural projects;
- offer preferential treatment and facilities for aircraft flying from one to the other;
- work together to eliminate illiteracy and improve health care in other underdeveloped countries, using the methods which have proved so successful in Venezuela;
- eliminate non-tariff barriers on all imports originating from each other's countries.

In addition, Cuba:

- offers a guaranteed price for oil from Venezuela, of at least \$27 per barrel, whatever the volatility of the market;
- eliminates any restrictions on Venezuelan state investments;
- offers 2,000 scholarships per year to Venezuelans for any advanced studies including scientific research, and as many as necessary for studies of medicine, for the next ten years;



Presidents Castro and Chavez

- guarantees to support over 15,000 medical professionals participating in the *Barrio Adentro* health mission in Venezuela;
- makes available the use of its installations and anti-doping control equipment to Venezuelan athletes.

In return, the Venezuelan government will:

- collaborate with Cuba in biodiversity investigation studies;
- develop agreements with the island in the sphere of telecommunications, including the use of satellites, air facilities and maritime transportation;
- fund productive or infrastructural projects relating to the energy sector, electricity industry, asphaltting of roads, port development and so on, as well as scholarships for studies in the energy sector or any other of interest to Cuba.

Venezuelan technology in the energy sector may prove crucial, as four new prospects for oil exploration are to be opened on the north coast of Cuba. During a five-day trial period in December 2004, 1,000 tons were extracted from the submarine soil with excellent results. The next months will see the start of 'experimental production', to be followed by an evaluation period, and by 2006 production should start in earnest; exploration so far suggests reserves of 100 million barrels. This, together with the guaranteed supply from Venezuela, could help Cuba to overcome the long-term energy crisis suffered as a result of the US blockade and collapse of the former Soviet bloc. Cuban oil production for 2004 was 75,000 barrels a day.

The ALBA agreement must be viewed in the context of a broader attempt to transform Latin American societies, by making them more just,

educated and participatory, and by increasing solidarity between them. It is no coincidence that President Chavez should have chosen the third Summit of the Association of Caribbean States in December 2001 to propose the creation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. It involves several revolutionary, democratic and indigenous organisations of the Latin American continent. It rejects the blind market policies imposed by imperialism and its financial institutions, setting as its main target 'to ensure the elimination of social inequalities and promote the quality of the life and effective participation of the peoples in the shaping of their own destiny'. ALBA also encourages economic co-operation rather than competition between the nations involved, in order to combat poverty and preserve cultural identity. Some specific projects include a continental plan to fight illiteracy, a Latin American plan providing free health care and a regional scholarship plan for those who need them, the integrated development of communications and transportation, the creation of a television network, *Telesur*, to disseminate Latin American news, energy integration through the creation of *Petroamerica* and the promotion of culture and identity with particular respect for indigenous cultures. It also aims to consolidate regional blocs to struggle for the democratisation and transparency of the UN and its agencies.

These demands cannot be met under capitalist rule, but will bring the oppressed people of Latin America to take an active part in creating their own history, to achieve their 'second and genuine independence'. Bolivarianism represents the struggle for social transformation and a serious challenge to imperialist domination. It is the spreading of the Cuban 'Battle of Ideas' and the Venezuelan 'Bolivarian Circles' to the hemispheric level, putting the working class at the front of the movement as active and politically educated leaders, rather than passive victims of their fate. As a Venezuelan woman who was taught to read and write thanks to this programme put it, 'If the Revolution is lifting me out of ignorance, then I am a revolutionary'.

Resolution 92

Following measures introduced last November in Cuba to purge the domestic economy of the US dollar note (see FRFI 182) a new law, Resolution 92, reintroduces a degree of financial centralisation to Cuba not seen since the early days of the Revolution. **HELEN YAFFE** reports from Cuba.

Resolution 92 was announced on 29 December 2004, following a two-day session of the Cuban National Assembly in which President Fidel Castro reported on recent trade agreements signed between Cuba and China, and between Cuba and Venezuela. Castro also reported two other important economic projects; investments by a Canadian firm into nickel production and the recent discovery of significant oil reserves in Cuba. These trade accomplishments are vital to offset the effects of the ever-tightening US blockade and, along with the conversion to *peso convertible* in the domestic economy, they will significantly increase the foreign financial flows to Cuba.

In order to optimise these inflows and control foreign currency expenditure, Resolution 92 withdraws financial autonomy from Cuban entities. From 1 January and over the next few months the *peso convertible* incomes of all Cuban entities are being transferred into a single account in the Central Bank. The Bank controls how these resources are allocated and all financial transactions will have to be previously approved, before any service is received rather than at the point of payment. Incomes received as the Cuban dividend in mixed enterprises and other joint business will also be deposited in this account.

From 1 February the committee which is responsible for approving transactions in foreign currency will also approve operations in *peso convertible*. Cuban banks will not process any transaction in either national or foreign currency for Cuban entities which has not been previously authorised by the committee of approval.

The new regulation concludes: 'The measures established by this resolution aim not only to guarantee a more efficient use of the resources in foreign currencies but also to provide more guarantees to the foreign commitments of Cuban entities.'

Resolution 92 is a rational response to the concrete conditions in which Cuba is forced to trade; a massively unequal international market and the illegal US blockade. Cuba trades with multinational corporations and other powerful financial institutions which have funds larger than some poor countries; by centralising its financial resources Cuba will be better able to respond to rapidly changing conditions and to have a stronger base from which to negotiate and make investments vital to the economic and social well-being of the Revolution. For example, the nickel industry is vitally important to Cuba, but prices in the international market fluctuate widely. With concentrated financial funds available when needed the Cuban government can respond intelligently to these fluctuating conditions.

CUBA IN BRIEF

Cubans continue to count gains of Revolution

In 2004, infant mortality in Cuba dropped to the lowest rate in all of Latin America, at 5.8 per 1,000 live births. This figure compares to a figure of 7 in the United States (but where the figure for black people is 13.6 and for Native Americans 8.2). In Nicaragua, infant mortality is 30 per 1,000 live births, and in devastated Haiti, 76. The figure has dropped year on year since the Revolution, from 37.3 per 1,000 live births in 1960. A recent World Health Organisation/Pan American Health Organisation commission described the protection the Revolution offers its children as 'impressive'.

Cuba also reported that its gross domestic product grew by 5% in 2004, an example, as *Granma* put it, 'of what can be done with limited resources if these are appropriately used to satisfy the essential needs of the population and the country's development.' This growth has been achieved despite setbacks, particularly in agriculture, caused by two



Response to the taunts of the US Interests Section in Havana: an anti-imperialist billboard

major hurricanes and widespread drought. Nickel production grew by 6.9%, tourism – a major source of income for Cuba – was up by around 7.6%, with more than two million visitors to Cuba, despite a tightening of US measures against Cuba during the year. 68% of the 2005 budget has been earmarked for education, health, social security, sports, science and technology.

Cuba already spends 10-11% of GDP on education, the highest level in the world – the next highest spender is Finland, at 6%. The largest number of Cubans ever are now enrolled in higher education. In the last three years almost 45,000 new teachers have been trained and 32 new schools and 5,270 new classrooms have been built, with the aim of achieving one primary teacher per 20 pupils. Cuba continues to build the example of a society fit for all to live in.

HC

Facing down US hypocrisy

From 6 December 2004, the US Interests

Section in Havana, headed by arch-reactionary James Cason, sported a calculated insult to the Cuban people in the guise of its Christmas lights. These featured an illuminated circle containing the number 75 – a reference to the US-sponsored spies and 'dissidents' jailed by the Cuban government last year. In response, the Cubans placed huge billboards outside the building, with blown-up images of tortured Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, swastikas and pictures of Guantanamo detainees – a stark reminder of the very real human rights abuses of imperialism. Thousands of young Cubans held a 'tribunal of the people' outside the US Interests Section. Addressing them, Hassan Perez, second secretary of the National Committee of the UJC, said: 'Washington does not have the moral or legal authority to condemn Cuba. With our achievements in health, education, culture and the social sector in general, we are the ones who have much to show to those who are today slandering and threatening us'.

Help without fanfare after the tsunami

On 9 January, a brigade of 24 Cuban specialists arrived in Galle, a province in the south of Sri Lanka severely affected by the tsunami which devastated large swathes of the coast of southeast Asia on 26 December. It is still not known however many of the areas 80,000 inhabitants were killed in the tsunami and its aftermath. The mortality rate continues to rise. The Cuban brigade consists of 16 doctors, two nurses, two hygiene technicians, three technicians from *Labiopharm* (Cuban pharmaceutical laboratories) and one electrical engineer in charge of an electrical plant. The Cuban team have already attended thousands of patients and have been counting on the voluntary assistance of Sri Lankans who have graduated as medics in Cuban universities.

This brigade was not publicly announced until 24 January, despite daily reporting on the disaster and on the international aid efforts and despite televised Round Table discussion dedicated to the tsunami. By not announcing their contribution to the rescue efforts in the aftermath of the disaster Cuba distanced itself from the hypocritical trumpet-blowing of the imperialist countries who portrayed themselves as saviours whilst furthering their hegemonic agendas of domination.

HB

Colombian ruling class – under US orders

The current aim of the Colombian government is clear: prolong the role of Colombia as a US client state, prolong the presidency of Uribe, prolong the attack on the revolutionary opposition. Peace and justice are not on the agenda, unless it is 'peace' brought by the Colombian Army, its terrorist accomplices in US special forces, independent contractors and the fascist paramilitary AUC. Any opposition to control of Colombian assets by private US interests must be destroyed; this is essential in the case of FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

On 13 December, Colombian police, assisted by corrupt Venezuelan national guards, abducted Ricardo Granda, foreign minister for FARC, from Caracas. He was taken to the Colombian border and detained by Colombian police. The Venezuelan government delayed a public response to consider the implications, before giving details that included the £800,000 bribery of security officials. In September 2004 Interpol had rejected a Colombian request to put Granda on its international wanted list because the charges were seen as political.

On 12 January the Colombian defence minister tried to cover up, stating that the arrest took place in Cucuta, Colombia on 15 December. Later that day Colombia admitted paying a bounty for the capture! Venezuela withdrew its ambassador from Bogota. President Chavez declared the suspension of business negotiations between the two countries 'until there is redress' for this violation of Venezuelan sovereignty.

Colombia justified hiring bounty hunters to snatch 'state enemies abroad' in a nine-point briefing. It claimed that Venezuela shelters 'terrorists'. Since US funding is nine-tenths of the law, nothing must stand in the way of US demands. This illegal and deliberate provocation – 'divide Colombia and Venezuela and rule' – has all the hallmarks of US direction. Naturally, the US ambassador in Bogota backed Uribe's nine points '100%'.

US repression

The US-funded and guided assault against FARC in southern Colombia continues. On 13 January, 20 military personnel were killed when a US-donated Black Hawk, part of an assault mission of seven aircraft, crashed near Manguipayan. As part of 'Plan Patriota', begun in 2004, and intended to destroy FARC and the ELN, 16,000 troops invaded south east Colombia. In preparation General James T Hill of US Southern Command met at least ten times in Miami and Colombia with Colombian military leaders. He proposed raising the number of US troops and private contractors from 400 to 800 and from 400 to 600 respectively. This was approved in March 2004. The extermination campaign has been funded to 2006. Its aim is to push armed resistance to imperialism to the Ecuador border, where 21,000 Ecuadorian troops are assembled to kill those trying to cross the border. The US base at Manta co-ordinates the strategy in Ecuador.

The declared aim is to eradicate the narcotics trade. Thousands of hectares have been poisoned with powerful herbicides, destroying small farms and seriously damaging the health of small farmers and farm workers. In fact it is the government-aligned AUC that runs the narcotics trade and penetrates and manipulates every level of government. The AUC's leader, Mancusi, was invited to address Colombia's Congress. The Centaur block of the AUC has begun planting 30,000

hectares with African palm as a counter-insurgency move on collective land seized from black communities in 'el Choco'. They then received state credits for planting. The government intends to legalise the past theft of land from small farmers in regions such as Catatumbo, Arauca and Uraba to produce export crops. Monoculture will be enforced on the land to supply the US and European markets. Colombia will become dependent on US-produced staple products. In fact, 46% of all US non-military aid consists of agricultural surpluses, with the purpose of destroying domestic supplies and suborning the politics of the recipient country.

Whilst Uribe hands over senior prisoners from FARC to US courts on trumped-up narcotics charges, the US pardons such Cali cartel figureheads as Harvey Weinig, who laundered \$100m. AUC gangsters on US lists are not handed over. Uribe has an open alliance with the AUC to create a stronger state. AUC 'demobilisation' means a legal identity for each member, plus a monthly pension for two years. They retain all arms and uniforms. They are being incorporated into the Colombian army, police, private security groups or into paid bands of civilian informants set up by the previous President. 4,000 AUC members have been transferred in the last two years. On 17 January a new mobile brigade was created out of four counter-guerrilla battalions to defend electricity and petroleum installations. 30,000 extra troops are planned, reaching 380,000 police and military



Bush and Uribe

(about two and a half times that of the British Army and police). In January, Human Rights Watch in Washington demanded that foreign donors refuse to pay Colombia to demobilise the AUC unless its members are first punished for past crimes. The World Bank has already approved \$200m to support Uribe's assault on labour, which will encourage bosses to employ AUC thugs without question.

Meanwhile the US keeps pressure on it clients. A declassified 1991 US Defence Intelligence Report reveals that US intelligence considered the then Senator Uribe to be involved in the narcotics trade and that he participated in Pablo Escobar's parliamentary campaigns. Escobar headed the Medellín cartel. The report also shows that Uribe attacked all attempts to extradite Colombian drug traffickers to the US. This, in the case of the AUC, he continues to do. The report also says that Uribe's father, Alberto Uribe Sierra, subject to a US drug trafficking warrant, was killed by rival traffickers over a \$300,000 debt and not killed by the FARC as the President regularly claims. Bush paid a flying visit to Cartagena on 22

November to stress continued support for Uribe, the only South American president to send troops to Iraq.

Breaking the US grip

On 19-20 November 2004 the Colombian section of the Congress of Bolivarian Peoples met in Bogota and declared its opposition to neo-liberal globalisation and the purchase of the most important sectors of the economy by multinational corporations. It denounced 'Plan Colombia', the 'Andean Initiative' and 'Plan Puebla Panama' as expressions of US imperialism. The second full Congress in December in Caracas reiterated these statements, calling for an international movement within Latin America and the Caribbean to struggle against US imperialism and its rejection of international law and human rights. The Congress supports the Social Charter presented by Venezuela to the Organisation of American States and the creation of a new South American Union of Nations.

Operation Dragon

The heroic fight of Colombian labour, subject to continuous assassinations,

can be seen in disputes with Coca-Cola. On 27 March 2004, Sinaltrainal, the union in the Coca-Cola bottling plants, announced the suspension of a hunger strike against the killing and intimidation of union members. The hunger strike had lasted for 276 hours. Agreements had been reached with the company's Colombian president Jaramillo which allowed for a further delegate meeting on 2 April 2005 from all the plants involved and a promise of no reprisals against hunger strikers and removal of sanctions against them. There would be two weeks' paid leave and medical treatment for the hunger strikers so they could recover, plus publication of a notice in a national daily newspaper demanding that the protesters' claims and the lives of the workers be respected. Sinaltrainal thanked the many labour and international solidarity groups that had supported the hunger strikers. Opposing the workers we find Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble who, at the First International Conference of Terror Victims, held in Madrid on 27 January 2004, backed Colombian vice president Francisco Santos. Trimble said, 'One of the great curses of this world is the human rights industry... They justify terrorist acts and end up being complicit in the murder of innocent victims'.

The Colombian state has prepared Operation Dragon directed against the trades union Sintraemcali and its allies. According to a Colonel Villate, who has been detained by the Attorney General, the paramilitaries and military, with full knowledge of the Interior Ministry, devised this plan. Documents found in Cali and Medellín exposed a hideous plot to assassinate up to 80 opposition activists and politicians. The documents revealed the complicity of the Military Intelligence Organisation, the Cali Metropolitan Police and the Ministry of the Interior. Central to the plan was the assassination of the leadership of Sintraemcali. Intelligence gathering had been commissioned by their employers at Emcali and by the Superintendent of Public Services.

State economic policy

Presidente Uribe's government privatised important companies such as Telecom, national radio, television organisation Inravisión and the Agricultural Credit Savings bank, weakened social expenditures of the National Petroleum Corporation Ecopetrol and undermined the National Institute of Social Security and 130 other economic organisations.

The signing of a Free Trade Agreement by Colombia with the US will ruin fishing and what remains of national industry. It will remove workers' access to health, education and other public services. Colombia's biodiversity, water and all natural resources are to be privatised. Its indigenous cultures are being destroyed. La Contraloría (Colombia's equivalent to the National Audit Office), reported that official poverty increased from 55% in 2002 to 64% in 2003. Some 20% are in absolute poverty. In May 2004 the United Nations described Colombia as the western hemisphere's worst 'humanitarian situation'. Three million people have been forced from their homes over the last 10 years. Two million people are internally displaced by counter-revolutionary terror. This reserve army of labour holds the aspirations of all other workers in check.

A 2004 referendum to extend Uribe's term of office was defeated and he turned to an ever-anxious bourgeois Congress to force through a change in the law. Legal opposition against him is now centred upon the forthcoming presidential election. The last, in 2002, was extremely violent, with AUC terrorists manning voting stations, forcing voters to mark votes as instructed. The same can be expected this time.



El Alto residents celebrate the government U-turn which forced the cancellation of the privatised water contract

Bolivia: 'They are not allowing me to govern' – President Mesa

Massive political protests closed two of the biggest cities, Santa Cruz and El Alto, the sprawling working class satellite of La Paz, on 30 December. President Mesa's government provoked the protests by raising diesel and petrol prices by 23% and 10% respectively. Demanding full nationalisation of the country's raw materials, oil, gas, and water, Santa Cruz farmers staged hunger strikes and sit-ins in government offices. To end street blockades and to re-open the route to La Paz's airport the state said it would scrap the private management of the El Alto water supply by France's Suez corporation and reduce fuel price rises by 6%. Many workers have been without water for ten years and connection charges in El Alto cost about six months' wages for poor workers. The Spanish-owned power company is the next target for the opposition.

Anti-Apartheid a study in opportunism

Anti-Apartheid. A history of the movement in Britain. A study in pressure group politics.

Roger Fieldhouse. The Merlin Press, ISBN 085036549X, 2005, 546pp, £20

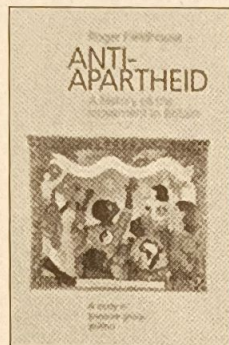
Fieldhouse recounts: on 1 January 1960 a special Cabinet Committee chaired by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and attended by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations (the Earl of Home), the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Ian Macleod), the President of the Board of Trade (Reginald Maudling), the Minister of Labour (Edward Heath), met to discuss the newly-formed British Boycott Movement which had declared its intention to build a consumer boycott of South African goods. Despite the fact that the Labour Party and TUC had publicly announced their support, the Tory government was reassured to hear from Heath that the TUC had privately told him that they had no intention of calling for industrial action. On this basis the Committee concluded that the campaign posed no real threat. The TUC's assurance and a private word in Lord Home's ear from one of the campaign's founders led the government to tell the South Africans that the boycott was 'no more than an irresponsible political manoeuvre'.

Already, in 1960, this infant Anti-Apartheid Movement had sealed its alliance with the British labour aristocracy and set the tone of the campaign for the next 30 years: British imperialism's boat would not be rocked.

Roger Fieldhouse has written an exhaustive, and exhausting, account of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), examining its archives, interviewing some of its officers and activists, reviewing its relationships with the liberation movements, political parties and the British government. The book examines the minutiae of letter-writing, meetings held with ministers, junior ministers, civil servants over more than 30 years. It ends up as an apologia for a movement that prided itself on its moral, liberal stance, but in practice betrayed its cause, censored and alienated its supporters and covered up for the world's most ardent apartheid prop – British imperialism.

There is no sense in this book of the life and death struggle that was going on in South Africa: the tragedy of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the heroism of Soweto school students in 1976, the brutality of Steve Biko's murder or the militancy of the new black trade unions and the township struggles of the 1980s which were, eventually, instrumental in the defeat of apartheid. Perhaps this is appropriate for a book about the British AAM. It was not the necessities or urgencies of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa that dominated the AAM's activities, but its allegiance to the Labour Party in Britain which totally circumscribed its conduct. It would not even commit itself to the anti-racist struggle in Britain for fear of alienating its 'broad church'. Anything with life had to be smothered.

In 1963, speaking on an AAM platform in Trafalgar Square, Harold Wilson promised to end the arms trade with South Africa: 'How can he [Macmillan] speak of the wind of change and supply arms to those who



are brutally resisting change?' Labour won the general election in 1964, and Wilson found no difficulty in continuing both trade and the 'bloody traffic' of weapons to the apartheid regime. Labour Ministers like Barbara Castle and David Ennals had been in the AAM leadership, only to ditch all pretence of action when in power. By 1976, with the next Labour government in power, Britain was South Africa's biggest export market with 23% of apartheid's exports coming to the UK. It was not just that successive Labour governments failed to act against apartheid, they invariably played an active role in supporting the regime. On every possible occasion when a vote arose at the UN either proposing sanctions against South Africa or opposing its illegal occupation of Namibia, the British government, Labour or Tory, used its power of veto.

When the Tories were in power, the AAM made great efforts to influence the government. During the Thatcher years their correspondence was answered by under-secretaries and their representations met with studied insults.

Did any of this cause the AAM to review its role? Not a bit. It even performed somersaults to keep its uncritical fellow travellers in the Communist Party of Great Britain off its platforms in order not to offend its Labour Party allies. It would happily welcome any renegade Tory or Labour MP regardless of their parties' support for apartheid (see pp216ff). *Plus ça change*: the so-called Stop the War campaign of today does very little to stop the war in Iraq but is committed to giving any Parliamentarian a voice. What neither the AAM nor today's Stop the



Rene Waller, one of City AA's oldest members was also a member of the RCG

War campaign will ever do is really challenge British imperialism

Fieldhouse argues that Thatcher was opposed to apartheid but simply disagreed on the question of how best to defeat it. It takes a curious sort of political tunnel-vision to suggest that Thatcher's constructive engagement policy was anything other than a ploy to continue British imperialism's support for the apartheid regime. She had proclaimed, after the 1985 Commonwealth Summit in Nassau, that she had conceded only a 'tiny little bit' to pressure from the Commonwealth and argued that sanctions would harm the black majority. At the time Britain headed the league table of foreign investors in South Africa, with £12 billion invested. Winnie Mandela responded in the only fashion possible: 'We regard it as complete racism that she should think for us'. It is a great pity that Professor Fieldhouse and sections of the AAM did not share this view.

Fieldhouse does not hesitate to dish dirt on behalf of the AAM. For ten years from 1982 the RCG was centrally involved in City of London Anti-Apartheid Group (City AA) which built a vibrant campaign against apartheid, centred on protests outside the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square. City AA directly involved hundreds of young people, of all backgrounds, races and creeds in solidarity with the liberation struggle in South Africa. It held two non-stop pickets of the embassy (one lasting 86 days, another lasting almost four years) calling for the release of all political prisoners in apartheid goals. It held regular protests, mobilised the support of all sections of society (including MPs and councillors), but made no concessions to British imperialism whatsoever. It operated in a completely democratic fashion: all participating organisations and individuals were free to speak on its platforms; all participants could distribute and sell literature; all its members were encouraged to attend and participate in its meetings which were held weekly. It gave active support to all the liberation movements without distinction: the African National Congress (ANC), Pan-Africanist Congress, Black Consciousness Movement, and indeed any forces fighting apartheid.

When City AA was started by myself, Norma Kitson, wife of South African political prisoner David Kitson, and their children Steven and Amanda, the work of the AAM in London was moribund. Norma was inspirational in this work. She had spent the previous decade trying to get something done for the prisoners and detainees. She had done the rounds of lobbying David Owen, then Labour Foreign Secretary, and being fobbed off with promises that were never kept. She was determined to build a local AAM group that was really active in giving solidarity to the struggle. Together with other RCG members, we mobilised and worked to build events in London.

Norma was determined to achieve change for the prisoners, and as an ANC member she was given permission to hold a non-stop picket of the South African Embassy demanding that the white political prisoners in Pretoria Central gaol be moved out of Death Row (where they were held following an ANC prisoner escape) to better conditions. The prisoners were



RCG comrades on the march against apartheid

segregated by race and David Kitson was one of these prisoners. Black political prisoners were mostly kept on Robben Island. Before the picket had even begun the AAM was circulating rumours that Norma was only acting in solidarity with white prisoners – a ludicrous accusation. This was the AAM that could not generate enough enthusiasm to hold a London committee meeting. Norma did more to educate thousands of young people about the realities of life under apartheid, the names of all the prisoners and the history of the liberation struggle, than any of the AAM's paper pushers and timekeepers ever did. The picket was successful: after 86 days and nights, the prisoners were moved. But the AAM's hostility to City AA had only just begun.

Fieldhouse gives a garbled account of the events that followed which resulted in City AA's disaffiliation, nodding only occasionally in the direction of the truth, that City AA built a campaign involving thousands, and built a worldwide reputation through its four-year-long non-stop picket. Fieldhouse accuses the RCG of using 'Trotskyist entry tactics' – the sort of ignorant abuse that the AAM dished out. The RCG is not Trotskyist and was openly and legitimately affiliated to the AAM.

Fieldhouse's account is also mealy-mouthed. When David Kitson was released from gaol after serving his 20 year sentence, the ANC tried to force him to condemn Norma and City AA. He is an honest man and he refused. As a result his ANC membership was suspended (along with Norma's) and the funding for his job at Ruskin College – his only income after 20 years in prison – was withdrawn by the trade union TASS (led by Ken Gill of the CPGB). Fieldhouse uses these events to illustrate 'the symbiotic relationship' between the AAM, the ANC and a sympathetic British trade union. He describes the affair as 'unedifying', when any honest person would be revolted by the double-dealing, dishonesty and treachery that underpinned the whole affair.

Any normal standards of journalism or academic history would demand that, before accusations are made in print, some attempt be made to check the truth or investigate the standpoint of the accused. Fieldhouse didn't bother. No one associated with the RCG or City AA was interviewed before Fieldhouse assembled his 'facts'. This is how the lies of the past are exhumed and given the badge of history. Fieldhouse accuses City AA of assaulting a SWAPO representative

at an AAM AGM when the only people assaulted were City AA members. City AA is accused of being violent, when it was nothing of the sort. He even goes so far as to dredge up a forged press statement attacking SWAPO in 1989, suggesting it was issued in revenge against SWAPO. The press statement was investigated at the time by City AA and a *Guardian* journalist and traced back to the South African Embassy. Fieldhouse would not know this: he didn't ask.

Why was it so important for the AAM and ANC to undermine City AA? Why were they so afraid of supporting the anti-racist struggle in Britain? Why were they opposed to direct action? Why did they allow the Labour Party to pretend it was anti-apartheid, when it was the opposite?

One might be tempted to think it doesn't matter; it is all water under the bridge. But there are two very good reasons why it does matter. Firstly, South Africa has achieved a bourgeois revolution: the black majority have the vote. But the ANC government stopped there. The Freedom Charter was ditched and the mass movement demobilised as soon as the ANC was elected. The result, 10 years on, is that the working class and oppressed still live in squalid squatter camps and townships on the edges of cities, the rural poor languish without land, the working class toils while the black and white elites protect their privileges in gated communities behind high fences. Millions have been consigned to death by the AIDS pandemic, unchecked because of the prejudices of Thabo Mbeki. The South African Communist Party plays lick-spittle and settles its comfortable bum in the back seat of bourgeois rule. This is the measure of what the ANC and the AAM have achieved. Because of movements like the AAM, the Labour Party and its wealth of hacks remain in place to administer British imperialism and betray the working class in the 21st century, time and again. Because of the AAM, we know what opportunism looks like.

The second reason why this history is important is that we saw the power of the working class in Soweto in 1976 and in the uprisings of the 1980s. In our own way, fighting apartheid in City of London Anti-Apartheid Group we learned the lessons of struggle. It is in our consciousness for the future when the working class is conscious of its destiny again. We know what revolution can look like. Fieldhouse can have the AAM, we prefer life.

Carol Brickley, formerly convenor of City of London Anti-Apartheid Group

Damning inquest verdict into death of Sarah Campbell

On 25 January 2005, an inquest jury at Warrington, Cheshire, delivered a scathing verdict on the death of Sarah Campbell, who died in Styal Prison, aged 18, on the first day of her sentence on 18 January 2003. The jury concluded that the prison had failed in its 'duty of care' towards Sarah and listed a catalogue of specific failings that had contributed towards this. ERIC ALLISON reports.

Sarah was known to be 'at risk' when she entered Styal, following her conviction for manslaughter at Mold Crown Court. The prison could hardly have been unaware of her vulnerability, given that, during an earlier period during which she was remained in custody, Sarah had self-harmed some 30 times. Indeed, a community psychiatric liaison officer at the court was so convinced that Sarah would attempt to take her own life in prison, he telephoned, wrote and faxed Styal, to warn them.

When Sarah arrived at Styal on 17 January 2003 the prison had experienced two recent deaths of women. (And a further three were to follow, in a 14-month period.) It would be imagined therefore, that prison staff would have been alert to the danger. If they were, then they expressed their concern in a callous, inhuman manner.

Because she had pleaded guilty, Sarah perceived herself to be in danger from another prisoner. She asked to go on protection in Butler House, the prison's vulnerable prisoners' wing. Instead, they put her down the block. (And I do not go along with, 'segregation unit' any more than I go along with, 'care and control area', or whatever namespin they want to put on their wretched prisons within prisons.) They also opened up a 2052SH Form (self-harm log) on her. Incredibly, somebody wrote on the card outside her cell, 'R53', meaning Rule 53 – in other words, awaiting adjudication.

The following morning, Sarah was observed and logged 'acting strangely and bizarrely'. Help should have been at hand, in the guise of the then Deputy Governor at Styal, Mrs Jean Craven, who had taken adjudications that morning. She offered to take Sarah's lunch into her, and presum-

ably fulfil her role as duty governor, checking on the welfare of an at risk prisoner who had been put down the block.

In evidence, Mrs Craven admitted that she did not see Sarah's face during the visit, only her back, nor did she bother to read the 2052SH Form which explained how vulnerable the 18-year-old was.

Later that day, Sarah was found, choking in her own blood and vomit, having ingested a huge quantity of prescribed medicine. The jury heard that there was a delay of between 20 and 40 minutes in calling an ambulance. (There was some debate as to whose responsibility that was.)

Professor Alexander Forrest, one of the country's leading experts on toxicology, said in evidence that 'Sarah could have taken some of the tablets on the Saturday morning'. Governor Craven 'saw' Sarah at lunchtime.



Sarah's mother, Pauline Campbell

Of all the evidence I heard during the inquest, nothing enraged me more than that of the then 'suicide prevention co-ordinator' (a decent woman, according to ex-Styal prisoners, I have spoken to). She was asked by a juror (and this, apparently working class,

jury asked some of the most searching questions an inquest will ever have heard), about the 'attitude' of staff, towards the problem of self harm in prison. She replied that, 'Some staff thought, "If someone wants to commit suicide, what right have we got to stop them?"' What about your Duty of Care, for starters, you unnamed staff?

It would be some consolation to the mother and friends of Sarah Campbell, and to the relatives of those prisoners who died before and after her, if lessons were to be learnt from the deaths. Judging by the flood of vulnerable people, men and women, who continue to pour into our prisons, I am not about to hold my breath in anticipation of a change of policy or practice.

Sarah Campbell had been convicted of a serious offence. She was a heroin addict, with a history of psychological problems. She took part in a criminal enterprise in which a man, who was going about his business, was aggressively verbally entreated to give her and her friend money, for heroin. The man suffered a heart attack and died. That was a tragedy for his family and a dreadful sign of the times. What happens to prisoners, when they are treated in a callous and inhuman manner is a tragedy for the whole of society. Such treatment betrays the memory of victims, past, present and future.

Ronnie Easterbrook

The last FRFI Prisoners Fightback page featured the brutality that goes on in British prisons' segregation units. Alan Porter wrote to us from Frankland prison about 73-year-old Ronnie Easterbrook, who had been moved between the 'health care' unit and segregation unit so many times he had refused to leave the seg unit again. Ronnie was convicted in 1988 of the attempted murder of a policeman during an armed robbery that was set up by the police and a TV programme and in which the only person who died was his fellow would-be robber who was shot dead by the police. He has campaigned relentlessly since then for his conviction to be overturned, refusing to become involved in applications for parole or early release. Ronnie writes:

After some months in the health care here I was put down the seg for refusing to go on 'normal location', since I'm not a normal prisoner. It is now on my record that I am and have been held illegally – though an official at Whitemoor referred to it as 'held in the interests of the state'. After four days in the seg I was returned to the health care in a wheelchair due to prolonged and intermittent refusals of all food. Six weeks later they tried again and once more after four days my health was such I was sent back to health care (no wheelchair).

Only a few days later I was asked to volunteer to go to the seg for the night, as my cell was needed. Naturally I refused, so was again ordered to go to the main wing, refused, was nicked, arrived down there and told the governor that were I kept down then I would stay for good. Two days later I was given seven or 14 days cellular confinement and two days further on they bring the wheelchair to return me to health care but I refused to leave the seg. After 20 days in cell/fridge, they asked me to move into the cell directly above so as to avoid having to traverse the stairs to

use the phone, and here the shower is only two paces away.

I still get asked to move but I got sick to death of their games. They know full well I am held illegally; it was actually admitted in the doctor's office at Whitemoor, yet still they try to break me down to conform (surrender to unremitting persecution) and people still wonder how guards in the concentration camps could throw people in furnaces. It's very simple, the chain of command, each individual protecting his position or job, and if asked – 'Not me, guv, I was only doing my job.'

I have now been down here since 3 October. It is controlled unlocking so only one person is ever out at any one time, and in fact I have never seen another prisoner, except out of my window to the cage below, referred to as the exercise yard. After the first four weeks I have been allowed eight pints of water a day for drinking, formerly it was four, so I have four pints of black coffee (with plenty of sugar) per day and four pints of OXO, with 1½ of those little cubes in each. I am of course very thin but surprisingly my only real problems to date are pains behind my eyes. I went partially blind in my left eyes about three years

ago due to muscular degeneration as a result of these intermittent hunger strikes for my rights, so I have recently increased my vitamins intake, expensive in here, but I don't want food in disguise. Dying at 73 is no big deal but infirmity is another thing altogether.

They say I am strong-willed, yet being right, even when one can prove it, as I can, is just a state of mind. If one had no principles it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to carry on, but as I have always had good principles there is no question that I would ever accept the burden a corrupt state and judiciary have placed upon me.

Thank you for continuing to send the paper. I admire the strength of character that enables you to keep trying in a world that seems to be slipping inexorably towards a disaster yet to make itself fully visible, but one that will surely have greed as its basis.

Ronnie Easterbrook B88459, HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Brasside, DURHAM DH1 5YD

Readers are asked to send Ronnie letters and cards of solidarity, and to write complaining about the appalling way he is being treated to Governor Paul Copple at the same address.



For over four years Turkish political prisoners have been engaged in an unremitting struggle against the state's moves to isolate them and destroy their ability to continue political organisation and education when they are incarcerated. This struggle has claimed the lives of 145 prisoners, with many more seriously injured by physical brutality or irreversibly damaged by hunger strikes. The Turkish government is now attempting to pass a new law to compel political prisoners to wear a special uniform. The prisoners see this as an attempt to humiliate and criminalise them and will resist it. The campaign continues! Here supporters in Britain show their solidarity.

NEWS IN BRIEF

New sentencing measures

The overhaul of sentencing made law by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 is due to come into force in April. From then, anyone convicted of a non-violent crime and sentenced to between one and ten years will automatically be released at the half-way point. This widely publicised element of the package is its only positive feature. However those released in this way will then be on licence for all the remaining time of their sentence, not just until the three-quarters point as previously. For everyone else the picture is bleaker, with a range of discretionary life sentences and 'sentences for public protection' meaning that anyone the courts perceive to be dangerous will be sentenced to an indeterminate period in prison with a specified minimum but no specified maximum period.

Screws to get new weapons

At Pentonville and Ranby prisons, prison staff are carrying out a trial of new, 'modern' batons that extend from five to 18 inches in length, as opposed to the current eight-inch truncheons with which they are routinely armed.

Also in the pipeline is the issuing of synthetic pepper spray to 'Control and Restraint' riot squads. A Prison Officers Association National Executive member apparently told *The Times* that the spray will 'only ever be issued in the most serious incidents such as a Strangeways riot situation...'

rcg



As soon as the police ban ended, picketers returned to demonstrate outside Marks & Spencer in Manchester

Manchester

The Manchester picket of Marks and Spencer has experienced a sustained attack at the hands of the Manchester police over the last two months, aided and abetted by a gang of Zionists.

In FRFI 182, we reported that Manchester Chief Constable Michael Todd had used Section 14 of the 1986 Public Order Act banning us from picketing M&S between 29 November and 3 January. The letter ordered us to confine our protest to the Peace Gardens half a mile away between 12pm and 3pm and to have no more than 20 participants. This was not just a ban on the picket: it was a ban on Manchester Victory to the Intifada (VTI). When we picketed the offices of *Manchester Evening News* on Wednesday 1 December for their censorship of our letters, the inspector on duty claimed that we were breaching the terms of the ban.

The police made no effort to respond to two letters of protest we sent in the week prior to 4 December. On 4 December itself, nine supporters were arrested as a result of the ban and were later charged under the Public Order Act. Five were banned from the city centre during Saturday daytime until mid-January whilst three others were initially banned from the centre altogether. The following weeks, these supporters held successful M&S pickets in Bolton and Rochdale to help expand the campaign. Meanwhile we are challenging the legality of the ban through a judicial review.

On the first Saturday after the

ban ended, 8 January, 25 supporters returned to Market Street to claim the right to protest. The police allowed Zionist thugs completely free rein to harass, intimidate and threaten VTI supporters in the hope that they would provoke the sort of incident that would allow a total ban on the picket. Members of the public reacted strongly against the intimidation, many determined to make a point by signing our petitions and taking leaflets. The following week, Sergeant Redfern decided after lengthy discussion with two Zionists that she found our Palestinian flag 'offensive' and demanded that we take it down. When we refused, she seized the bamboo flag pole and broke it over her knee. When we brought out another flagpole, she confiscated that without any legal authority. The following week, again following Zionist complaints, police confiscated two of our placards which declared 'Victory to the Intifada' on the absurd grounds that this constituted an 'incitement to racial hatred'. These placards have been present on all pickets since they started more than four years ago.

It is vital that we defend the right to protest in support of the Palestinian people particularly given the orchestrated attempts of Zionists to suppress pro-Palestinian groups on university campuses up and down the country. A meeting called by the Palestine Solidarity Group (PSG) at Leeds University on 11 December received a catalogue of these attacks:

- The Birmingham University Students' Guild initially denied students the right to set up a Palestinian Society as it 'would create a forum for racism and extremism'. Zionists have blocked stalls and the Guild President has warned the society not to use the word Palestine on its website 'because this may imply taking a side in the Israel-Palestine dispute'.
- The Warwick Students Union took down Friends of Palestine society posters after a complaint about the use of the word 'apartheid' but after protests had to allow them to be put up again. This union then unsuccessfully attempted to ban a society debate, alleging it would be 'a catalyst for increased harassment and victimisation'.
- When Leeds PSG held a well supported event on campus against the apartheid wall, the union got security guards to tell protesters to remove the wall on the complaint of a Zionist. Subsequently the Union wanted to censor the use of the term 'racist Zionist state' in leaflets and has banned pro-Palestinian events.
- At SOAS, London, an event called to boycott Israeli academic institutions, this time with Student Union support, was attacked by the Jewish Society (J-Soc) in six newspapers, including *The Times*. Zionists have called for MPs to investigate Palestinian behaviour on the campus.

Events

DURHAM

For information about pickets of M&S in Silver Street and other events call: 07813 073 846

MANCHESTER

Regular Saturday pickets of M&S, Market Street
Manchester City Centre, 12-3pm
For more information email:
victory_intifada@hotmail.com

ROCHDALE

Regular Saturday pickets of M&S, Rochdale town centre 12-3pm
For more information email:
victory_intifada@hotmail.com

For more information on other FRFI events in the northwest email: manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com or ring 07816 547 066

Every Monday:

Salford University FRFI society
Stall and discussion
To contact the society, email:
salfordfrfi@hotmail.com

MIDLANDS

For information on activities email:
midlandsrcg@hotmail.com

NOTTINGHAM

Picket of M&S, St Peter's, near Broadmarsh Shopping Centre
Saturday 5 February and Saturday 5 March 1-3pm

SHEFFIELD

Picket of M&S, High Street
Saturday 12 February 12-3pm
For further details email
midlandsrcg@hotmail.com

GLASGOW

Saturday 26 February and Sunday 27 February:
Protest against the slaughter in Iraq, Donald Dewar Statue, Buchanan Street
For further details of this and other FRFI activities in Scotland
phone: 07779 785 529 or email:
frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

LONDON

Every Thursday:
Picket of M&S, Oxford Street (Marble Arch End), 6-8pm

Street stalls every Saturday, 1-3pm For details email:
victoryintifada@hotmail.com or call: 020 7837 1688

Wednesday 9 February, 7pm
LSE FRFI society meeting

Eye witness report back from Palestine
Room G1, 20 Kingsway, WC2
Nearest tube Holborn.

Wednesday 23 February, 7pm
LSE FRFI society meeting to organise an anti-imperialist contingent on the **Stop the War** march (19 March)
For room details, contact LSE FRFI society email: frfi_lse@yahoo.co.uk

Monday 14 March, 7.30pm
Meeting on **Venezuela** with Nora Castaneda, leader of Women's Development Bank
Joint meeting with Global Women's Strike
For details call 020 7837 1688

Stop the War March
Saturday 19 March
1pm, central London.
Join FRFI on an anti-imperialist contingent.

Karl Marx's London - a guided walk
Sunday 20 February
Meet 3pm Piccadilly Circus, Subway 1 exit (above ground)
All welcome - £5 donation to FRFI Fighting Fund
For more details or to reserve a place phone 020 7837 1688 or email rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

- Zionists from J-Soc blockaded a VTI stall outside Manchester University. Steve George, General Secretary of the Students Union, asked us to remove it from University property. Later a Zionist punched a VTI activist and tried to kick our stall over. On seeing this George told us he was phoning the police as we were causing a disturbance.
- LSE Student Union representatives tried to force the FRFI society to remove a Victory to the Intifada banner from a stall. Supporters had to point out to them that the stall was on a public highway over which the Union had no jurisdiction. Threats by the union to launch an investigation with the police came to nothing.

The Socialist Workers' Party and the rest of the left have completely failed to defend pro-Palestinian activities on university and college campuses. Indeed, the SWP representative at the Leeds meeting who came from Manchester University told us that there was quite a 'progressive atmosphere' on his campus and that Steve George 'is a good guy who could be talked round.' Such illusions are no defence against Zionism and its racist allies.

London

London Victory to the Intifada (VTI) pickets of Marks and Spencer on Oxford Street every Thursday continue to be lively, colourful and loud, attracting new demonstrators every week. Betar fascists were unable to sustain their counter-protest over the New Year, and they have been unable to mobilise significant numbers since. VTI is also holding regular pickets of M&S in Camden Town and Holloway Road. In addition, members have supported pickets set up independently in Brighton and met with picketers of M&S in Stratford-upon-Avon.

On 9 December London VTI organised a protest action against the British-Israeli Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner. Along with Israeli ambassador to Britain, and the British ambassador to Israel, the guest of honour was none other than Stuart Rose, Marks and Spencer chief executive. 60 people kept up a noisy protest throughout the evening.

Scotland

FRFI comrades in Scotland joined other anti-war groups and activists in Glasgow for a refreshingly open and democratic event on 11 December to discuss

and plan protests against the occupation of Iraq. Organisations present included Troops Out, Glasgow; Troops Out of Iraq Network; Faslane Peace Camp; Glasgow Palestine Solidarity Campaign and other individuals from Scottish CND. It was a meeting of people from different political backgrounds who were involved in some real way in opposing the war against the Iraqi people.

The following weekend, comrades from RCG/FRFI joined with others in the streets of central Glasgow in a Weekend of Action against War on 18 and 19 December. With Christmas the following Saturday, we let thousands of people of know about the 100,000 Iraqis who had already perished in the imperialist onslaught. Support for our stand was excellent as we challenged the media lies about Iraq. RCG/FRFI supporters also joined a Bloody Sunday commemorative march in Glasgow on 22 January, where the SSP were conspicuous by their absence. Despite Loyalist and fascist opposition the march made its way through Glasgow city centre to remember the victims of the British Army murders on the streets of Derry in 1972.

Rock around the Blockade round-up

office@ratb.org.uk www.ratb.org.uk

Cuba - a better world is possible

In July this year, Rock around the Blockade brigadistas will spend two weeks in Cuba, taking with them funds raised in Britain for the Union of Young Communists (UJC) to buy a sound system for the UJC in the east of Cuba, for recreational and political work. It will be inaugurated in Caimanera, a town in the province of Guantanamo, near the border with the illegally US-occupied area of Guantanamo Bay - a place where Cuban socialism comes face to face with the fascism of the US detention and torture camp in Guantanamo Bay.

The brigade is a culmination of work by Rock around the Blockade to raise awareness of the gains made by the Revolution

in Cuba, despite the illegal blockade led by the USA. Defending the Cuban Revolution is part and parcel of building a revolutionary movement in Britain, for Cuba shows that it is possible to prioritise people and the needs of a society as a whole over profit, as its most recent statistics show (see page 10).

Over four decades of building a socialist society, Cubans have, as Fidel Castro said at the closing of the UJC congress in December 2004, 'known true independence and real freedom. We shall never resign ourselves to living without them. We shall continue to create, to struggle'. They have escaped from 'plunder, humiliation and ignominy' and are building a society fit for all to live in.

Show your support for the Revolution by taking part in the events and activities of Rock around the Blockade such as street stalls, meetings and club nights. E-mail us on office@ratb.org.uk

or call us on 020 7837 1688. For regular information from and about Cuba, join our egroup by emailing viva_cuba-subscribe@yahoo.co.uk. You can become a member of Rock around the

Blockade to support our work and receive the newsletter by filling in the form below. We would be grateful for all donations towards the sound system for the UJC.



Yes, I would like to join Rock around the Blockade
and enclose £10 waged/£4 low-waged/£2 concessions
(delete as appropriate) £ _____

I would like to donate £ _____ towards the sound system for the UJC

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____

Please make cheques made payable to Rock around the Blockade and sent to RATB, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Events

Friday 18 February, 6pm to midnight (no admission after 11pm): A night of art, music and politics at Nambucca, 596 Holloway Road, London N7 (nearest tubes Archway and Holloway Road). 6-8pm: film and discussion - *Inventos, Hip Hop Cubana*; 8pm-midnight: live music (jazz pianist, mbira player, guitarist), poetry, speeches, dancing and more. Free entry.

Saturday 19 February, 1-3pm, Camden Market, Camden, north London. Street stall against the US blockade of Cuba. Meet outside Camden Town tube.

Sunday 10 April: Sponsored bike ride to raise funds for Cuban youth. For details and a sponsorship form contact the campaign on the details above.

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 ☐

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LETTERS

Shed no tears for Blunkett

In the wake of David Blunkett's overdue resignation, a picture has been painted of 'an honourable man brought low by love'. I first met David Blunkett in 1974, and later suffered under him when he was leader of Sheffield City Council. Neither his dishonesty, nor his corruption, nor his right-wing views are recently acquired; he's simply been better in the past at hiding them. First and foremost though, Blunkett has been a ruthless careerist – no wonder, like Margaret Thatcher before him, he's blubbing now.

Thatcher was a great political ally to Blunkett in his Sheffield Council days; he could cover up the corruption and incompetence of his administration by blaming everything on central government.

More than half the council's own 32,000 employees earned basic pay below TUC guidelines, and 10,000 were paid less than the Council of Europe 'decency

threshold'. Women got a particularly bad deal, earning far less than their male colleagues, and getting fewer promotions. There was also racial discrimination, with only 1% of council employees being black, and rumours of a 'colour bar' in the Town Hall's heavily subsidised restaurant, where no black person had ever been employed.

Blunkett presided over a huge homeless problem in Sheffield, while massive numbers of council-owned properties lay empty, sometimes for decades. Early in 1983 'Peace City' was somewhat embarrassed to find that a group of young peaceniks had squatted one long-empty council-owned building and turned it into a 'peace centre'. In response, Blunkett's pal Roger Barton, then Chairman of the 'Nuclear Free Zones Committee', personally went round and cut off the electricity. Blunkett promised the young pacifists that they would

not be evicted – a promise he quickly broke.

Another embarrassment came when a British Rail guard blew the whistle on the transportation of nuclear waste through the area, a fact the council had tried hard to keep quiet.

Blunkett's administration also waged a long and bitter war against travellers, even evicting them in the middle of a TB epidemic.

While Blunkett and his cohorts railed in public about the corruption of Tory politicians in Whitehall, Sheffield City Council junkies were legendary.

A big part of maintaining the illusion was the notion of 'squaring up to Thatcher', so from time to time various 'stands' were made. One was over 'rate-capping', when Sheffield and several other Labour councils refused to set 'a Tory rate'.

How Blunkett and his pals puffed and panted, before crumbling at the very first

opportunity. The inside word was that Blunkett had been instructed to back down personally by Labour leader Neil Kinnock, who was waging a war against Militant Tendency, particularly in Liverpool where they controlled the anti-rate-capping council. Blunkett's reward was to become MP for Brightside, one of Labour's most solid seats, at the next General Election.

Another 'stand' was against bus-fare increases. The city's famously low fares had actually begun to increase a few years earlier, but in 1986 Thatcher's deregulation of public transport threatened to send them spiralling. Blunkett again capitulated, and, as always, aimed to crush any uncontrolled dissent ruthlessly. As a member of a group opposed to the fare increases I was sent to prison for putting up a poster advising passengers not to pay. I wasn't prosecuted by the police but by the Labour council, for not having planning permission!

Blunkett has long had a vicious tongue, and as his former cabinet colleagues witnessed recently, is not slow to use it. He once famously accused single mothers

of deliberately getting pregnant to jump the council housing queue.

His own current fixation with acquiring a family, even if it's somebody else's, sits uneasily with his past history. The day after his election as an MP, he announced he was leaving his wife and children in Sheffield and moving in with his 'research assistant' in London.

He's now finding out that middle-class women don't disappear into the background so conveniently.

Like Thatcher, the only person David Blunkett is able to shed tears for is himself; snivelling that he'll 'try to have something of a Christmas', he sounded like Albert Steptoe. Whatever now happens to Blunkett, he certainly had a better festive season than the families of the record 93 British prisoners who killed themselves in 2004, those locked up without trial in prisons or detention centres, or the vast number of other victims of his reign as Home Secretary. Shed no tears for Blunkett – he can shed them himself.

MARK BARNSELEY
Leeds

Eight years' isolation

Thank you for the latest issue of FRFI. It's always a pleasure to read your fantastic paper. You wrote in the last issue about segregation in the jails so please find enclosed my latest statement about my situation.

In October 1996 following a bank robbery I was provisionally arrested by the police and placed in isolation custody in Stuttgart-Stammheim prison. Following several court cases I am now serving a sentence of nearly 17 years, following which I can be further detained in 'preventative detention' at the whim of the Justice Department.

I am a so-called 'Redskin' (RASH = Red and Anarchist Skinhead) and a person of plain words. I refuse to show false remorse for my actions. Instead I continue to speak my mind, both personally and politically. This includes a refusal under any circumstances to co-operate with the Justice Department. A few years ago the prison informed me my solitary confinement conditions would only be relaxed if, firstly, I entered into dialogue

with prison staff, and secondly agreed to 'denounce violence', promising in particular not to incite fellow prisoners, or plan any rebellion or breakout.

I have now been in solitary confinement for almost eight years. That means 24 hours a day alone, with the sole exception that I see prison officers when meals or mail are brought. In recent years the daily hour in the yard, actually meant to be spent alone as well, has been relaxed in that another inmate in solitary can come into the yard. This is not due to humanity but practical constraints; there are too many prisoners in isolation.

I am most bothered by the inability to be active. In these times of increasing repression and upheaval, instead of being able to join the struggle, I sit behind bars. I attentively follow political developments at national and international level. Much of my everyday experience in prison (spying, searches, permanent observation) is being progressively introduced outside as well and I

ask myself whether if and when I return to 'freedom' I will not simply be exchanging one prison for a much greater one. This makes it all the more important to me to offer resistance, to defend autonomy, to expose repressive structures in the political and justice systems and in business, to call them by their names and to stand firm in resistance against them, by fighting for a free and just world.

I am an early riser. Mostly I am awake at four in the morning. Through the bars of the windows I see here and there the moon or Venus twinkling, smell through the open window the cool of the night. Freedom surely consists not only of the possibility of being able to freely be somewhere else when you feel like it, but also in not allowing one's intellect and imagination to be locked away. Not even the justice system can take from you this inner freedom.

THOMAS MEYER-FALK
c/o JVA Z3117, Schönbornstraße 32, 76646 Bruchsal, Germany

An outrage in Venezuela

What is the world coming to? On 8 January soldiers and peasants occupied the 32,000-acre El Charcote estate of the Vestey Group in Venezuela. 'We campesinos are not the invaders – the invaders are the English,' according to Alfredo Rodriguez. 'We've been in Venezuela for just over 100 years and we hope to be there for some time yet,' riposted Lord Vestey. Formed in 1897, the Vestey Group was once the world's biggest family-owned multinational. 'They did not live on their income, they did not live on the interest from their investments; they lived on the interest on the interest,' wrote journalist Philip Knightley of the Vestey Group. The Vestey Group has cattle ranching and sugar cane interests in Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. The original Vestey company founders moved to Argentina to avoid British income tax. Vestey's supplied McDonald's with beef.

Lord Vestey – 'Spam' to his chums – has a fortune of \$750 million and a 5,000-acre estate in Gloucestershire. With racing and hunting as hobbies, Lord Vestey is described as a friend of Prince Charles. In Venezuela 60% of the land is owned by 1% of the people. 80% of the land is owned by 5% of landowners.

The British press described the occupation of the Vestey land as a 'seizure'. Venezuela's government says it is 'intervention' to investigate Vestey's claims over land titles and whether the land is being fully used. Readers might care to cheer the beleaguered Lord up and revive his dwindling empire by dining at the Oxo Tower in London or, if your pockets do not stretch that far, dissolve a little more of the famous cube in your gravy: both owned by the Vestey's.

TREVOR RAYNE
South London

First they came for the communists

In 1945 Martin Niemöller wrote: 'First they came for the communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist, then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew, then they came for the Catholics and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant, then they came for me – and by that time there was no one to speak up for me.'

Victory to the Intifada held their weekly picket of M&S in London on Thursday 26 January, the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet Red

Army. We were proud to be joined by a group of Turkish communists flying red banners bearing the hammer and sickle – it seemed particularly fitting. Despite some passers by and the Betar (Zionist) counter-picket calling us anti-Semitic, speeches on the picket made it clear that we stand against fascism, against racism, against imperialism and in support of all those fighting for liberation from occupation and for self-determination for their people. We feel revulsion about the murder of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, communists, people with disabilities and gay people under the Nazi regime in Germany. We feel revulsion at the Israeli state's ongoing humiliation, murder and torture of the Palestinian people, denied basic human rights in the land of their forebears. These two statements are not mutually exclusive.

We welcome onto the picket all those who stand against racism and fascism. We welcome those who fly any flag that stands for the struggle against racism, tyranny and prejudice. Long live the memory of the valiant Soviet fighters who fought against and defeated the fascist Nazi regime and liberated the death camp at Auschwitz.

Victory to the Intifada!
Long live socialism!

HANNAH & JIM
Victory to the Intifada

Privatising health

See that the process of privatisation that is taking place is causing alarm amongst NHS trust chief executives. Having given their full support to the concept that private provision is a crucial component of the modern NHS, they are finding that it now threatens their interests.

The reason is that the government is determined to press on with new private sector centres, and wants to award 31 new contracts in 2005. The problem is that there is already spare capacity within NHS hospitals and NHS treatment centres, with some in London already mothballed for lack of demand, for instance at Kings College Hospital. Primary Care Trusts will be told to offer a private sector option under 'Patient's Choice'. But the private sector centres will be able to cherry-pick procedures they want to offer – and they will be ones that would be the bread-and-butter of NHS Trusts and treatment centres under the new Payment by Results. With the NHS as a whole £500m in debt, some trusts will face huge financial problems next year. Expect serious financial instability.

ROBERT CLOUGH
Liverpool

A light in the darkness

Season's greetings. Darkness may seem to characterise the social, political, economic, environmental landscape with the evils of global empire rampant and the re coronation of George the Lesser just past. But the winter solstice marks the return of the light! Literally, the extra daily minutes of solar inspiration may feel like small comfort against the chill of winter. Figuratively, however, nature's example of a

turning point and promise of an upward cycle is a much greater inspiration. Already there are bright sparks in the blackness. Larry Giddings, my co-defendant, is out. Ray Levasseur (Ohio 7) is out! Proud (Veronya Bowers, former Panther), if not out is almost out. Marilyn Buck has a parole date! And the depredations of globoperial capital are engendering broad consciousness of the nasty nature of the new

world order. Behind all the winter year-end holidays is the solstice and its celebration of light and progress toward renewed growth. So, whatever gloom may lurk, we all have at least the promise of illumination and maybe a little warmth to celebrate May y'all enjoy the time and thanks for being there these many calendars. It must be like 20 now. The future holds promise!

BILL DUNNE
10916 -086, US Penitentiary,
PO Box 019001, ATWATER,
CA 95301-0910, USA

25th Anniversary FRFI fighting fund

Help us raise £7,770 in the next two months!

Since the start of the fund drive we have raised £2,230 towards our target of £10,000. We have a long way to go over the next two months, and we urge all our readers to send us your donations.

Over the last two months we have once more demonstrated our fighting stand against imperialism by work in solidarity with the Palestinian people. We have stood up against the intimidation of Greater Manchester Police and their unofficial auxiliaries, the Zionist racists.

We remain the only left paper in Britain to fight Labour racism and imperialism. As we move into a pre-election period, others on the left will seek to further their political careers through an accommodation with the Labour left. We will however continue to expose the Labour left's refusal to stand against the massive attacks on democratic rights that the Blair government is legislating. We will continue to condemn those who refuse to break from Labour for its continued support for British imperialist interests in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East. We will continue to stand for the independent interests of the working class and oppressed throughout the world.

Please support us. We need to develop FRFI to provide a voice for those fighting back here in Britain, for those who will have no truck with Labour. For this we need your contributions. Help us meet our £10,000 target!

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'Freedom' – for capital

When, in his inauguration speech, Bush spoke of bringing freedom to the world, he means freedom for capital to exploit the world, freedom for US imperialism to oppress nations and peoples, freedom for the US military machine to impose US policy anywhere that refuses to pay obeisance to the Empire. Bush has no intention of supporting political freedom in the United States, never mind in the puppet regimes in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia or anywhere else. He is putting in place a team that will repress at home and aggress abroad.

The brutal empire

Attorney General Ashcroft oozed the instincts of a tyrant from every pore, but even he is surpassed by his replacement. Alberto Gonzalez, Bush's lawyer when Governor of Texas, ensured that death-row inmates' appeals to the Governor were automatically turned into execution warrants, making Texas execution capital of the US. In the White House he was the principal legal architect attempting to legalise torture. Gonzalez is the man to lead and justify the forthcoming assault on civil liberties.

Although the advances in civil rights in the US have only been the fruit of struggle, it is the US Supreme Court which, for the last 50 years, has been the main battleground for the advance and defence of civil rights. However, eight of the nine justices are now over 65, with several likely to die or retire soon. Bush will appoint extreme right-wingers, opponents of civil rights and abortion. They will be the ideal complement to Gonzalez.

The new Secretary of State is Condoleezza Rice. If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail; Rice is a case-hardened cold-war warrior who sees any challenge to US imperialism as a threat to be hammered.

The brittle empire

But, behind the Emperor's bluster, the United States is in crisis. Despite talk of recovery, profits fell in the third

State of the Empire report: *brutal but brittle*

With Emperor George Bush entering his second term, what is the state of his empire? What are his policies likely to be? What can the rest of the world expect from US imperialism? From the United States, STEVE PALMER reports.



New Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez, responsible for legalising the torture of Iraqis and for ditching the Geneva Conventions

quarter of 2004; capacity utilisation and employment have not yet regained their 2000 level, wages increase slower than inflation, the number of jobless workers grows. Stock market indicators point to share prices being overvalued while house prices are inflated by as much as 35% – sure signs of a speculative bubble waiting to burst.

This crisis has masqueraded as a feeble recovery only because of debt-financed expansion of consumer and government spending. Total debt is now 300% of national income compared to 160% in 1980. An orgy of mortgage-refinancing has enabled consumers to borrow massively: mortgage debt has grown fourfold since 1995. Consumer debt now stands at an historical high of 54% of consumer income.

Projected government spending on the Iraq war until the end of 2005 is

\$300bn. Its budget deficit was \$412bn. This has been financed by foreign lenders and has covered a \$650bn international current account deficit. Yet 80% of these security purchases have been by central banks, which hold 70% of their assets in US dollars. The People's Bank of China recently announced it had increased its dollar exposure last year by \$207bn – one third of the current account deficit.

Although the US administration ignores the consequences, its creditors do not. This massive foreign borrowing has led to a decline in the dollar exchange rate, devaluing dollar reserves. A recent survey showed 70% of Central Banks reserve managers had increased their exposure to the Euro. In the last three years OPEC members have cut the proportion of their dollar deposits from 75% to 61.5%. Thailand is considering reduc-

ing its dollar reserves from 80% to 50%. More ominously, although central banks increased their reserves by 66% over the last four years, they expect this to slow to around 20% in the next four. Put simply, this means that the rest of the world is unwilling and unable to continue to prop up US capitalism. There is no way that the US can fill the gap with exports, since it has already exported its manufacturing industry. If it cannot borrow, the only alternative is a massive deflation of the US economy. This spectacular crisis will puncture the stock and housing bubbles and drive up unemployment and poverty. The ripples of this crisis will be a tsunami across the world.

attacks. Yet, despite supposedly having the world's most powerful military machine, Bush has pushed it to its limits, to a point where senior officers are concerned it will be a broken force in the near future. The entire US army is bogged down in Iraq – it is either there, on its way there, or on its way back for a brief break. Up to 5,000 US soldiers are thought to be absent without leave. Retired soldiers over 50 are being called up; reservists, who legally can be deployed no longer than a year, are having their terms extended by another year. Relatives hold bake-sales to buy adequate flak jackets and armour for their vehicles! This is not a force which can dominate the world.

Despite its bragging and brutality,



Behind the Emperor's bluster, the United States is in crisis

The military

The prospects for the Empire, then, are deepening crisis, destruction of political liberty and more military

Bush's empire is brittle. Its crisis is bringing forth increasing fightbacks abroad and at home. Emperor Bush's rule is going to be very shaky. ■

Labour maintains terrorist scare to strengthen police state



Barbarity at Guantanamo Bay in illegally-occupied Cuba

In January four British men, who had been seized following the events of 11 September 2001, were finally released from the US military torture camp in Guantanamo Bay.

Moazzam Begg, Feroz Abbasi, Martin Mubanga and Richard Belmar had been incarcerated there without charge or trial for over three years. They were denied any legal process or visits from

friends and family. Throughout the period they underwent persistent beatings, death threats and psychological torture. Moazzam Begg was locked in solitary confinement for 19 months. His solicitor, Gareth Peirce, said 'He looks like he has been to hell and back'. Feroz Abbasi was kept in isolation in a cramped cell without windows for 18 months. Even his guards were withdrawn in order to deny him any human contact. He suffered hallucinations and mental breakdowns. Martin Mubanga was kept in shackles for such long periods that he wet himself and was then forced to clean up his own urine. All the men reported that they were given injections that triggered psychoses. If they did not comply they feared further beatings. Their tormentors were not only the US military. On up to nine occasions they were interrogated by British MI5.

Despite their horrific ordeal the men were immediately arrested on their return to Britain and questioned under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act

before being released the next day. This cruel fiasco had nothing to do with gaining information. The police were not going to find out anything that the torture at the Guantanamo Camp hadn't already revealed. The police action had no purpose other than to maintain suspicion of guilt against the four men and thus try to justify their torture and imprisonment. This is in line with the wider strategy of US and British imperialism to generate an exaggerated fear of terrorist threat in order to carry out their military plunder abroad and to curtail civil liberties at home.

There are still 553 people imprisoned at Guantanamo, including at least six British residents whom the Labour government has refused to represent. Conditions and treatment there are so desperate that there have been 34 suicide attempts by prisoners since January 2002 and almost 500 incidents of self-harm in the last two years alone.

In Britain there are still 12 people being held without charge or trial in

British prisons supposedly on suspicion of involvement with terrorism. This is despite a ruling by the Law Lords last year that such detention without trial contravenes the European Convention on Human Rights (see article on centre pages). The Labour government now plans to circumvent the Law Lords' ruling by replacing detention without trial with control orders. These are planned to involve strict surveillance, curfew, electronic tagging, banning access to the internet and mobile phones and placing people under house arrest. The measures are likely to be applied not only to the 'suspect' but to his friends and family as well. The new Home Secretary Charles Clarke is also still considering the proposals of his predecessor, David Blunkett, that some trials may be held in secret, without juries and with defence lawyers having to be security vetted. All these proposed measures would apply to anyone suspected of 'acts preparatory to terrorism'; a definition so loose as to include just about anyone who questions the power of the state. Which is precisely, of course, what they intend.

Jim Craven