

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Hamas wins Palestinian elections NO TO OCCUPATION

Hamas's landslide victory in the elections to the Palestine Legislative Council (PLC) is, as Hamas political leader Mahmoud Zahar put it, 'a big slap to the Americans and Israelis'. With Fatah rapidly dissolving into warring factions and Sharon's stroke leaving the Zionists effectively leaderless, Bush's roadmap is now hopelessly discredited. All that imperialism can do for the moment is threaten to starve the Palestinian people into submission by withholding aid until Hamas abandons the armed struggle and recognises Israel. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

In electing Hamas the Palestinian people have shown that despite more than five years of terror that have accompanied the latest Intifada, they remain unbowed. Their defiance, their refusal to roll over and do imperialism's bidding, has rocked imperialism back on its heels. It was not just a vote against the corruption of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) – it was a resounding vote against occupation. Despite the daily terror of the Israeli occupation, and their almost complete international isolation, the Palestinian people showed they will not give up their national aspirations and kneel down to the interests of Zionism and

imperialism. They have delivered a major blow to imperialism as its strategy in the Middle East continues to unravel.

Both Bush and Blair were staggered at the scale of Hamas's victory. Blair stated that Hamas must decide 'between a path of democracy or a path of violence' while Bush argued cynically that 'if your platform is the destruction of Israel it means you're not a partner in peace, and we're interested in peace'. Mahmoud Zahar clearly answered their hypocrisy: 'We are under occupation. The Israelis continue aggression against our people; killing, detentions, demolitions. In order to stop this we are entitled to

self-defence by all means including using guns. If the Israelis stop their aggression, we will be committed to the calm-down'.

Election results

In all Hamas won 76 out of 132 seats on the Legislative Council: 46 out of 66 directly elected regional seats as against Fatah's 16, and 30 out of 66 distributed according to the votes won by national lists. Fatah ended up with a mere 43 seats in all. The call by Islamic Jihad for a boycott of the election did not seriously affect the turn out, which was estimated to be about 74%.

Imperialist commentators have tried to present the result as merely a no confidence vote in Fatah and PA corruption in order to minimise its significance. Hamas of course made these issues central in the election. But there was also Hamas's welfare record: its organisation of social welfare, schools, universities and hospitals especially in Gaza. Whilst Fatah and PA leaders creamed off millions of dollars of aid that flooded in after the 1993 Oslo peace agreement, the mass of the Palestinian people sank further into destitution. For many, Hamas's social programmes were what kept them from starvation. For hundreds of thousands of Palestinians,

Fatah and PA corruption was clearly payment for services rendered to imperialism: aid had created a completely parasitic and dependent bourgeoisie whose only interest was to sell their national rights to imperialism.

The elections had gone ahead despite widespread calls for them to be postponed or abandoned. Such calls came not only from the imperialists and Zionists, but also from sections of the ruling Fatah movement, clearly worried at an early stage about the level of support they would command in the new PLC. In an act of naked intimidation, both the US and the EU threatened to suspend financial support for the PA if Hamas ended up in government. Israeli troops established at least 400 checkpoints and roadblocks in the run-up to the election and imposed severe restrictions on the movement of candidates throughout the West Bank and on Palestinian communities isolated between the 'Green Line' and the Apartheid Wall. Candidates were also banned from travelling between the West Bank and Gaza.

The Zionists also tried to undermine the legitimacy of the elections by threatening to prevent the quarter of a million Palestinians living in East Jerusalem from taking part. The response of Mahmoud Abbas was to

suggest that if this happened then the elections should be cancelled. Hamas, whilst supporting the right of East Jerusalem Palestinians to vote, insisted that the election should go ahead regardless. As it was, on 15 January, just ten days before the elections were due to take place, the Israeli government agreed to allow limited campaigning in East Jerusalem, but banned any campaigning for election lists attached to resistance groups. This was of course a futile attempt to prevent Hamas gaining support. Candidates from both Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine were arrested in East Jerusalem in the run-up to the election. The election procedure for citizens of East Jerusalem was to be the same as it was for the 2005 presidential election: they had to go to one of five post offices to cast their votes. The purpose of this exercise was to enable the Zionists to describe this as a postal vote since they do not recognise any Palestinian rights in Jerusalem.

Fatah – squabbling over the crumbs from imperialism

Fatah, which has dominated Palestinian politics since the end of the 1960s, was riven by division in the run-up to the election, principally between

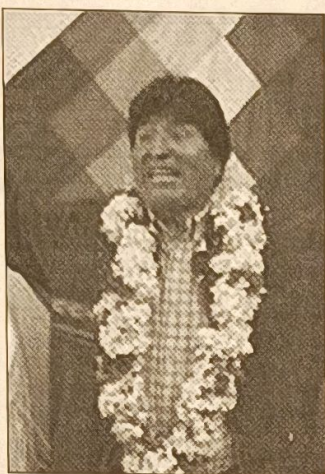
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Welcome...

The neo-liberal counter-revolution that began at the end of the 1970s is being pushed back. Mass resistance to imperialism's brutal exploitation of the world's people and resources is consolidating and creating political shockwaves in the imperialist centres. The most recent period of uncontested US imperialist domination of the world is at an end. Revolutionary resistance is being given political expression in many parts of the world as inter-imperialist rivalries for the control of surplus profits from oppressed nations of the world intensify. The balance of class forces internationally is changing. This issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* looks at recent developments.

The landslide victory of Evo Morales in Bolivia in December reinforces the socialist and anti-imperialist forces throughout Latin America and further undermines US imperialism's hold over the region. That victory has its roots in the anti-imperialist movements of the indigenous peasantry and working class that toppled previous neo-liberal governments. The support of socialist Cuba and revolutionary Venezuela will give added impetus to those forces fighting for revolutionary change (see p4). Political and military power in President Chavez's Venezuela is in the hands of a revolutionary national movement, yet much of the economy, as well as the media, are controlled by Chavez's bourgeois opponents. A situation of dual power exists with the government attempting to transform the economic process, destroy the corrupt old state apparatus and build a socialist state demanded by the working class (see p11).

Cuba continues to defy the expectations of supporters and enemies alike as the complex and fascinating process of building socialism develops. Now that Cuba has survived and gone beyond the devastating conditions inflicted on its people by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the US blockade, there are many new issues to resolve: the relation between the individual and the state, how the wealth of socialist society should be distributed, the mediation of such class antagonisms as still remain in Cuba, and the reversibility or otherwise of the socialist revolution, amongst many other matters facing the Cuban people (see



Evo Morales of Bolivia – reinforces socialist and anti-imperialist forces

p5). Cuba's growing co-operation with Venezuela and now Bolivia, a real internationalism, and its increasing links with the rest of the world through medicine, education and biotechnology are strengthening the influence of anti-imperialist forces internationally.

The remarkable electoral victory of Hamas in the January elections has struck another major blow against imperialism's strategy in the Middle East. It is a massive victory for those who refuse to give up the resistance against the Zionist occupation of their country and a devastating defeat for Fatah and the corrupt Palestinian Authority for openly collaborating with the imperialists and the Zionists and enriching themselves at the expense of the popular masses (see front page and p6).

The Iraqi resistance continues to put pressure on the occupation forces and their Iraqi collaborators. The recent elections have not taken the pressure off the imperialists. Talk of early withdrawal is wishful thinking. US and British imperialism cannot be seen to be defeated in Iraq. A failure in Iraq would have major consequences for US imperialism's global strategy of military domination to sustain its economic and political domination internationally (see p7).

These international developments have created divisions inside the US ruling class. The present gang of 'liars, swindlers, cut-throats, bullies and thieves' who run the government are undermining US imperialist interests throughout the world. With them

the US ruling class has scraped the bottom. It is approaching its final nadir as it exhausts its historical mission, demonstrated by its inability to do anything but delay the inevitable crisis (see p10).

As the imperialist powers desperately search for new sources of surplus profits throughout the world, unprincipled alliances are made and remade as the interests of profit dictate. China is increasingly drawn into this process as it has moved from ally of the Soviet Union, through the Sino-Soviet dispute to Chinese chauvinism. China will be an important factor in shaping the next 50 years and it is important for the socialist movement to understand China's international role (see p8/9).

The intensification of the struggle by the imperialist powers over surplus profits in Africa finds a horrendous expression in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Africa's richest source of minerals. Control of these vast resources is behind the ongoing civil war in which 3.8 million people have so far lost their lives (see p6). The need to destroy imperialism is a matter of life and death for the vast majority of the world's population.

British imperialism directed by the Labour government continues along its increasingly reactionary and repressive path both internationally and in Britain. It keeps 8,500 troops in Iraq, some 13,000 in Ireland protecting British and Unionist interests (see this page), and will soon deploy nearly 6,000 troops in Afghanistan, while being complicit in the kidnap and torture of detainees (p13). In Britain the private sector's role in education, health and housing continues to expand, exacerbating inequality (see p3). Repression directed at the working class continues unabated with Labour's asylum policy (see p16) and its latest Respect Action Plan (see p3).

It was the weakness of the socialist movement in the imperialist countries which allowed the counter-revolution of the 1970s to take off and spread with such devastating consequences. Today that movement is still the weakest and most backward link in the chain of growing worldwide anti-imperialist resistance. The British left movement is a grotesque expression of this. The massive anti-war movement which existed just before the start of the Iraq war has been totally dissipated with the main organisation of the left, the SWP, throwing itself into electoral politics and its members becoming foot soldiers for George Galloway's Respect coalition. The spectacle of Galloway acting the clown in the Celebrity Big Brother house (see p12) shows what a low point this trend has reached.

There is an alternative and the RCG and other anti-imperialist forces are attempting to build it, by totally breaking with the imperialist Labour Party, campaigning on the streets for all imperialist troops out of Iraq and the Middle East, supporting the struggle of Palestinians for self-determination, and campaigning in solidarity with socialist Cuba, revolutionary Venezuela and Bolivia. There is much to be done in Britain fighting the privatisation of the public sector, combating the ever growing assault on our civil liberties and defending the rights of asylum seekers to stay in this country. Now is the time to rebuild the socialist movement in Britain.

Get in touch and join us in the fightback.

Ireland Unionists maintain block on Assembly

PAUL MALLON

With policing set to become the central political issue in the peace process in 2006, the exposure of a British agent in the Sinn Fein leadership in December provided a reminder of who really controls the Six Counties. Neither Sinn Fein's involvement in the running of the police nor a return of the Stormont Assembly will alter the reality that Unionism, backed by British imperialism, rules the north of Ireland

The British spy

On 15 December 2005, Denis Donaldson, a leading member of Sinn Fein for over two decades, admitted to having secretly worked for the RUC/PSNI, Special Branch and British military intelligence throughout that period.

Donaldson had been centrally involved in the so-called 'Stormontgate' debacle in October 2002, when the devolved Stormont Assembly collapsed amidst allegations of a Republican spy-ring. Donaldson, who was head of Sinn Fein's Stormont administration, was then arrested with four others during a high-profile raid on Sinn Fein's offices by hundreds of PSNI officers (see FRFI 170, December 2002/January 2003) and charged with having information useful to terrorists. Donaldson made his announcement only after the police had announced that they were dropping all charges and had warned him that his life was in danger as he was about to be exposed as an informer.

Sinn Fein responded the following day by expelling him from the organisation. Since then it has been engaged in a damage limitation exercise minimising the extent of Donaldson's involvement in the organisation, stressing that his work had been mainly in the electoral arena. However, this merely emphasises the

to restate its refusal to share power with Sinn Fein for the 'foreseeable future'. Instead, the DUP, along with the Ulster Unionist Party and the nationalist SDLP, prompted by minister Peter Hain's threat that Assembly members' salaries would be cut if progress was not made, stated they would accept a return of the Assembly without an inclusive ministerial executive, that is, without Sinn Fein. The UUP proposal is a return of the Stormont Assembly under the control of British ministers until the next scheduled elections in April 2007.

In mid-January Sinn Fein held a pre-Ardfheis (annual convention) conference on policing and justice. The Unionists will be using this issue to wring further concessions from Republicans. Sinn Fein spokesman on policing Gerry Kelly indicated just how far the Republican leadership is prepared to go to placate Unionism. Referring to the forthcoming British government consultation paper on policing, Kelly called on the British government to transfer powers from London to Stormont to help bring about 'sovereignty, accountability and change'. In fact British plans for policing the north are all about stability and normalisation.

At the end of January North Belfast DUP MP Nigel Dodds said Unionists would not accept any devolution proposal on policing and justice powers if it meant the involvement of Sinn Fein in an administration. He said: 'There is absolutely no community confidence in Sinn Fein having anything to do with policing or justice powers.' In FRFI 177, February/March 2004 we wrote that 'The Unionist veto remains firmly at the heart of the northern statelet. The DUP is now setting the political agenda of the north. The pace of any future "progress" will be dependent on the racist bigot Ian Paisley.' This remains the case.

Imperialism is determined to con-



fact that it is precisely this period that has witnessed the Republican Movement's retreat from the revolutionary national struggle towards the very 'electoral work' which underlies the peace process and has led to the disbandment of the IRA.

The Stormont Assembly

On 26 January, British Prime Minister Tony Blair held talks in Dublin with Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to set the agenda for talks on the restoration of the Stormont Assembly. Two days earlier, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) had met with Blair in London

to undermine even those nationalists who are prepared to share power with Unionists. The outing of Donaldson by British intelligence is designed to destabilise the Republican Movement. The next Independent Monitoring Commission report published on 31 January will set the context for the all-party negotiations planned for February intended to end the political impasse. The report will further implicate Republicans in criminality and will provide Unionism with yet another opportunity to veto any possible restoration of Stormont rule in the next period.

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Labour No respect for the working class

ERIC ALLISON

On 10 January, the government announced its much trailed 'Respect Action Plan'. According to the official press release, police and local authorities are to be given 'tough new powers to deal with families who blight communities with unacceptable behaviour'. These powers include 'a new house closure order temporarily sealing properties that are the constant focus of anti-social behaviour' and 'parenting orders where a child's behaviour requires it'. These 'parenting orders' can be applied for either by schools or by local authority housing officers or community officers. There will be 'sanctions' for those who 'refuse help', including fines and withdrawal of benefits.

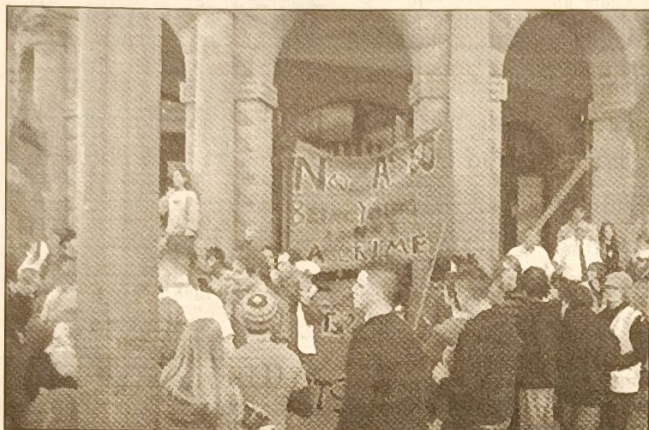
Once again Labour is trying to show how tough it is. One of the slogans that helped propel Blair into power was 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. He's certainly kept to his word on the first part – the prison population has almost doubled since Labour came to power in 1997 – and now, by flexing its muscles in the direction of the under-privileged and their children, New Labour is again showing us just how tough it is.

For, make no mistake, although the action plan occasionally speaks of 'proposals' that will 'provide help and support' for families and support for people 'struggling with the challenge of parenting', by far the bulk of the text is concerned with the punitive measures that will be imposed if this 'help and support' is not accepted.

Not that we needed this new plan to tell us how fixated this government is with punishing the young dispossessed. Not when Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are scattered among the poor like confetti at a wedding. In some cases these orders are issued to kids whose learning difficulties are so severe that they cannot understand the conditions they are supposed to comply with. In one recent case exposed by a *Panorama* documentary, a boy with such problems was arrested for breaching his ASBO because he took part in a five-a-side football match. His order forbade him from associating with more than three people.

ASBOs are issued on the strength of evidence that would not be accepted in a court of law. Hearsay evidence, often from unknown sources, is read out by a council officer, and, in many cases the recipient is only aware of the order being issued when it is actually presented. In other words, people are being tried and sentenced in their absence. In some instances, particularly in Greater Manchester, where the council slavishly follows the New Labour doctrine by issuing more ASBOs than Greater London, the photographs of young children who have been given orders are printed on leaflets which are posted through neighbourhood letter-boxes. Shades of 'wanted' notices in the Wild West.

As if this demonisation of the poor was not enough, we have the spectacle of 'problem families' being evicted because their children have been subject to ASBOs. Let us imagine for a moment that, in such a case, the child has indeed behaved badly: does anyone really believe that the answer lies in putting the family on the streets? Clearly those responsible for home office policy do.



'Being young is not a crime': anti Asbo demonstration in Leeds

'Dispersal Zones' are now the order of the day in many cities, again with Greater Manchester leading the way. In these no-go areas, people can be forcibly dispersed because they are guilty of congregating on the streets. They do not have to be committing a crime, or even causing a nuisance; the fact that they are there clearly implies that they are up to no good.

What has been the response of the media towards this outright attack on the poor? Predictably, the right have welcomed the proposals, but so have parts of the so-called liberal press. Will Hutton, writing in *The Observer*, says that Blair's line on Respect 'deserves better than the buckets of bile poured over him by left and right alike'. Hutton quotes the Chief Constable of Strathclyde, who says that he can identify the houses that will 'incubate the next generation of criminals'. He says that the combination of out-of-control children, desperate poverty cheek-by-jowl with great affluence, the impossibility of even rudimentary success at school and a delinquent peer group are toxic. Amen to that, but why don't the Chief Constable and Hutton suggest that we do something about the affluence instead of giving the poor even more problems?

Just in case there is anyone out there who doesn't believe that this Respect agenda is class-based, consider this: during the reign of this government we have seen the children of the powerful and privileged clearly seen to be behaving badly. From the Prime Minister's son drunk and throwing up in the streets, to Jack Straw's lad procuring drugs and the next-in-line to the throne taking them,

along with dressing up as a Nazi. Did anybody suggest slapping an ASBO on those three, or evicting their families from their homes?

Perhaps that question ought to be asked of the new 'Co-ordinator for Respect', the head of the taskforce which will supervise the whole agenda. Step forward, Louise Casey, who has been chosen for the role on a salary of between £75k and £159k – not the first time that Ms Casey has been chosen as an overlord. In 1992, when she was the Deputy Director of the charity Shelter, she was appointed to head the government's Rough Sleepers' Unit and earned the nickname 'homelessness tsar'. She immediately declared that handing out soup and sleeping bags to those living on the streets was merely perpetuating their misery and began a campaign to stop people giving to the homeless. The number of homeless people now stands at record levels, more than 101,000.

Again demonstrating that it is one law for the rich, in a widely leaked and reported after-dinner speech last year, Louise Casey said: 'I suppose you can't binge drink any more because lots of people have said you can't...I don't know who bloody made that up, it's nonsense...Doing things sober is no way to get things done.' The Respect agenda is in good hands then.

Amidst all the spin words and phrases trotted out in this agenda, one line of sense stands out. 'Respect cannot be learned, purchased or acquired – it can only be earned'. They might have added that respect cannot be 'punished into' people.

Education notes Abolition of the welfare state moves closer

The most significant fact about the Education White Paper to be voted on in March is that it will abolish the right to education for all. Local authorities will lose the responsibility to ensure a school place for all the children in the area; it will be the schools that have the power to accept or reject pupils. If the proposals become law there will be no one to whom parents can appeal if no school offers their child a place.

One of the cornerstones of the post-war construction of the welfare state, the most acclaimed achievement of the British Labour movement, is the 1944 Education Act. This enshrined the right of all children to free secondary education. Local authorities were also made responsible for finding out how many children in their area had special educational needs and providing education for, in the language of the time, 'the blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially hearing, delicate, educationally subnormal, epileptic, maladjusted, physically handicapped and those with speech defects'. All children were given the statutory right to schooling by their local authority. It is this right that is under threat if the new Education White Paper is passed.

Labour rebels are hypocrites

There has been much talk of panic in the ranks of Labour MPs about these proposals. Prescott sniffs about failing to get into grammar school as a youngster and Lord Kinnock condemns the proposals as 'at best a distraction and at worst dangerous'. Yet both these Labour stalwarts consistently supported the increasing pace of privatisation of goods and services in the state sector that has characterised this Labour government since it came to power in 1997.

Previously mesmerised by talk of entrepreneurial skills and corporate marketing, the Labour rebels are perhaps now realising that demand and supply is no way to organise social provision. For though demand is high for good local schools and hospitals, supply is dependent on many factors, including the profitability of the private sector. Poor sick people may go away and die, like the 45 million US citizens who lack medical insurance, but poor youngsters without schools will be a new and destabilising threat.

There is already panic about the

number of school truants which continues to rise despite the government's failed £1 billion anti-truancy campaign, (see FRFI 186). To these numbers will be added thousands of 'excludes'. Individual schools currently have the power to exclude 'undesirable' pupils, those who fail to lift the school up the league tables of exam results. But when each school controls its own admissions, then local authorities will also lose the right and the duty to ensure that excluded pupils are accepted into another school.

Honda, Vodafone and the Church of England

Meanwhile the big players are dividing the spoils of Labour's privatisation agenda. Vodafone UK Foundation, one of Banbury's biggest employers, and Honda Motor Europe, which has a major plant in Swindon, are preparing to purchase academies in their localities. For just £2 million cash per school the government will transfer responsibility to a new governing body and throw in £25 million. The United Learning Trust, chaired by Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury will oversee and run the schools together with the sponsors so that, in effect, big business is bankrolling religious schools.

Around 80 academies are open or in development with another 130 under consideration, but Sir Cyril Taylor of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) has admitted that it is becoming difficult to attract sponsors in areas outside of London. Recently Des Smith, a member of SSAT had to resign after telling a journalist from the *Sunday Times* posing as a potential sponsor that 'the prime minister's office would recommend someone like [the donor] for an OBE, a CBE or, for a donation of £10 million, you could go to the House of Lords'.

The real scandal

The scandal about people on the sex offenders' register being allowed employment in schools has dominated the headlines. It is a debate where everyone lands on the same side, 'the safety of our children'. One scandal hides another child protection scandal. The bigger scandal, the greater offence, is in these White Paper proposals to dismantle the right to education.

Susan Davidson

Defend council housing

BARNABY MITCHELL

The struggle against the privatisation of council housing won several major victories in the run up to Christmas. Several attempts by local councils to blackmail tenants to vote to transfer their homes have been defeated. Despite facing expensive propaganda campaigns that promise much needed improvements and threaten the withholding of investment if tenants say no, local communities and grassroots campaigns have stood firm. Through local campaigning the motives and corruption of local councils and the Labour government have been exposed. Tenants understand that replacing their landlord will result

in higher rents, less secure tenancies, a less accountable landlord and an uncertain future.

In Edinburgh 53% of council tenants voted against attempts to sell off their homes to a housing association. This was one of the biggest sell-off attempts with 23,000 homes affected. The tenants now face the battle to get the direct investment they need from central government to make their homes decent.

In Tower Hamlets in the East End of London, five out of seven estates which were balloted voted to stay with the council. The vote on the future of the Ocean Estate has had to be postponed until summer 2006. It was clear to local people that this was because the mood on the estate was against a sell-off. Tower Hamlets council has named its

privatisation programme 'Housing Choice' – a strange name for a policy which in practice bullies and blackmails council tenants. Roughly one third of the council's housing stock has now been transferred to housing associations.

The campaign to defend council housing is a battle to defend the interests of the working class. In this struggle central government is on the offensive. A report published last year by the local government regeneration agency revealed the tactics being used: as part of plans to transfer properties on the run-down Ocean Estate to a housing association, 'housing partners and community leaders will also work to undermine the aims and integrity of those campaigning against the transfer' (*The Guardian* 3 January 2006). After tenants in Sefton,

Merseyside rejected a sell-off in September 2005, the local council disgracefully re-balloted to get a vote in favour of transfer. In Tower Hamlets Eileen Short, a prominent member of the Defend Council Housing Campaign, has been sacked from her job in the council after 14 years because of her role in defeating its privatisation programme. Faced with the threat of communities standing up for their rights, the government is fighting dirty.

Tower Hamlets suffers some of the worst housing conditions in Britain, with the worst overcrowding in the UK and 20,000 people on the housing waiting list. The housing stock has been deliberately run down to force through stock transfer but the tenants still chose the council. Working class people understand that the fragmentation and destruction of council housing is an attack on their rights.

Bolivia: the masses will decide

Evo Morales' landslide victory in the Bolivian presidential elections represents a significant set-back both for the ruling class and for imperialist interests in the country, and indeed across Latin America. Although some on the left have drawn pessimistic conclusions on the future from Morales' ambivalent record in relation to the mass struggles of the past few years, it is the actions of the Bolivian masses that will be the deciding factor, together with the international support they receive, particularly from socialist Cuba and revolutionary Venezuela. **ROBERT CLOUGH** reports.

The scale of Morales' victory was extraordinary. Opinion polls in the months leading up to the election on 18 December placed him in the lead, but with only about 35% of the vote, perhaps 5% ahead of his right-wing opponent, former World Bank economist Jorge Quiroga who had been a senior member of the government which privatised the Cochabamba water supplies in 1999. In the end Morales received 53.7% of the valid votes against Quiroga's 28.6%. Even this figure masked the true extent of Morales' support. Although there was an exceptional 85% turnout, the registered electorate numbered fewer than 3.7 million: up to 1.5 million indigenous people and therefore Morales' supporters, were prevented from registering. In the poorer west of the country, La Paz, Morales won 66%, 62.6% in Oruro, and 64.8% in Cochabamba. In the richer east, Quiroga received the greater support: 45.3% versus 31.6% in Tarija, and 41.8% versus 33.2% in Santa Cruz. Despite a redistribution of seats favouring the east, Morales' Movement for Socialism (MAS) swept the board in congressional elections, winning an absolute majority in the lower house (72 out of 130 seats), and 12 out of 27 seats in the upper house.

The May-June 2005 struggle

The roots of Morales' victory lay in the near-insurrectionary movement which toppled President Mesa at the beginning of June 2005. Tired of Mesa's and Congress's refusal to nationalise Bolivia's oil and gas industry, the anti-imperialist movements of the indigenous peasantry and working class mobilised in huge demonstrations throughout the country during May and blockaded roads connecting the principle population centres. La Paz, the capital, was under siege as hundreds of thousands assembled in the centre on an almost daily basis. On 6 June Mesa submitted his resignation. Congress fled to Sucre to appoint a replacement; under the constitution, it would have to consider senate leader Hernando Vaca Díez, an extreme right-winger from Santa Cruz. Tens of thousands of demonstrators followed the congressional deputies: on 8 June the first protester, a miner, was killed. The situation was now completely out of the control of the Bolivian ruling class: in desperation it turned to Morales who secured a deal whereby third choice Eduardo Rodríguez, head of the supreme court, was sworn in as interim president until elections were held under the constitution within six months.

Weeks of blockades and demonstrations had resulted in a partial victory: Mesa had gone, and the right-wing defeated. But at that point the anti-imperialist movements were unable to agree a way forward. The working class and peasantry demobilised as

a debate opened up on whether or not to participate in the elections, or whether to press for the immediate convocation of a constituent assembly. The turning point was Morales' agreement to campaign for the nationalisation of oil and gas resources; hitherto he had opposed it, calling instead for the multinationals to pay increased royalties and taxes. With this as a cornerstone of his platform along with the call for a constituent assembly, most of the anti-imperialist workers' and peasant organisations gave him their support.

and Santa Cruz, capable of treating 50,000 Bolivians. Challenging imperialist charges that Cuba was interfering in Bolivian politics, Fidel Castro asked 'Will the US government be offended if Cuba helps increase the life expectancy of Bolivians? Will they be offended if we help reduce infant mortality?' Morales echoed this point by asserting that 'these agreements we have signed are for life, for humanity, they are not a crime, even though they might be for the United States.' The political and ideological effect of these agreements cannot be underestimated:

Evo Morales is greeted by supporters in Cochabamba



The ruling class in Bolivia is once again on the defensive, as are its imperialist allies. US imperialism no longer has the power to determine the political process within the country: its coca eradication policy has completely failed. The loss of US domination is not just political, however, but economic as well: for instance, the major investors in Bolivia's gas and oil industry are Spain's Repsol and Brazil's Petrobras, ahead of both Britain's BG Gas and US companies such as Enron. US imperialism's efforts to retrieve both its political and economic position through treaties such as ALCA have yet to meet with any significant success. Its failure to quell resistance in Afghanistan and Iraq hamstringing it further.

The consequence is that there is increasing political space opening up for governments in Latin America to pursue an independent course. These conditions have also greatly increased the political influence of both Cuba and Venezuela. Recognition of this led Morales to visit both countries within a few days of his election. On 30 December, he concluded an agreement with Cuba, the key elements of which are a 30-month literacy campaign starting in July; the establishment of 5,000 scholarships for Bolivians to train as doctors and other specialists in Cuba; and the extension of a Cuban eye clinic in La Paz to Cochabamba

for the impoverished people of Bolivia they represent a very practical example of socialist solidarity. For Cuba it means breaking down its isolation and strengthening its position against imperialism.

On 3 January, Morales met President Chavez who promised that Venezuela would supply Bolivia's entire diesel fuel needs of 150,000 barrels a month, a deal worth \$180m annually. However, Bolivia would not need to pay cash, but in kind through agricultural exports. In addition Venezuela will donate \$30m for social projects. Furthermore, Venezuela will open offices of its state-owned companies in Bolivia, including PDVSA, the oil company, BIV, its main industrial bank, and Bades, its development bank. Such steps will limit the impact of economic sanctions that oil and gas companies that are faced with nationalisation could seek to impose on Bolivia. As Chavez himself said, 'we can't lose a day in supporting Bolivia in any way we can'.

Within Bolivia itself Morales faces a number of challenges. First, there is the question of nationalisation of the oil and gas industries. The mass of the Bolivian people will not accept delay. Yet the oil and gas monopolies and their allies, the ruling class based especially in Santa Cruz, will be determined to frustrate such a move. Shortly after the election Morales

went to Santa Cruz to tell local leaders 'I do not want to harm anybody, I do not want to expropriate or confiscate any assets. I want to learn from the businessmen', promising to speed up the development of a privatised mining project in El Mutun which contains 70% of the world's known reserves of manganese. On the other hand, he has said he would nationalise the country's national resources, and speaking of the existing oil and gas contracts said 'Many of these contracts signed by various governments are illegal and unconstitutional. It is not possible that our natural resources continue to be looted, exploited illegally, and as the lawyers say, these contracts are legally void and must be adjusted.' Prior to privatisation in 1997, the nationalised oil company YPFB contributed \$350-400m annually to Bolivian state coffers; in 2005, foreign companies contributed only \$110m during a time when proven gas reserves had quadrupled.

Second, there is the constituent assembly which is scheduled for August 2006. Along with nationalisation, its convocation has been a central demand of the anti-imperialist workers' and peasant organisations. The political institutions in Bolivia are irredeemably racist. In a country where 65% of the population are indigenous,

control over 25 million hectares of land, while two million campesinos have five million hectares. Internationally, the average wealth discrepancy between the richest 20% of the population and poorest 20% is 30:1; in Bolivia it is 90:1. In Santa Cruz and Tarija, state grants of land under existing agrarian reform laws in the 1970s were allocated to cronies of the then president, Hugo Banzer. Some individuals and families received grants in excess of 100,000 hectares. However, these lands were not unoccupied: indigenous people lived there. Since then there have been campaigns uniting indigenous people and poor settlers moving in from the west; in 2001-02 10 campesinos were murdered in land settlement campaigns. The struggle has continued with demonstrators being attacked viciously by fascists in Santa Cruz city during May 2005.

Lastly there is the coca eradication campaign that the US has imposed on the country as a precondition for \$150m annual aid. Morales came to national prominence as a leader of the coca growers in the 1990s, and he has always made it clear that he will stop the eradication campaign which impoverished many coca growers unable to make a living out of substitute crops. This will mean that the government will ask US anti-narcotics forces which have been in the country since the 1980s to leave. A further \$598m in aid is at stake from the US Millennium Challenge Account, which the US gives to those countries which it regards as on the right development path.

In a recent *Counterpunch* article (4 January 2006), James Petras paints a very pessimistic picture of the outcome of the Morales government. Starting with Morales' equivocal record during the great struggles of the last three years: his support for Mesa in 2003 and for the gas referendum in 2004, his attempts to demobilise the struggle in March 2005, and then to cut a deal in June to defuse the crisis, Petras argues that Morales will not offer a serious challenge to neo-liberalism. However, there is no mention of the role of the anti-imperialist workers' and peasant organisations and the forces they organise. In December 2005, these came together in the first Congress of the National Front for the Defence of Water and Basic Human Services. It included the Cochabamba Water Co-ordinating Committee and El Alto FEJUVE. As the leader of the struggle against water privatisation in Cochabamba Oscar Oliveira said, 'we are creating a movement, a non-partisan social-political front that addresses the most vital needs of the people through a profound change in power relations, social relations'. Petras also neglects to consider the increasingly important role that Cuba and Venezuela are play-



Poor Aymara Indians queuing to vote in El Alto

ally businessmen who use their political influence to further their financial interests. The anti-imperialist organisations see the constituent assembly as a vehicle for establishing a popular democracy; what however has not been agreed is on what basis it should be convened, and with what forms of representation.

Third, there is the land question. According to the October 2005 United Nations report, 100 families in Bolivia

are pushing forward a process that is taking place across the whole of Latin America. An increasing assertion of political and economic independence is creating conditions where the masses can find the way to solve the problems of poverty and decay that are the legacy of neo-liberalism and imperialist domination. Above all, whatever Morales' intentions might be, the future of the struggle lies with the popular organisations of Bolivia. ■

Cuba: stirring society at its roots

On 1 January 2006, Cubans celebrated the 47th anniversary of the Revolution and the dawn of the Year of the Energy Revolution in Cuba. This signifies a major state initiative to save and rationalise the use of energy resources: to install efficient new power generators, to experiment with renewable energy and to replace old durable goods with energy saving equipment – light bulbs, refrigerators, televisions, pressure cookers, kettles, electrical hobs and microwaves. Within a short period, Cuba's capacity for electricity generation will be four times its needs. From Havana, **HELEN YAFFE** reports.

However, this 'revolution' is also the culmination of many processes ongoing in Cuba since the initiation of the Battle of Ideas in 2000, which involved an intensely critical examination of society, resulting in increased emphasis on education, health and culture as key tenets in a humane socialist society. The campaign also ties together the de-dollarisation process and centralisation of financial resources introduced in November and December 2004 (FRFI 182 & 183), the free distribution of new cooking equipment announced in spring 2005, the salary and pension increases of summer and winter 2005, the increase in ration quotas, the beneficial trade deals with China, Canada and Brazil, among others, cooperation with Venezuela through the ALBA treaty and increasing links, via medicine and education, with the rest of the world.

There is a complex, multifaceted and fascinating process underway in Cuba. Revolution is a process and a socialist society must be self-consciously constructed by those who live within it. There are many issues to resolve: the balance of responsibility for provision between the individual and the state; how such class antagonisms as remain under socialism are mediated; ensuring discipline with resources and at work; how the wealth of socialist society should be distributed; how much control and centralisation is appropriate; whether the socialist revolution is reversible. These questions are being addressed in Cuba in the face of a brutal blockade and terrorist attacks.

On 17 November, President Fidel Castro skilfully drew all these issues together in an important speech to university student leaders in Havana, sparking a national debate via the media, in workplaces, in homes, in the streets and in the National Assembly of People's Power, with 609 delegates elected from the Cuban population. Castro declared that the US is waiting for him to die to overthrow Cuban socialism. For the first time he publicly questioned the future of the Revolution in Cuba. 'I ask you all, without exception, to reflect on it: Can the revolutionary process be irreversible, or not? Which are the ideas or the degree of conscience that would make the reversal of the revolutionary process impossible? When those who were the forerunners, the veterans, start disappearing and making room for the new generations of leaders, what will be done and how will it be accomplished? After all, we have been witnesses to many errors, and we didn't notice them.' Castro declared

goods generated widespread pilfering of state resources. This problem has always existed under socialism, as Castro pointed out, 'don't think for a moment that stealing resources and materials is just a present-day illness, nor is it an exclusive phenomenon of the Special Period. The Special Period aggravated it, because in this period we saw the growth of much inequality and certain people were able to accumulate a lot of money'.

In a speech to the National Assembly on 23 December, Cuba's Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque referred to the Cuban youth, some three million, who have reached adulthood or adolescence during 15 years of the Special Period. They 'have grown up in a society in which these vices developed, these negative tendencies that comrade Fidel denounced in the university; they didn't grow up in a country in which each one receives according to his work, they have known the epoch in which individual-

constitute the only real threat to the Cuban Revolution: wastage, corruption and thieving. Their efforts are also the precondition to getting the energy revolution underway.

Social workers and the 'energy revolution'

On 10 October 2005, it was agreed to place social workers in petrol stations to monitor fuel consumption. The social workers decided their own salary and discussed the task at a conference with Castro. Their average age is 18 and 72% of them are women. The aim is twofold. Firstly, to stop the stealing of petrol for sale in the informal market. This will increase state resources and end the privileges of the 'new rich' who buy subsidised stolen fuel. Secondly, they will analyse the fuel distribution system, its vulnerability to natural disasters, such as hurricanes or military attack from the US.

By 5 December social workers were operating in every petrol station

Social workers are also leading the campaign to rationalise energy consumption. With rucksacks full of energy-saving light bulbs, they visited every home, replacing conventional bulbs for free and making inventories of electrical equipment. There is overwhelming support and enthusiasm for their work from the general population.

State subsidy for fuel is so high that bills are negligible. Castro told university students: 'Simply stated electricity is a gift, and I can prove it to you', and he did prove it with statistics and examples. 'No one knows the cost of electricity, no one knows the cost of petrol, no one knows its market value.'

The world's oil and gas resources are due to start running out within 30 years. As a socialist country, organised for the interests of the majority, not for profit, Cuba is in a unique position in the world to begin to tackle this problem today. The present distribution of energy saving equipment, mostly bought from China, is being monitored and assessed in pilot projects. Gas-guzzling vehicles are being replaced. There is also research into alternative energy, wind and solar power, and new technology which uses oilfield gas to boil water to produce electricity, highly efficient and less environmentally harmful.

Cuba is replacing its huge old inefficient power stations, bought from the Soviet Bloc, with small modern generators placed throughout the island. This improves national security, and reduces the potential for hurricane damage. The small generators, bought in secret to avoid machinations by the US, will provide four times more power. 80% will be installed by mid-2006.

Such investments have been possible because of substantial economic growth in recent years, rising to an astounding 11.9% in 2005. The investments will increase savings, which will increase national wealth for further investments. Castro estimates that Cuba can save two-thirds of its current energy consumption, more than US\$1.5 billion a year, which is 25 billion Cuban pesos, nearly double the sum of Cuban wages. The total cost of Cuba's higher education system is just 20% of what can be recouped by the energy revolution underway.

With this accumulation of wealth, salaries will be significantly increased and prices reduced as production increases, to achieve what Castro called, 'the dream of everyone being able to live on their salary or on their adequate pension'. There will be no need for the ration book, which will be removed, undermining the parasitic layer in Cuban society, those who can work but won't. The state will also reduce its subsidy on energy consumption, inducing awareness of consumption levels and saving. 'Subsidies and free services will be considered only in essentials. Medical services will be free, so will education and the like. Housing will not be free. Maybe there will be some subsidy' announced Castro.

'Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society – after deductions have been made – exactly what he gives to it'. (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*)

Novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez has said: 'The explanation of Cuba is that Fidel is at the same time the head of government and the leader of the opposition.' Still dressed in fatigues, Castro has declared war on 'parasites', 'the dirty little crooks selling gasoline to the new rich' and on the Bush administration, a 'gang of shit-eaters (comerierdas) who don't deserve any respect'. As Castro himself said, the Revolution is confident in its ability to tackle these enemies from within and without. 'We invite everyone to take part in a great battle, it's not just a fuel and electricity battle, it's a battle against larceny, against all types of theft, anywhere in the world.'



Mass demonstration against US imperialism in Havana, 24 January 2006

that while the Revolution could not be overthrown by imperialism: 'This country can self-destruct; this Revolution can destroy itself, but they can never destroy us; we can destroy ourselves and it would be our fault.'

War on corruption and the 'new rich'

In 1989/90 the Soviet Bloc collapsed. Cuba lost 85% of its trade and GDP fell 35% over four years. In the following years of austerity and isolation, the Special Period, measures were introduced to defend the gains of the Revolution which permitted a degree of market enterprise to provide scarce goods and accumulate hard currency. The dollar was introduced and tourism became a mainstay of the economy.

The Revolution survived the economic crisis, but the Special Period had negative social and political effects. Inequalities grew as access to dollars, via tourists, remittances or joint ventures with foreign companies, created a 'new rich'. A small percentage of the population benefited from the free welfare and education provision while refusing to contribute anything to society. Castro recognised that 'there are several dozens of thousands of parasites who produce nothing'. Low salaries and scarce material

istic tendencies have developed in our country, every man for himself'.

Capitalism uses fear of unemployment to control workers. Under socialism, only a highly developed collective consciousness can prevent self-interest jeopardising the social project. Creating this consciousness is the challenge of the present 'revolution' in Cuba.

Battle of Ideas

Following the massive national and international mobilisation to return the kidnapped child Elian Gonzalez to Cuba from Miami in 2000, the Revolution developed a new dynamic: the Battle of Ideas. This involves incorporating the Cuban masses into practical programmes to improve their own quality of life. Since 2000, there have been nearly 7,000 projects: constructing schools, adult education courses, expanding airports, building new medical and therapeutic facilities, video and computer clubs and, vitally important, the training of 28,000 social workers, many of whom were previously disaffected teenagers neither at school nor employed (see FRFI 187). Such has been the success and enthusiasm of the social workers that they have now been entrusted a central role in combating the vices which

in the island. Next they were sent to the refineries and to accompany fuel distribution trucks. The results have been rapid and tangible. 'We started in Pinar del Rio to ascertain what was happening in the gas stations that sell gas in dollars. We soon discovered that there was as much gas being stolen as sold', revealed Castro. Referring to the refinery trucks, he said the social workers 'have discovered private petrol stations supplied by these trucks'.

The social workers have been joined by university students and members of mass organisations, such as the Union of Young Communists, overseeing operations in numerous state enterprises. There will also be an end to the use of state vehicles and fuel for personal use. New devices will be installed on state vehicles to reveal if drivers are using these resources for personal trips. The intention is not to pursue culprits but to stop this corrosive trend and consequently increase the national wealth which can then be distributed fairly. In the National Assembly, the head of the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC) revealed that hundreds of workers assemblies had already held gritty debates about these issues. This revolution is stirring society at its roots.

Hamas wins Palestinian elections



continued from page 1

the 'old guard' associated with Oslo and Arafat, and the 'new guard' including the leadership of the Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AMB) which has played a leading role in both the first and second Intifadas. The 'old guard', which had controlled the PA since its inception was determined to continue excluding the 'new guard' and retain its access to wealth and privilege.

Indicative of this was Fatah internal elections last November to agree their candidates. The 'old guard' largely ignored the results and placed itself at the head of the Fatah election list. This led in early December to a split in Fatah with rival election lists being presented. One, put forward by the 'new guard' and calling itself the Future Bloc, had Marwan Barghout at its head, and included his wife and Mohammed Dahlan, the former PA Civil Affairs Minister. The official Fatah list put forward by Abbas also opportunistically had Barghout at its head. The Future Bloc's inclusion of Dahlan, a millionaire widely accused of corruption, clearly showed that there was no fundamental class difference between the two sides, and that the dispute was solely over which set of individuals would get access to the PA's finances. Although Fatah eventually presented a unified list, in many places Fatah members who did not make the official lists stood as independents. The resultant split in the Fatah vote helped Hamas to its overwhelming victory, particularly in the regional seats.

The squabbles between the factions continued throughout the election campaign. Sections of AMB occupied offices of the Central Election Commission in Gaza calling for the elections to be cancelled, as their representatives had not been put on the national Fatah list. In the West Bank the AMB in Nablus threatened to disrupt and stop the voting: 'Neither the PA, Fatah, nor Hamas has done anything for the Palestinian people as we witness daily Israeli occupation forces incursions and assassinations, without anyone providing protection to the Palestinian people, so on what grounds are we holding the elections?' asked Ala Sanakra, leader of the AMB in Nablus.

Hamas's political strategy

For Hamas the elections provided an opportunity to follow up its success in the municipal election and gain a level of national representation that reflected its support on the ground.

Hamas is clearly evolving and it adapted its strategy and political programme to maximise its electoral chances. For instance, it suspended military attacks on Israel during the election period. All the rocket strikes

on Israel from Gaza during this time were carried out by Islamic Jihad, AMB and the Popular Resistance Committees. This was a complete change from September when Hamas was in the forefront of such attacks. According to one Hamas candidate, 'the policy is to maintain the armed struggle but it is not our first priority. We know that first of all we have to put more effort into resolving the internal problems, dealing with corruption, blackmail, and chaos. This is our priority because if we change the situation for the Palestinians it will make our course stronger...Hamas is looking to establish a new political strategy, in which all Palestinian groups will participate, not just dominated by Fatah. We will discuss the negotiation strategy, how can we run the conflict with Israel but by different means.' (*The Guardian* 12 January)

Another Hamas candidate, Aziz Dweik, from the West Bank city of Al Khalil (Hebron), said Hamas had no choice but to moderate its political language: 'Eventually we will have to distinguish between the ideological and the political'. He added Hamas recognised the need to show 'political responsibility' and 'moderation' once it reached parliament. When it was clear that Hamas had an overwhelm-

ing victory Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh told the BBC 'don't be afraid, Hamas is an aware and mature movement...which is politically open in the Palestinian...and the international arena.'

The future

Hamas and the Palestinian people are now under renewed pressure to 'win international acceptance' – that is, to capitulate. In imperialism's world, where aggressors become victims and victims aggressors, US, British and Israeli politicians queue up to condemn Hamas as terrorists whilst ignoring the root cause of the violence – Zionist occupation. The US intends to suspend \$400m aid; EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana says that Europe will also halt hundreds of millions of dollars in aid unless Hamas recognises Israel's right to exist. With Abbas isolated and his Fatah organisation disintegrating, imperialism has lost the principal vehicle for representing its interests amongst the Palestinian people. That this has coincided with Sharon's incapacitation merely compounds its problems. As the Palestinian people stand against their persecutors, we need to intensify our solidarity work in this country. *Victory to the Palestinian people!*

Israeli repression

A report put out by the Palestinian National Information Centre on 16 January showed that since the Palestinian Resistance agreed to the calm-down at Sharm el-Sheik on 8 February 2005, Zionist forces had:

- killed 168 Palestinians
- wounded 1,199
- arrested 3,998
- erected 4,538 roadblocks
- stolen 35,344 dunums of land (9,000 acres).



On 28 December 2005 Israel declared the setting up of a buffer zone inside Gaza along its northern border with Israel. The zone extends 3.5km into what is supposed to be Palestinian territory and stretches from the Mediterranean Sea past the Erez border crossing. Although it is home to some 600 people, the area is now subject to regular artillery shelling and air strikes as the Israelis attempt to deter rocket attacks. On 31 December two Palestinians sat in a field 2km from the northern border were killed by Israeli tank shells, and a third severely injured.

Congo Imperialists plunder gold

The subsoil of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire) is so gorged with minerals that it is Africa's richest country. DRC has the world's largest deposits of copper, cobalt, coltan and cadmium, as well as chrome, timber, cassiterite, rubber, oil, uranium, germanium, diamonds and gold. Mongbwalu, capital of the north-eastern Ituri district, contains Africa's largest gold seam. Control over these vast resources, not 'ethnic rivalry', is behind the civil war which started in 1998 soon after the US and British-backed dictator Mobutu died, and which has cost over 3.8 million lives, mostly from starvation and disease.

Looting the gold

Every month, hundreds of kilograms of gold are extracted from the mines around Mongbwalu, taken illegally to neighbouring Uganda and then flown to Europe, usually to Metalor Technologies in Switzerland, a leading European dealer in precious metals. (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 2005). DRC ministers are directly involved in the smuggling, with stolen wealth, worth millions of dollars, stored in offshore bank accounts. In 2003, although local Ugandan gold production was worth \$23,000, gold exports were worth \$45 billion. Gold is Uganda's second biggest export after coffee.

The gold smuggling is controlled by the Ugandan-armed militia, the Nationalist and Integrationist Front (NFI), which takes a percentage and a dollar a day from the workers. NFI is responsible for some of the worst atrocities in DRC, including child abduction, rape and torture. In June 2005, Human Rights Watch revealed that the British company AngloGold Ashanti made payments to NFI, and gave it 'meaningful financial and logistical support'. This gave AngloGold Ashanti access to the gold-mining concessions in the north-east. AngloGold Ashanti, the world's second biggest gold producer, with sales of about \$2 billion and profits of \$10 million in 2004, is part of the international mining conglomerate Anglo American, controlled by the apartheid-supporting Oppenheimer 'dynasty'.

Looting the coltan

Coltan (short for columbite-tantalum) is a rare precious ore found only in DRC and Australia, and is a key component in nuclear reactors and small electronic devices, such as mobile phones, pagers, laptop computers, etc. With US backing, Rwanda invaded DRC three times in 1996, 1998 and 2004, ostensibly to look for Interahamwe rebels responsible for the 1994 genocide. Once in eastern DRC they began looting diamonds and coltan instead. Tonnes of precious metals were flown to the capital, Kigali, each week and exported to Europe and China via routes in Mozambique, South Africa and Thailand. Rwanda made \$20 million a month between 1999-2000 from coltan sales, despite having no coltan deposits.

Burundi and Uganda have also been behind the coltan and diamond plunder, using either their armies or trained militia, many of them children. After signing worthless peace agreements in 1999 and 2003, the invaders officially withdrew their armies, but left behind their militia to continue the pillaging. Rwandan and Ugandan troops and militia are responsible for killing, raping and torturing people in north and south Kivu and Maniema Provinces. In some places, the Rwandan army has actually formed alliances with the Interahamwe rebels in order to control the mines.

The role of the imperialists

Behind the pillage lie the arms, train-



DRC diamond mine

ing and political support of Britain, Belgium, France and the US in particular. Soon after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, it was revealed that France had armed and trained senior figures who directed some of the massacres. According to a UN Security Council report in October 2002, high level political, military and business networks were stealing DRC's gold, timber, coltan and diamonds, and had transferred at least \$5 billion of assets from the state mining sector to private western companies, including 18 British firms such as Anglo American, DeBeers and Barclays Bank, as well as US, Belgian, Canadian, Swiss and German firms (*The Observer*, 6 February 2005). A more critical report in 2003 was suppressed.

Both Rwanda and Uganda are heavily dependent on western 'aid'; for example 52% of Uganda's national budget comes from EU countries. Uganda is a useful proxy state for US imperialist interests in the resource-rich region. The US has a permanent military base in northern Uganda, from which it chases 'Al Qaida terrorists' and the Sudan-based, Christian fundamentalist Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), itself set up by the US. The LRA have now entered DRC to escape Ugandan forces in southern Sudan. Uganda and DRC have agreed joint operations against the LRA inside DRC, threatening a wider conflagration.

The illegal invasion of DRC by Uganda and Rwanda in 1998 had the backing and support of the US and Britain. Large quantities of arms were transferred to Rwanda via eastern Europe from Israel, Britain and the US. These arms ended up in the hands of 'rebels' in eastern DRC (*The Guardian*, 5 July 2005). Britain's arms sales to Africa neared £1 billion in 2004.

A token UN observer mission, MONUC, set up in 1999, is confined to barracks and restricted to a few patrols. It ignores the gold smuggling and has admitted not knowing what is going on in the mines. Britain, France, Belgium and the US have blocked attempts to strengthen the 15,500 force (3,300 are civilians, observers or volunteers), insisting instead on targeted sanctions, useless arms embargoes and elections to legitimise the transition government of Joseph Kabila, which has western backing, having accepted IMF 'reforms'.

Charles Chinweizu

Iraq: no end to resistance

The run-up to Christmas saw the usual 'morale-boosting' visits to Iraq from imperialist politicians, happy to pose alongside the machines of war that terrorise the Iraqi people and the soldiers they send to die.

JIM CRAVEN reports.

Blair, Rumsfeld and Cheney all went and grinned and gave upbeat messages about troops coming home in 2006 and Iraqi elections defeating the insurgents. In the United States President Bush even managed to raise his popularity rating a couple of points from October's all-time low with a series of flag-waving speeches. At the end of November, he told cadets at the US Naval Academy: 'Our strategy in Iraq is clear...I will settle for nothing less than complete victory'. Bush claimed that 120 Iraqi army and police battalions were now ready to fight on their own and another 80 with US support. The Iraqi National Security Adviser, Muaffah Al Rubbaie, followed this up by claiming that Iraqi forces were ready to take control of 14 out of 18 provinces, that 30,000 occupation troops would be withdrawn in the first half of 2006 and the remainder by the end of 2007. This optimistic assessment, devised to reassure the Iraqi electorate that an end to the occupation was in sight, was somewhat undermined when the *Los Angeles Times* revealed that the US forces had been paying the Iraqi press to pass off their propaganda as unbiased Iraqi accounts. A few days later Iraqi Vice-President Ghazi Al Yawer admitted that the training of Iraqi security forces was not gaining any momentum.

The cost of war grows

The reality on the ground in Iraq is very different from the US propaganda. According to the Brookings Institute, attacks by the Iraqi Resistance surged from 45 per day last March to 100 per day by October. In the same period the average number of US troops killed each week rose from 12 to 20. By the end of 2006 over 2,300 occupying troops had been killed, including 98 British soldiers, and over 16,000 troops had been wounded in action. Troops from Ukraine, Bulgaria and Norway all pulled out in December, leaving even more pressure on those from the United States and Britain, although those from Poland reversed their earlier decision to leave. The total cost of waging the war so far is around \$250 billion, enough to ensure food, water, shelter, health and education for half the world's poor. Nobel laureate and economist Joseph Stiglitz has estimated that, even if occupation forces were to withdraw gradually over the next five years, the final budgetary cost of the war to the United States alone would be between \$750 billion and \$1,184 billion and the total economic cost as much as \$1,854 billion.

The truth is the imperialists have no idea how they are going to extricate themselves from the quagmire. In a CBS/NY Times poll in December, 59% disapproved of how Bush was handling the occupation of Iraq and 70% believed he had no clear plan for withdrawal. A US government document published at the end of last year entitled 'National Strategy for Victory

in Iraq' had no new ideas other than to stay the course. That they certainly will try to do no matter what the costs, for US and British imperialism cannot afford to admit defeat in Iraq. As US Vice-President Dick Cheney pointed out, failure in Iraq 'would have major consequences for American security and interests in the region' – not only in the region, for it would be a major blow to the US global strategy of military domination to secure economic and political supremacy.

Resistance grows in Middle East

Other challenges to US hegemony in the Middle East are adding to the imperialists' worries. In Afghanistan the resistance to imperialist occupation has gathered momentum in the past few months. Resurgent Taliban fighters now control much of the country. Altogether more than 1,600 people were killed last year and the death rate is rising. In mid-January at least 28 people, including five Afghan soldiers, were killed in three separate incidents. Bombing raids by occupying forces killed at least another 26 people. An already overstretched British army is scheduled to commit a further 3,400 troops there this year. On 13 January, near the Afghan border, at least 18 Pakistani villagers, including women and children, were murdered by a US drone. It was supposedly targeting Ayman Al Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's second-in-command but he was not there. The incident provoked fresh tensions with the Pakistan government, an important new ally of the US in the region.

In Iran the government has defied threats from the imperialist countries and restarted its nuclear programme. The Labour government, as so often taking a lead in imperialist aggression, called a conference in London of the US and European imperialist nations to agree a joint plan to make Iran halt their programme or be condemned by the UN Security Council. If Iran does not comply the imperialists are threatening sanctions. Both the United States and Israel have implied military action may be taken against Iran but the Iranians remain defiant.

The imperialists, led by the United States and France, are also mounting pressure on Syria over the assassination of the Lebanese prime minister, allegedly at the hands of Syrian agents. A UN investigation into the killing is underway. The imperialists are looking for any lack of compliance by the Syrians as an excuse for further action against the country but the Syrians are not backing down.

Occupation creates more suffering for Iraqi people

In Iraq itself a poll found over 80% of the population are 'strongly opposed' to the occupation. Two-thirds of Iraqis said they feel less secure since the invasion than they did before. News footage broadcast in December showed some of the 20,000 mercenaries on whom the occupying forces rely driv-



British troops on the streets in Iraq: using well-tried counter-insurgency tactics first used in Ireland and elsewhere

ing through the streets, shooting at random at passing Iraqi civilians. Iraq Body Count estimates that between 27,000 and 30,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed due to the occupation alone. No one knows the total number of Iraqis killed since the war began but estimates from the Red Cross and others put it at between 80,000 and 100,000. Many of those Iraqis who could afford to do so have left the country. Some 400,000 now live in Jordan with thousands of others in Syria and the Gulf States. Poor Iraqis must stay and suffer. Around 40% are unemployed. 8% of Iraqi children suffer from acute malnutrition. Over two-thirds of Iraqi homes have no functioning sewage system. Electricity supplies operate at just 63% of demand. Rich nations who promised \$13.6 billion for reconstruction have so far given less than 5%. The World Bank estimates the total cost of reconstruction to be \$36 billion. Only around two thirds of the reconstruction projects planned by the United States have been started. More than 400 contractors have been killed. Corruption is rife. Robert Stein former comptroller of the Coalition Provisional Authority together with other officials has been charged with accepting bribes and kick-backs worth up to \$200,000 a month.

Iraq has had to spend most of its investment budget importing oil because its refineries are in such a mess. Oil production barely reaches two million barrels per day compared with 2.5 million before the war. It sank to 1.2 million last November. The southern oilfields are being driven so hard that they risk being permanently damaged. The Iraqi oil industry desperately needs investment but even the biggest multinationals such as Exxon and BP are holding back until security improves, a legal framework is established and doubts about the unity of the country are settled. When they eventually move in they will expect very favourable terms. The oil industry monitoring organisation Platform estimates Iraq will lose \$194 billion in such deals.

Government death squads assist occupation

Since the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), became the largest party in the interim government and took over Iraq's inte-

rior ministry, the SCIRI-backed Badr militia has dominated the Iraqi police. The militia has carried out waves of murder, abductions and torture, particularly against the Sunni population. Izzat Al Shahbandar of the Shia Iraqi Accordance Movement accused the Iraqi government of exacerbating violence by colluding with the militias. The defence team in Saddam Hussein's trial have repeatedly complained about their lack of personal safety but refused offers of security from the Iraqi government saying: 'It is the interior ministry that has offered to provide us with protection against these attacks, but it is the ministry itself that is planning the killings.' Judge Rizzar Amin, who was leading the trial has resigned following threats to his life and accusations from Shia groups that he was being too lenient. Former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said human rights abuse was as bad as under Saddam's rule with 'death squads' linked to the government carrying out extra-judicial killings. Though no doubt correct, Allawi can carry little moral authority since it was he who assented to the massacres in Fallujah and Najaf by the occupying forces.

The imperialist forces have contradictory attitudes to this sectarian violence. On the one hand allowing the Shia death squads to terrorise anyone who dares to resist the occupation and encouraging sectarian violence; to keep the population divided is a well-tried counter-insurgency tactic as used by the British in Ireland and elsewhere. On the other hand they do not want sectarianism to result in the break-up of Iraq with an independent Kurdish state that would provoke a Turkish invasion, and a separate Shia state that would create a close ally for Iran.

Elections bring no relief for imperialists

Many of the Iraqi groups most prominent in the Resistance movement took part in the 15 December elections. Only the Association of Muslim scholars opposed the elections. The Islamic Army in Iraq called on the Resistance not to attack polling stations and voting went off without major incident. Moqtada Al Sadr, whose Mehdi army had fought many battles against the occupying forces, joined SCIRI in the United Iraqi Alliance for the elections. Voting broadly followed religious and ethnic lines with Shia, Sunni and

Kurdish groups each achieving a majority where their populations were strongest. Iyad Allawi's group, the National Dialogue Front, which was strongly favoured by the imperialist forces, did very badly.

The image of Iraq polarised into hostile and opposing groups and a country teetering on the brink of break-up helps the imperialists justify their occupation as a stabilising force. The reality is more complex than that. There are differences within the groups and common interests between them. Important developments that unite the Iraqi people against the occupation are seldom reported by the imperialist media.

Before the election Moqtada Al Sadr organised a conference to discuss a 'Pact of Honour'. Organisations that attended included SCIRI, the Shia Al Daawa Party, the main Sunni electoral alliance the Iraqi Concord Front, trade unions, social organisations and even some government officials. Among the demands they agreed were:

- Withdrawal of the occupiers and elimination of all the consequences of their presence, including any bases for them in the country;
- Suppression of the legal immunity of occupation troops and the condemnation of their practices against civilians and their breaches of human rights;
- Categorical rejection of the establishment of any relations with Israel;
- Resistance is a legitimate right of all peoples but we condemn acts of violence, killing, abducting and expulsion aimed at innocent citizens for sectarian reasons;
- To postpone the implementation of the disputed principle of federalism and to respect the people's opinion about it.

Any hopes the imperialists might have had that the elections would create a new attitude of compliance with the occupation and an improvement in the security situation were soon dashed. Fifty Iraqis were killed on 4 January and at least a further 130 were killed in two explosions the next day. On the same day five US soldiers were killed in Baghdad, two in Najaf and another four elsewhere. An oil pipeline was blown up and set on fire near Kirkuk.

The imperialist forces remain trapped. Peace will not return until they are dispatched. ■



CHINA

from internationalism to chauvinism

For all but the last two centuries of the past 2,000 years China has possessed the world's biggest economy. The Mongol Khan's once ruled an empire stretching from the Pacific to the Danube. Today, with a total population of 3.3 billion people, the countries of east and south Asia (excluding Japan) have more than three times as many people as the developed capitalist countries. With China as the world's fastest growing economy, there are many who see the locus of world power shifting in the coming period from the US and Europe to China and Asia. Hence, Martin Jacques:

'The growing conflict between an extant America and a rising China will become the dominant fault line of global politics' (*The Guardian*, 18 June 2005).

To support his argument Jacques cites China's economy, 'immeasurably stronger than the Soviet Union's ever was...economic strength is the key precondition for global power and influence', and China's integration into the global economy, unlike the Soviet Union. FRFI 188 examined China's transition from the socialist to the capitalist road of development. Here TREVOR RAYNE explores the Sino-Soviet dispute and its consequences.

In December 2005 a revision of China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measure raised the estimated size of the economy by 16.8% to \$1.983 trillion. China overtook Britain and France in 2005 to become the world's fourth largest economy. China will be an important factor in shaping the next 50 years, but its economy is one-seventh the size of the US economy and a little more than one-third that of Japan's. The economy of the 25 European Union (EU) countries matches that of the US. China is integrated into the world economy, with combined imports and exports forming 60% of GDP, but its overseas investments are a fraction of those of the US and EU. EU foreign direct investment amounts to approximately 53% of the world total. The determining fault lines of the coming period are not only that between the US and China, but also, and more immediately, between the US and EU, the major imperialist powers. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist bloc inter-imperialist rivalry is growing; its manifestation in the dispute between the US and Britain against Germany and France over the war on Iraq foretells what is to come. However, international capitalism fights its battles to divide and re-divide the world with unscrupulous alliances that are formed and re-formed as self-interest, opportunity and profit dictate. China was long ago drawn into this deadly game.

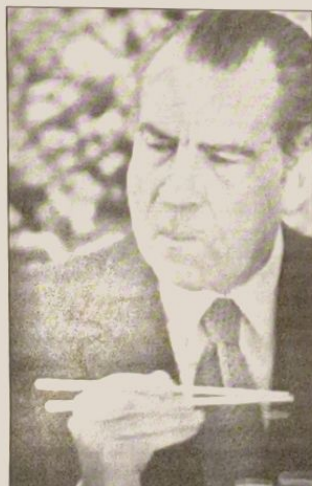
The Sino-Soviet split

With the triumph of the Chinese revolution in 1949 and the Soviet Red Army's front line confronting imperialism in Germany, a third of humanity lived under the banners of socialism. The Chinese Communist Party's victory made the prospects for socialism look favourable. No longer was the Soviet Union isolated: to the west were the new socialist states of central and eastern Europe and to the east China, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and the Vietnamese Democratic Republic led by Ho Chi Minh. Imperialism's response was to continue the policy of aggression it had waged against Russia since 1917, launching wars on Korea and Vietnam that killed approximately eight million people. It tried to subvert the socialist governments in Europe and turn them against the Soviet Union. In this context the Sino-Soviet dispute, which became open in 1963, was a setback for socialism and oppressed humanity, increasing the

manoeuvrability and bellicosity of imperialism. In 1964 the US started bombing Vietnam.

It is noteworthy that in the *Age of Extremes: The short twentieth century 1914-1991* the renowned Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm, makes only fleeting reference to the Sino-Soviet dispute. He states, 'Mao's own knowledge of Marxist theory seems to have been almost entirely derived from the Stalinist History of the CPSU [b]: Short Course of 1939.' This expression of contempt demonstrates a Eurocentric vision of the fight for socialism, which in the last half of the 20th century was fought out primarily in the oppressed Third World. It is that fight, not concluded, that was initially at the core of the disputes between the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties. For imperialism, the road to Moscow ran through Managua, Luanda and Kabul.

Joseph Stalin died on 5 March 1953. For three months the Soviet leadership contemplated the prospects for withdrawing the Red Army from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and seeking détente with the imperialist powers. On 16 and 17 June a workers' revolt against increased work norms and decreased wages spread from Leipzig to Berlin and other GDR cities. The Red Army suppressed the revolt. US radio stations called on Europe to rise against the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership abandoned any idea of withdrawing from the GDR, fearing that a retreat could turn into a rout across central and eastern Europe.



US President Nixon visited China in 1972

Following the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989, this is what happened - only the rout went as far as Moscow. In July 1953 the Soviet Minister of the Interior Beria was dismissed as 'an enemy of the people', accused of intending to 'surrender Eastern Germany to world capitalism'. Beria was shot.

Foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy and in turn reacts back on to domestic policy. In 1955 the Soviet Union debated the Sixth Five Year Plan, for 1956-60. At issue were the relative merits of investing in heavy and light industry, producer and consumer goods, and the balance between them. Prime Minister Malenkov favoured consumer industries and housing. The pro-consumer group hoped for peaceful overtures to imperialism and a slowing down of the arms race and hence reduction in military spending. The Red Army leadership and heads of the planning agency, Gosplan, opposed the consumer line. Future Soviet leader Khrushchev wavered and then sided with the Army and Gosplan. Malenkov resigned. The following day China indicated its own opposition to imperialism and decreed universal conscription. Khrushchev became Party Secretary.

Since a Soviet debate on socialist construction in the 1920s, the emphasis had been placed on heavy industry as the quickest way to build the economy to catch up with capitalism and to produce the weapons to defend the socialist state. Constant threats and war reduced the resources available for use on consumption, as imperialism intended.

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956, before an exclusively Soviet audience, Khrushchev secretly denounced Stalin. Khrushchev said that Soviet foreign policy was based on the Leninist principle of peaceful coexistence and that because of the increased strength of socialism war between imperialism and socialism was no longer inevitable. Revolutions, he said, could be achieved in non-violent ways. Khrushchev also condemned the post-Second World War Soviet deportations of Chechen, Ingush and Kalmyk peoples. Within a year the Chinese Communist Party issued two publications rebutting Khrushchev's positions: *On the Historical Experiences of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* and *More on the Historical Experiences of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Mao Zedong's 1957 speech *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* and the launch of China's



'All people of the world unite, to overthrow American imperialism, to overthrow Soviet revisionism, to overthrow the reactionaries of all nations!' (Chinese poster, 1969)

Rectification Campaign against bureaucracy, sectarianism and subjectivism were a radical critique of Soviet economic management and methods of government, but Mao did not criticise Stalin by name.

In the Soviet Union in 1957, following a debate with over 500,000 meetings, 25 industrial ministries were abolished and 92 Regional Councils established. State management was to be decentralised and state owned concerns put under the management of the Regional Councils and allowed to trade with each other directly or through the Regional Councils. The Five Year Plan was revised and the housing allocation increased.

Despite the loss of approximately 25 million people killed in the war against Nazism, and economic devastation, the Soviet Union rebuilt. In 1957 it launched the first artificial satellite, Sputnik 1. The Soviet Union had developed transcontinental missiles before the US. In 1961 Yuri Gagarin made the first manned space flight. For Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership the demonstration of Soviet military capability increased the likelihood that the imperialists would accept détente, diplomacy and peaceful relations, and the status quo in Europe. Peace would allow the Soviet Union and socialist camp to build their economies, raise living standards and demonstrate to workers in the capitalist countries the superiority of socialism.

When US President Eisenhower visited Rome in 1959 Italian Communist Party members chanted 'We too like Ike'. Their leader Togliatti had told them to drop the customary 'Yankee, go home'. The Soviet Union sought to

align all communist parties behind its diplomatic effort to reach détente with imperialism. This fitted well with the west European communist parties that had made alliances with social democratic parties and hence imperialism and were advocating, as the British Communist Party did, the Parliamentary Road to Socialism.

At a Moscow conference of 12 ruling communist parties in November 1957 Mao attacked the Soviet interpretation of peaceful coexistence. He said that war between socialism and imperialism was inevitable and that the peaceful road to socialism was the exception and not the rule. In April 1960, on the ninetieth anniversary of Lenin's birth, the Soviet leadership presented Lenin as the peacemaker while the Chinese leadership had Lenin as the class warrior who insisted that war was inevitable as long as imperialism survived. Khrushchev was soon to describe Lenin's positions as out of date in the age of nuclear weapons. In August 1960 the Soviet Union withdrew its technicians from China and the following year did the same to Albania that had sided with China in the argument over détente. A November 1960 Moscow conference of the leaders of 81 communist parties saw the Chinese delegation attacking the Soviet Union for underestimating the potential for revolution in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The Cuban Revolution triumphed in 1959. Chinese delegates accused the Soviets of curbing revolution, especially in Iraq, Algeria and India and of supporting anti-communist bourgeois leaders like Qasim in Iraq, Nasser in Egypt, Nehru in India and Sukarno in Indonesia. The Soviet leadership argued

'If the road to Moscow lay through Managua, Luanda and Kabul, we must recognise that the abysmal capitulation of the anti-imperialist movement in the capitalist heartlands has been critical to imperialism's ability to undermine the Soviet Union and push China away from internationalism and towards chauvinism.'

the Sino-Soviet dispute

that the main form of the international class struggle was between the Soviet Union-led socialist camp and the US and NATO.

At the Twenty Second Congress of the CPSU in October 1961 Khrushchev openly denounced Stalin and attacked the Albanians. Zhou Enlai, head of the Chinese delegation, condemned 'any one-sided censure of a fraternal party' and laid a wreath on Stalin's tomb. Stalin's mummified remains were removed from Red Square and statues to him pulled down across much of the Soviet Union, towns named after Stalin were re-named. The Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations with Albania in December.

In 1963 the Sino-Soviet dispute came into the open. The Chinese sent a letter in June to the CPSU entitled 'A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement'. The Soviets did not publish it and five Chinese people who distributed the letter inside the Soviet Union were deported. Bilateral talks between the CPSU and Chinese Communists in Moscow coincided with Soviet disarmament talks with the US and Britain, also in Moscow. After a fortnight the Chinese delegates Deng Xiaoping and Peng Chen left. Five days later the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed by the US, Britain and Soviet Union banning all nuclear tests except those held underground. China and France refused to sign it. China called the Treaty a 'dirty fraud' and an attempt by the US and Soviet Union to maintain a nuclear monopoly. China said it was a betrayal of socialism and revealed that in 1959 the Soviet Union had broken an agreement with China on sharing nuclear technology. Khrushchev argued that Lenin's view that war was the inevitable outcome of monopoly capitalism was wrong.

Communists played leading roles in the struggles of oppressed nations to rid themselves of colonialism after World War Two. For imperialism it was essential to prevent these nations joining the socialist camp. The Sino-Soviet split sowed confusion among anti-imperialist forces.

Korea, Taiwan and Tibet

As US troops pushed north in Korea in December 1950, China sent 180,000 volunteer soldiers to help drive them back south of the 38th Parallel. This was followed by further Chinese offensives. In 1950 US President Truman sent the US Fleet to protect Chiang Kai Shek and the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) on the island of Taiwan, where they had fled from the communists on China's mainland. The KMT promised to re-conquer all of China. Truman had acted without going to the United Nations for permission. It was later revealed that the US had drawn up plans to nuclear bomb Chinese cities. KMT forces launched raids into China from Burma. In 1949 the US had announced it was ready to recognise an independent Tibet. The following year Chinese forces entered Tibet to reunite it with China. When China manoeuvred its troops to challenge part of the KMT-held territory closest to the mainland in 1961 the Soviet Union accused Mao of being

obsessed with Taiwan at the expense of understanding the international situation and of 'incitement to war'. For China the issue of Tibet and Taiwan was then and remains an internal Chinese matter. In 1961 China was not prepared to allow its strategic interests to take second place to Soviet strategy and diplomacy. As recently as 2005 a senior Chinese general threatened to use nuclear weapons against the US if it used weapons to defend Taiwan against China.

Suez and the Middle East

With the US-encouraged move towards decolonisation in the British and French empires the Soviet Union sought, by diplomatic means and with aid, to increase its influence in the Middle East. When Britain and France, assisted by Israel, attacked Egypt in 1956 for nationalising the Suez Canal Soviet Foreign Minister Shepilov offered to send volunteers to fight the invasion armies. This greatly angered the US, which, as the now dominant imperialist power, was determined to enforce its monopoly over the Middle East, at the expense of Britain and France. Andrei Gromyko replaced Shepilov for threatening the détente.

On 14 July 1958 Generals Arif and Qasim led the Supreme Committee of Free Officers in overthrowing the British installed monarchy in Iraq. The US responded by sending troops into Lebanon, and Britain by despatching a force to Jordan. In Moscow a few thousand people demonstrated their opposition to the US and Britain but with no Soviet leaders present. In Beijing over one million people demonstrated with gigantic meetings across China addressed by Communist Party leaders and Arab envoys.

The biggest communist party in the Middle East was in Iraq. The Soviet Union refused to support a communist offensive in Iraq against the Qasim government. As communist influence grew in demonstrations against Qasim between July 1958 and July 1959 the Iraqi Communist Party was told by the Soviet Union to ally with the Qasim government rather than oppose it. The Soviet Union denounced the Iraqi Communist Party for calling mass demonstrations and allowing its ranks to be 'swamped by ultra-left extremists'. The Soviet leadership advised the

Iraqi Communist Party Central Committee to demote leaders guilty of these 'deviations' and to purge its ranks, while acknowledging General Qasim as the 'national revolutionary leader'. The instructions were carried out and the Iraqi Central Committee published a recantation. The Iraqi Communists were humiliated. China criticised containment of the revolutionary forces.

In October 1959 Ba'ath Party assassins attempted to kill Qasim, but they failed. Their leader was Saddam Hussein. By 1961 the Iraqi Communist Party reported that 286 Party members and supporters had been murdered and thousands forced to flee their homes. Ba'athists pushed the Communists off the streets and in 1963 organised a military coup against Qasim. There commenced the physical elimination of Communists and their supporters. Lists of names of people to be killed were supplied to the Ba'athists by the US CIA.

The Algerian independence struggle took to arms in 1954. In 1959 China recognised the Provisional Algerian government fighting French colonialism, but the Soviet Union did not. The leader of the Provisional government was invited to Beijing in 1961. Khrushchev called on the French people to support French President General de Gaulle and on the Algerians to negotiate with his government. At one point the French Communist Party, allied with the Soviet Union, said the national resistance, the FLN, were 'paid Nazi agitators' and called for 'the ringleaders to be shot'. They later adjusted their position to call for peace, but refused to support the FLN.

India

With Tibet administered as part of China a Sino-Indian border dispute arose. In 1959 the Soviet Union adopted a neutral position and said the issue was a matter of 'regret'. China later stated that this was the first example of open criticism of one Communist Party by another. The Indian government used the dispute to justify the disbandment of the communist government in Kerala state and as part of its drive against the Indian Communist Party. The Chinese opposed the disbanding of the communist government in Kerala and saw Khrushchev's 'impartial appeal' as acquiescence in the Indian government's anti-communist drive. In August

1962 China announced that the Soviet Union had provided India with military aircraft. Two months later the Sino-Indian war was waged. Subsequently, Indian communists split along pro-Soviet and pro-China lines. Many of the pro-Chinese leaders were imprisoned.

Cuba

On 22 October 1962 US President Kennedy announced a blockade of Cuba and further action if Soviet missiles were not removed from the island. After a week when the world looked to be on the brink of nuclear war Khrushchev accepted Kennedy's demand in return for a US promise that it would not invade Cuba. The US also removed nuclear missiles from Turkey. Khrushchev's critics said that Kennedy's promise was worth about as much as Hitler's assurances over respecting the independence of Czechoslovakia.

China's leadership viewed the Soviets as both too adventurous and too timid, of being confused, vacillating and of appeasing imperialism. China's *The People's Daily* said 'some people... have been guilty of a double error, first the error of recklessness because they use nuclear weapons as a means of retaliation or deterrence, which socialist countries have no need to do at all; and then of the error of defeatism, when, veering from one extreme to another, they succumb to the imperialists' atomic blackmail and rush to capitulate.' Mocking one of Mao's aphorisms Khrushchev retorted 'The paper tiger of American imperialism has nuclear teeth.'

Vietnam

Communist-led Vietnamese forces defeated French colonial occupation forces at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. There followed a Geneva Conference on Indo-China at which an armistice was signed agreeing the 17th parallel as a demarcation line between the North and the South. North Vietnamese forces would withdraw from Cambodia and Laos and France would be allowed to move its forces into these countries. Elections were scheduled for Vietnam. China and the Soviet Union approved the Geneva agreement. The US then set up the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in the South, in violation of the agreement, so preventing the elections.

With the US puppet regime in the South in danger of collapsing to the patriotic Vietnamese forces the US engineered the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 when it claimed North Vietnamese torpedo boats had fired on US Navy destroyers. The US accelerated the drive to war and commenced bombing North Vietnam. On 15 October the Soviet Union announced that Khrushchev had been released from his state and party posts. The next day China announced its first atomic test explosion. Khrushchev's roles were filled by Brezhnev and Kosygin. Kosygin visited Hanoi, Beijing and Pyongyang but was unable to reach agreement with the Chinese leadership, who spoke of 'Khrushchevism without Khrushchev'. China said Soviet appeasement had encouraged the US to attack Vietnam and accused the Soviets of being mean with aid to Vietnam. The Soviets accused China of preventing a united front against imperialism in support of Vietnam and of preventing aid reaching Vietnam. Unlike with Korea, there were no battalions of Chinese volunteers crossing the border to fight with the Vietnamese. In 1974 China invaded and captured the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea from Vietnam. China's national self-interest prevailed over internationalism and solidarity with Vietnam that was continuing to fight for national reunification.

Cambodia

With the victory of the Vietnamese people and defeat of imperialism in Indo-China the Khmer Rouge or Communist Party of Kampuchea took power in Cambodia in 1975. The Khmer Rouge claimed large parts of Vietnam's territory and their troops invaded Vietnam

in 1977. In January 1979 a joint Cambodian and Vietnamese force removed the murderous Khmer Rouge government. It had killed between 1.5 and 2 million Cambodians, around 20% of the population. A month after the Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia China invaded Vietnam across its northern border to 'teach it a lesson'. China considered the Khmer Rouge to be a strategic ally and Vietnam to be allied with the Soviet Union. China described Vietnam as 'the aggressor' in Cambodia. China's invasion of Vietnam must rank among the most squalid acts of a communist party-led government. Chinese chauvinism was in command. Revolutionary Vietnamese forces drove the Chinese invaders back into China. Britain and the US continued to recognise the Khmer Rouge as the government of Cambodia.

Chinese chauvinism

The Sino-Soviet split was a factor in imperialism's calculations over waging the Vietnam war and it prolonged that war. Imperialism was swift to exploit the division and try to widen the breach between the two socialist states. When the breach became official in 1963 France gave full diplomatic recognition to China in 1964, the first of the imperialist powers to do so. China responded by taking the position that the Soviet Union should not seek agreements with the US, but instead seek out 'contradictions in the imperialist camp', and try to break France, Britain and Japan from the US. The Chinese communists developed a theory of Soviet social imperialism, which they said was as big a threat to the world's workers as imperialism.

In 1971 China replaced Taiwan at the United Nations. The US recognised the advantages of not using its Security Council veto. There was what was called 'ping pong diplomacy' with a Chinese table tennis team visiting the US in 1971. US President Nixon visited China and met Mao in 1972. By this time China would support any forces that pronounced themselves anti-Soviet and there were reports in the 1980s of China sharing intelligence with the US, over Afghanistan for example.

If the road to Moscow lay through Managua, Luanda and Kabul, we must recognise that the abysmal capitulation of the anti-imperialist movement in the capitalist heartlands has been critical to imperialism's ability to undermine the Soviet Union and push China away from internationalism and towards chauvinism. In Central and South America, in Africa, the Middle East and Asia the imperialist countries were united in their fight against the liberation movements of the poor and oppressed. In Britain it has been the Labour Party and Labour governments that defended apartheid in South Africa at the United Nations, that has supported and presided over repeated British military expeditions to the Middle East, Malaysia, Indonesia and so on. Soviet efforts at détente failed to prevent the US from increasing military spending in an effort to break the Soviet Union. Whatever the ideological failings of the Soviet and Chinese leaderships the weakness of the socialist movement in the imperialist countries has been a dominant factor in the global balance of class forces, allowing the capitalist ruling classes to turn back the march to socialism in China and the Soviet Union. Only with the US people's opposition to their state in the Vietnam war, led by the US's black people, did a real challenge to the imperialist ruling classes emerge at home.

The Sino-Soviet dispute and the consequent division of the socialist camp undermined the resistance to imperialism in the oppressed nations and ultimately contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union and the transformation of China from socialism to capitalism.

A future FRFI article will analyse the changing relationship between China and imperialism today.



Khrushchev: Revolutions could be achieved in non-violent ways

'By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying.'

Communist Manifesto

The US bourgeoisie is not sure what to do about the mess it has got itself into. The Clinton Administration of 1992-2000 laid the groundwork: destroyed almost the entire welfare system in the US, helped organize the brutal and rapacious process of primitive accumulation in the ex-socialist countries, consolidated various important trade measures, slimmed down the US military, initiated the reactionary 'peace process' in the Middle East and modernized infrastructure needed for the 'globalisation' undertaken by US imperialism. Clinton sowed the seeds, but the ruling class needed a more aggressive crew to do the reaping and harvesting. Our US correspondent STEVE PALMER reports.

What it got is the present gang of liars, swindlers, cut-throats, bullies and thieves. Sworn to defend the US Constitution, they shred it clause by clause. Professing patriotism, they betray the mass of the US people day after day. In the name of 'democracy', 'peace' and 'freedom', they spread tyranny, torture and repression wherever they strut.

What frightens the bourgeoisie is these hoods' dogmatism, inflexibility and greed. They behave like juvenile delinquents. They took the Army out for a long drive and practically wrecked it: it'll be years before it's ready to fight another serious war. They snatched the family credit card and went on a wild spending spree, running up the massive national debt to dangerous levels. They line their pockets at every opportunity and raid the budget on any pretext. They're locked into a war they did not need, do not understand and cannot escape. They're replacing science, critical to capitalist wealth and domination, with mystical nonsense: global warming is a liberal myth; an 'Intelligent Designer' threw the world together in a few millennia. Soon it'll be a flat earth and a moon made of cheese. They're hopelessly inept organizers, leaving millions devastated, floundering and helpless in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. With the appointment of the utterly reactionary Judge Alito to the Supreme Court their grip on executive, legislative and judicial power in Washington is total.

The United States was not always a bastion of reaction. On the contrary: the American Revolution in the 18th century was the first modern national liberation struggle: the 13 North American colonies united to free themselves from British rule. English laws tried to restrict manufacture and trade in the American colonies. In the mid-18th century, the English Parliament tried to raise revenue in the colonies to pay its war debts. These exactions, the restraints and the attempts to regulate the colonies more strictly provoked the American Revolution. And so, when, two centuries ago, the US bourgeoisie rose in rebellion and threw off the fetters of despotic monarchy, it did so under the banner of Liberty:

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness... whenever any Form of Government becomes

destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government... Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes... But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.'

US Declaration of Independence, 4 July, 1776

It was not only 'the Right of the People', but also 'their duty' to wage revolution to end abuses and usurpations.

Barely had the ink dried on that historic parchment before the US bourgeoisie was reneging on its progressive vision. Having taken power from the English ruling class in 1783, it faced challenges from its subjects. Farmers protested against their indebtedness, culminating in an armed rising: 'Shay's Rebellion' in 1786.

The US bourgeoisie consolidated its power throughout the 13 States by uniting them under a Constitution. James Madison, 'Father of the Constitution' warned in the *The Federalist*, No 10, in 1788, of the dangers of 'the mischiefs of faction' – basically, class conflict. Inherent inequalities in faculties between men determine the distribution of property 'and divide them into different classes' and interests. Since the inherent causes of class war – private property – could not be removed, 'relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects', wrote Madison: 'the protection of different and unequal faculties of acquiring property' was 'the first object of government'.

What if a majority chooses to sacrifice 'both the public good and the rights [ie to private property] of other citizens'? Rejecting the dangers of 'pure democracy' ('citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person'), which was 'incompatible with personal security or the rights of property', Madison argued that it was necessary to establish a republic, 'by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place... the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest'. Indeed, these representatives may know better than the people what is good for them:

'It may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representa-

tives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves'.

A representative republic of 'proper guardians of the public weal' would ensure that 'a rage for...an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union'. Representative, indirect democracy, argued Madison, would protect private property from the 'the secret wishes of an unjust and interested majority'.

The entire Constitution is architected along these lines: the President was indirectly elected, via an 'Electoral College'; the Senate appointed by the States, and the Supreme Court appointed by the President. Only the House of Representatives was directly elected. States already had property restrictions on voters. Consequently, women, black people, propertyless men and Native Americans on tribal land were voteless in the new Republic. A 20-year prohibition on immigration restriction was a typically genteel way of preserving the slave trade without saying so. African Americans – predominantly slaves and

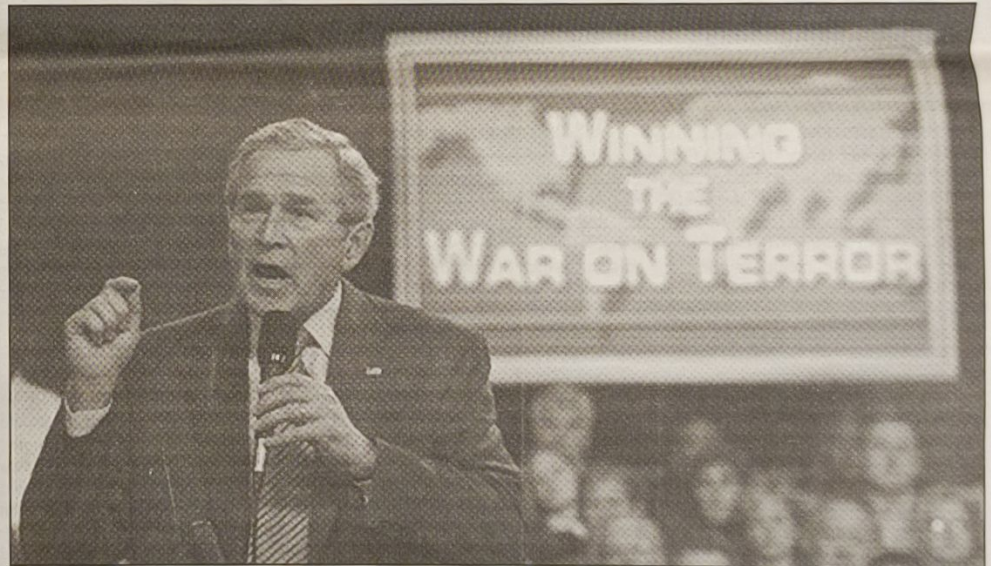
and free labour to increase profits and accumulate capital; the Southern states sheltered the sluggish and extensive system of plantation slavery which could only lazily increase wealth by sprawling its plantations westward and enslaving more labour. Western expansion from the eastern seaboard was underway; despite its economic power, the Northern bourgeoisie's grip on political power was still feeble; the Southern states seceded and a fight to the death between the two systems was inevitable. Freedom for slaves was simply a by-product of the struggle for freedom for capital. As President Lincoln wrote to Horace Greeley:

'My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy Slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it'. (22 August 1862)

Even the emancipation of slaves was only intended as a tactical threat to pressure the rebellious Southern Confederate states back into the Union: freedom for slaves was to be confined solely to those States still in rebellion against the Union after 100

Between 1956 and 1971, the FBI operated the COINTELPRO operation to spy on the Black Panthers and other progressives and engage in provocations. The US bourgeoisie only conceded civil rights to African Americans in the 1960s when they were afraid of black rebellion and insurrection in their cities. And so on and so forth down to the so-called PATRIOT Act, terrorising legislation which limits countless rights enjoyed by US citizens, and the vast surveillance operation conducted by the National Security Agency against millions of US citizens.

The behaviour of the Bush administration keeps creating new problems for the bourgeoisie and undermines its legitimacy. What is special is the degree of lying, incompetence and cronyism and the elevation of contempt for the law to a principle. Every week there are fresh outrages: torture, violations of freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, the 'outing' of a CIA agent for political reasons. Currently it's internal surveillance by the National Security Agency, bribery by lobbyists and bringing the Supreme Court under conservative control,



Scraping the bottom of the barrel

described as 'all other Persons' – only counted as three-fifths of a white man in the Constitution of the new United States. And so on.

The Bill of Rights – the ten amendments which guarantee individual rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to bear arms, freedom from arbitrary imprisonment – was only introduced as an afterthought, after the Constitution was finished, when it became clear to Madison that full ratification of the Constitution could fail without it.

In short, in various ways, big and small, US revolutionary democracy was trimmed to suit the needs of US capitalism. This trend has continued through the whole history of the nation and intensified at every crisis of the Republic. Such rights and freedoms as exist have been won only as the result of popular struggle.

The US Civil War of 1861-65 was not a struggle to free the slaves but a war to replace slavery with wage-slavery. The Northern states were the seat of a vigorous, intensive, expanding capitalism which needed free land

days had elapsed. The Civil War was about ensuring that US capital could maintain expansion without obstruction.

Any time the ruling class has thought itself to be under threat, it has thrown the Bill of Rights into the trash can. The Espionage Act of 1917 was used to criminalize opposition to the First World War and imprison socialists, including Eugene Debs, the founder of the Industrial Workers of the World – the Wobblies. When some anarchists bombed the home of the Attorney General A Mitchell Palmer in June 1919, he rounded up thousands of immigrants who were beaten and forced to sign false confessions. The 1940 Smith Act was used in 1949 to jail members of the Communist Party. President Roosevelt authorised the internment of 110,000 people of Japanese descent during World War II, most of them US citizens. During the Cold War, Senator McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee hounded Communists and progressives for their views, jailed them and had them blacklisted from jobs.

threatening abortion rights, civil liberties and any legal redress against capital. Next month, it'll be something else.

The Democrats whine and indulge in hair-splitting arguments about whether the next outrage is legal or not. But what else can they do? They're part of the same ruling class. They know that they would have done the same things, except a little more politely and diplomatically.

Clearly, with the Bush administration, the ruling class scraped the bottom of the barrel for someone to take care of business. The problem isn't the legality or illegality of the policies, whether they are carried out crudely or with finesse or 'without alienating allies'; there just isn't much left in the barrel to choose from. The US ruling class has been in steady decline and is approaching its final nadir. The exhaustion of its historic mission is measured by its inability to do anything but to try to delay the inevitable crisis, that moment when we are again duty-bound to exercise our revolutionary right.

Venezuela The December elections and the struggle for socialism

The 4 December National Assembly elections saw President Chavez's party, the Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR), win 114 of the 167 seats. Previously it held 89 seats. This remarkable victory means that for the next five years the MVR has slightly more than the two-thirds majority needed to make constitutional amendments and key appointments. It has never been in this position before. In addition its allies For Social Democracy took 15 seats, the PPT (Fatherland for All) 11, MEP (The People's Electoral Movement) 11, the Communist Party 8, and the Venezuelan People's Union 8 seats. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

The enfeebled opposition parties boycotted the elections at the last moment in the hope of painting the government as an undemocratic mono-party, and to disguise their own hopeless position. 556 of the 5,500 candidates thus withdrew. This delayed the opening of many voting centres as staff in upper-middle class neighbourhoods did not show up. The final turnout was reduced to 25% (3.67 million votes), compared to 56% in 2000. Bad weather and the expected government success undoubtedly reduced the turnout.

Despite observers from the Organisation of American States and EU giving the election a clean bill of health, the US State Department said that the results showed a 'broad lack of confidence in the impartiality and transparency' of the process. Yet 22% of registered voters supported the MVR. In the 1998 parliamentary elections the utterly corrupt Democratic Action won with votes from only 11.24% of those registered, and was congratulated by Washington. So much for Washington's stinking hypocrisy! As real economic democracy grows in Venezuela, US imperialism can only become more desperate – and more violent. Before the election an attempt was made to sabotage an oil pipeline. After the election, on 22 January, a shoebox bomb was found at a Caracas metro station whilst a frustrated opposition demonstration of 120,000 took place. Anti-Chavez terrorists continue to train openly in Florida.

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Political and military power is clearly in the hands of a revolutionary national movement, whilst much of the economy, including the media, lies in the hands of its opponents. This is a condition of dual power. Venezuela remains incorporated economically into the global imperialist system. The challenge for the government is to transform the economic process, displace the reactionary profit motive and replace it with a transparent, regulated economy, expressing the values of the majority.

The driving energy of the Venezuelan revolution is that of the poor who constantly demand solutions to the harsh conditions – poverty, illiteracy, education, poor health – previously imposed upon them. Occupation of buildings in central Caracas by the poor, displaced by mudslides at the turn of this year, show both their combativity and the urgency of the housing situation. Mayor Barreto, supported by the president of the Supreme Court, issued a decree to permit occupation of 13 buildings saying, 'It cannot be that one person has 6, 8, 10, 15 buildings... while there are tens of thousands of citizens who have no property.' Popular legislation for the expropriation of abandoned property is in preparation and 92 buildings are now targeted in Caracas.

Criticism by the Comptroller General, the Attorney General and the Ombudsman of Mayor Barreto's statements show nervousness in sections of the government confronted with reactionary press attacks on squatters' actions. Yet there is no realistic long-term alternative to extensive and systematic political and economic democracy. The new parliamentary position should allow quicker progress in transforming the country.



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The process of building socialism

Bowing to imperialism's demands Venezuela suffered a 35% decline in per capita income between 1970 and 1998. Venezuela has reversed this decline. From 1999-2001 poverty dropped from 49% to 39% of the population. Despite the managers' 2002-03 oil strike, it has fallen further to 35%. Critical poverty, where basic needs can't be met, has fallen from 18% to 10%. The growth rate in 2005 was well over 7% and unemployment dropped below 9%. The 2006 budget allocates 41% for social projects based on a conservative \$26 per barrel of oil with a stable foreign exchange rate.

Ministries are now forced to work in new ways and new ministries have been created (see FRFI 181). Venezuela, with oil, has the resources to speed changes. It must manage this asset with great care. Instead of importing every item in exchange for oil, the government is intent on manufacturing products in Venezuela; increasing economic security and providing work for as many people as possible. Thus the government aims to promote about 50,000 cooperatives to generate employment. The Women's Bank and the Economic and Social Development Bank provide micro-credit and cheap loans to small enterprises. They are not banks in the capitalist sense, but the means to create new self-confident producer units, working in accordance to local committees. Bolivarian Circles, with two million members, initially set up against counter-revolutionary coup attempts, and the independent electoral organisations (La Unidad de Batalla Electoral or UBE), established to fight the opposition during the 2004 recall referendum, now work in local social programmes. Local government is being redesigned on a new democratic basis. Part of this revolutionary redefinition of democracy is the funding of community organisations such as the 'Organizaciones Comunitario Viviendo' (Community Living Organisations), the most local level of community networks at the centre of the Bolivarian

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President Chavez has said, 'There can be no revolution without revolutionary ideology... Capitalism is a perverse model, a dictatorship that does not lead to real democracy... with socialism there is authentic democracy... capitalism will never solve the problem of unemployment.'

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Legislation before the National Assembly calls for worker co-management in any private firm receiving state subsidies. Chavez has invited all industries in Venezuela that are not functioning 100% to work with the government to increase production, and will provide the funding if workers are part of the management. Abandoned or unused industry is to be expropriated. More than 700 closed enterprises are being assessed for expropriation to establish co-management regimes. The owners and workers in 155 of these are now committed to co-management. The aim, Chavez said, is to move from a revolutionary democracy to socialism.

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These actions in the countryside have come against a backdrop of closer unity between the countryside insurgents and the city-based political parties (see FRFI 188). The Seven Party Alliance has called for a boycott of municipal elections announced by King Gyanendra for February. Nearly all of Nepal's political parties oppose holding the polls because they consider local conditions do not permit free and fair elections and that the King will manipulate them to bring credence to his absolute rule.

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Exposing the racist Zionist state

■ **Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History**, Norman G Finkelstein, Verso, 2005, £16.99 (HB), 332pp

When we reviewed Norman Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry* in 2000, we lost a subscriber who protested that it was not possible to criticise any aspect of Jewish conduct because of the Holocaust. Five years on it is still a challenge to have a discussion about the history of the Jewish people and the establishment of the Zionist state of Israel without meeting irrational hostility and accusations of anti-Semitism. Finkelstein has faced a torrent of abuse since the publication of *Beyond Chutzpah*, directed not at the book, but at him personally as a 'self-hating Jew'. The book, which is a work of substantial scholarship, had not received one review in any of the hundreds of academic and general media publications in the US months after its publication.

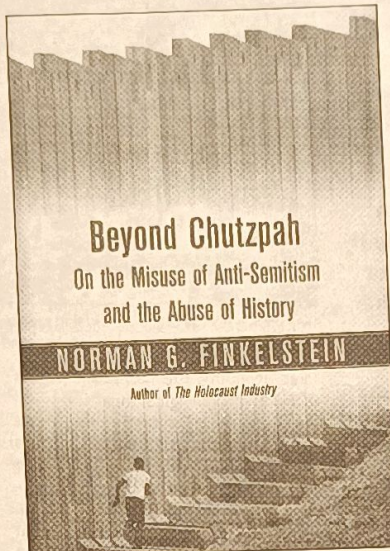
Finkelstein alerts the reader to the 'vast proliferation of sheer fraud masquerading as serious scholarship' that surrounds the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, which is in essence very simple. Israel is in illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. Controversy surrounding this situation, he asserts, is politically contrived in order to conceal or distort the facts and the documentary record and thereby deflect criticism from Israel.

In the first part of his book, Finkelstein charts the resurgences of claims of a 'new' or 'real' anti-Semitism by following the publication of books of the same name, most of them written by the leaders of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in the United States. Highlighting the main targets said to be leading the anti-Semitic offences in each of these books, Finkelstein shows how over time the authors are moving politically further and further to the right, and that this reflects their class interests.¹

For example, Forster and Epstein's *The New Anti-Semitism*, published in 1974, claims that the main thrust of anti-Semitism, apart from that supposedly coming from the African American community, comes from the 'Radical Left', and sectors of the religious and peace community. The next publication, in 1982, Nathan and Ruth Perlmuter's *The Real Anti-Semitism*, was devoted to the alleged anti-Semitism of the mainstream left and even centre. By 2003, Abraham Foxman's *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism* cast as the heart of anti-Semitic darkness mainstream human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The 'new' or 'real' anti-Semitism embraces everyone from Andrew Lloyd Webber, who wrote the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* to those who challenge Jewish interests anywhere.

It is significant that each new book, each campaign to combat 'the new anti-Semitism', has coincided with renewed international pressures on Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territories in exchange for recognition from neighbouring Arab states'. Moreover, the construct of a pervasive new anti-Semitism has not prevented leaders of the ADL from making open political alliances with right-wing Christian fundamentalists whose theology 'reeked of anti-Semitism, [but] it was of no account as long as they gave backing to a militarised Israel'.

Accusations of anti-Semitism serve to gag criticism of Israel and have been largely successful. There have been witch-hunts across university campuses – we have seen many in Britain, for those showing the slightest sympathy for the Palestinian people. Steven and Hilary Rose and others calling for an academic boycott of Israel have been subject to abuse. FRF's regular pickets of Marks and Spencer calling for a boycott of the largest corporate sponsor of British-Israeli trade, a company that has had market gardens producing food



directly for its stores on illegally occupied land in Gush Katif, have been abused, arrested and boycotted by the media. The most recent act of university bullying occurred at the School of Oriental and African Studies where a Muslim student, Nasser Amin, was given a formal reprimand and threatened with charges of incitement to racial hatred for having written an article for a student magazine arguing that the Palestinians had the right to use force against Israel's occupation.² Campus Watch invites students to report teachers who are insufficiently supportive of Israel, a practice commonplace in the US alongside false allegations of assaults by Palestinian students on Jews.

Finkelstein shows that unremitting accusations of anti-Semitism are used as a smokescreen to conceal the real issues of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. The chief motor for Arab antagonism is fear of territorial dispossession. The Zionist project was never to merely exploit the Arabs but always to dispossess them. The ethnic cleansing of 1948 was 'premeditated, indeed deeply entrenched in the Zionist goal of creating an overwhelmingly Jewish state in a territory overwhelmingly non-Jewish.' Such precise statements on the 1948/9 War introduce and con-

clude the book and the appendices blow away many of the repeated myths about the so-called 'War of Independence', but Finkelstein's own focus remains on the two-state solution, showing in the appendices how the Zionists have repeatedly rejected it. The bulk of this study is a closely monitored critique of the occupation of Palestinian land since 1967.

In the second part of the book Finkelstein turns his attention to Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz, and especially his 2003 book *A Case for Israel*, an 'immediate and influential bestseller'. Finkelstein's aim is to expose the brutality and criminality of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as he picks apart the Dershowitz main thesis – that Israel's human rights record is 'generally superb'.

Finkelstein demonstrates over and over again how Dershowitz's claims are made without evidence, and that human rights organisations have a consensus showing that Israel's occupation is 'morally indefensible'. Finkelstein takes information from a variety of human rights organisations, particularly Israeli and Palestinian, and also the US-based Human Rights Watch, United Nations affiliated groups and Amnesty International – whose 'manifold reports' are a 'most under-utilised resource'.

Dershowitz makes many unfounded contentions: that Israeli killings are 'unintentional'; that Israelis are punished for killing civilians. Each time Finkelstein presents well-documented examples that prove the exact opposite (nearly half of all those shot are shot in the head; of 72 Military Police investigations only three resulted in convictions – maximum sentence was 65 days in prison). Finkelstein details Zionist abuse of children; attacks on the Palestinian medical system, ambulances and personnel; extra judicial assassinations; house demolitions used as punishment for families of suspects. Destruction of property is used both as punishment and to create permanent facts on the ground – Israel's expansion.

Torture of Palestinian detainees by Israel is routine. B'Tselem, an Israeli

human rights organisation, reported in 2000 that 85% of those interrogated are subjected to torture. The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel concluded in 2003 after a two-year study that the number of detainees 'against whom no method of ill-treatment whatsoever was used is negligible.' Amnesty International and B'Tselem concurred in the late 1990s, following Israeli Supreme Court decisions that Israel is the only country to have legally sanctioned torture.

Dershowitz argues that the forms of torture used instil fear rather than pain, and that destruction of homes is 'among the most moral and calibrated responses'. Never once does he cite a mainstream human rights organisation to support his claims, accusing the Palestinians of: biological warfare (no evidence, but Israeli settlers are poisoning Palestinian fields); using human shields (no evidence of Palestinian use but evidence of Israeli use and in the orders that Israeli soldiers receive); 'terrorist abortion' – women raped and then shamed for their pregnancy into becoming suicide bombers (no evidence – hundreds of women volunteering). He described the siege of Jenin in 2002, considered a war crime by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, in which Palestinians were murdered in their own houses as they were bulldozed, as 'a model of how to conduct urban warfare'.

The Israeli Supreme Court is, according to Dershowitz, 'among the best in the world'. B'Tselem disagrees, observing in a press release entitled 'Israel's contempt for fundamental legal principles' that: 'What renders Israel's abuses unique throughout the world is the relentless efforts to justify what cannot be justified.'

Finkelstein's book is a valuable and exhaustive documentation of Israel's abuses in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from many sources. This book is useful to us in Britain as a powerful tool in fighting against Israel's apologists here in Britain and building a movement to sever all British support for the Zionist occupation of Palestine.

Fiona Donovan

1 'Reflecting its elite Jewish constituency, ADL had in fact become a bastion of reaction.' (Finkelstein, 2005, p31)

2 To protest against the mistreatment of Nasser Amin contact Colin Bundy: cb3@soas.ac.uk

No Respect for politics

■ **Celebrity Big Brother**, January 2006, Channel 4 (Endemol production)

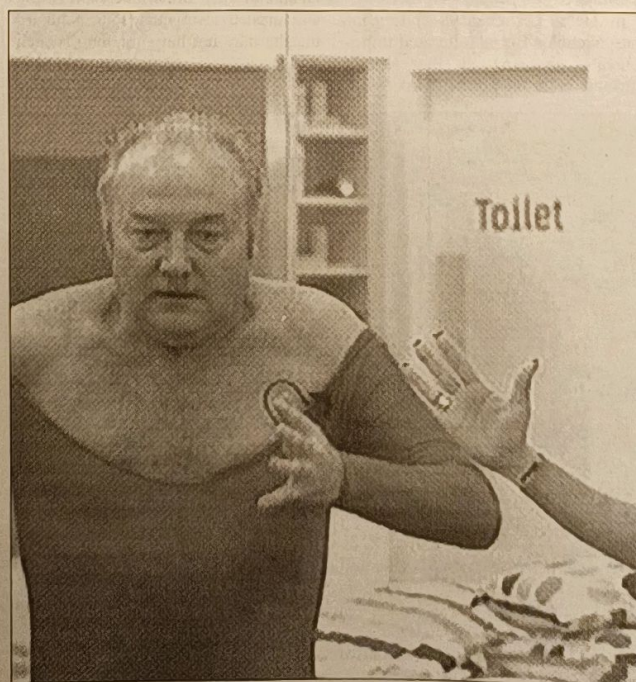
George Galloway MP was evicted from the *Celebrity Big Brother* house on 25 January after 21 days in the reality TV show. During this time, he variously wore a red leotard, a rocker's outfit and a lab coat, imitated a cat drinking milk and did a robotic dance. He also sported a Cuba sweatshirt and puffed on large, presumably Cuban, cigars.

Of course the press loved all this, as did any politician who has ever crossed swords with Galloway. For the Tories, Galloway – alleged friend of Gaddafi and Saddam, opposer of imperialist wars, friend of the SWP – has always been considered a buffoon. Labour, however, hates him for opposing the war, for linking the war and the London bombing, and for managing to be re-elected as an MP on behalf of the Respect Coalition, after being thrown out of the Labour Party. Big Brother is therefore a gift for them – rather than dealing with any of the serious arguments that Galloway has put forward

in support of the Palestinian cause or against imperialist war in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Labour politicians and apparatchiks from now on only need to make jokes about saucers of milk.

Galloway's main rationale for going on the programme, along with the fact that his fee would be donated to the Palestinian charity, Interpal, was that he would be able to bring an anti-war, anti-imperialist message to five million people, rather than the small groups he regularly speaks to. Following his eviction he was forced to sheepishly admit that in fact more or less anything political he had said during the 21 days was voiced over with bird-song noise.

The few political comments that did get through consisted mainly of personal anecdotes – 'as I told Saddam Hussein', 'as Nelson Mandela said to me' – highlighting the main factor that made Galloway a suitable candidate for Big Brother: his individualism. Galloway's opposition to the war, support for the Palestinian cause and love of Cuba add up not to a political programme but to the more positive facets of his personality. Lest we forget, he is



also virulently anti-abortion and does not oppose immigration controls.

Alongside this spectacle went the sub-spectacle of watching the SWP contort itself in order to accommodate

the great man, their ally in the Respect Coalition, whilst holding on to some semblance of political credibility. *Socialist Worker* expressed disapproval of Galloway's decision while standing by the SWP's alliance with him in Respect on the basis of his work against the war. However Respect's line was that the decision to go into *Celebrity Big Brother* was correct. Both positions were expressed by John 'Janus' Rees, who wrote in *Socialist Worker*: 'lots of people feel that it's not an appropriate way for an MP to spend their time'. However, wearing his Respect hat, Rees told Radio 4 that Galloway 'has attempted here to advance the political ideas for which he was elected by the constituents for Bethnal Green and Bow'.

Ultimately Galloway's own career will probably benefit from the notoriety; he may well leave politics in the foreseeable future to present chat shows or to concentrate entirely on column-writing and after-dinner speaking. But he has done those of us who are serious about opposing the war in Iraq, supporting the struggle of Palestinians for self-determination and defending the Cuban Revolution no favours. He has not brought anti-imperialism to a new audience, and has simply shown up the degeneracy of what passes for left politics in this country for all to see.

Nicki Jameson

Death in Frankland segregation unit – questions remain unanswered

My name is Pauline Day and I am the mother of Paul Day who tragically took his own life in Frankland prison segregation unit on 2 October 2002. On 7 December 2005 Paul was

the subject of a television documentary on Channel Five. The programme showed harrowing footage of a video taken by prison officers of Paul being moved off of a dirty protest on the last day of his life.

I hope that at least some of you viewed this documentary. For those who did not, please believe me when I tell you that I have seen the complete footage and Paul's treatment on the last day of his life was tantamount to serious psychological torture.

Paul had been, and still was, on suicide watch. The video shows him being instructed by prison officers 'not to say a word, or we will restrain you'. Several other orders follow, but

he is refused the right to speak to the prison officers. He is waded through a flooded corridor and up stairs which are also flooded. Then, having been showered, he is waded back through human excrement and urine on to the same segregation spur he was taken from, and then put into another cell. A Perspex screen is fastened over the cell door and held there with eight-foot blocks of wood. Prison officers at the inquest described how they had to tear these wooden battens down with their bare hands to get to Paul when he was discovered hanging. Nobody seems to know exactly what time Paul died. But one thing is certain, the time it would have taken to remove these battens which were deliberately wedged against his cell door and the wall opposite his cell and then to have to strip the Perspex away and unlock the door, would have created a serious delay in reaching Paul. I wonder if there would have been any hope of resuscitation had there not been this delay in reaching him.

My husband Andy and I attended every day of the four-and-a-half week

inquest into Paul's death. We worked closely with Bruce Jones, the journalist who made the Channel Five programme. We have met with the Prison Service and the Chief Inspector of Prisons. We have marched with the United Families and Friends Campaign and worked with the organisation Inquest. But it still remains a total mystery to us how a prisoner on suicide watch could be locked in a cell with access to what he would require to be able to hang himself. Having seen the actual cell in which he died I was unable to see any place where any ligature could be attached as there were no exposed bars, no pipes and the bed, being segregation, was of course a concrete slab. No one has ever offered any explanation as to how it was possible for Paul to hang himself. We therefore continue to ask questions, collect information from prisoners and work with any journalists or campaigners who are not afraid of taking on the system.

You can correspond with me via FRFI and I will answer each and every letter I receive.

Pauline Day

Racist prisons

The disproportionate imprisoning of young black people is an inevitable result of a criminal justice system imbued at every level with racist attitudes and an antipathy towards the black working class community. The facts speak for themselves; although black people make up just 2% of the total population in England and Wales, the most recent statistics available from the Home Office (February 2003) show that 16% of male and 25% of female prisoners are black.

For many black prisoners life inside is a continuation of the racist treatment they have experienced at the hands of the police and courts, with the very worst treatment reserved for those who possess the courage and determination to resist and openly complain about the racist behaviour of those managing and running the prisons. Their experience is of frequent physical brutality, long stays in solitary confinement and endless transfers, usually to prisons geographically remote and inaccessible to friends and family.

The predicament of Sean Higgins typifies the sort of treatment dished out to black prisoners perceived by staff as 'upitty' and unreasonably

proud. Sean's treatment was highlighted in autumn 2005 when ex-prisoner John McGranaghan (who himself spent over a decade in prison for crimes he did not commit before being released on appeal in 1991) contacted the organisation 'Black Britain' to tell them that Sean, then in Frankland prison, was being brutalised by prison officers and feared for his life.

Sean said that in 1999 in Swaleside Prison several officers entered his cell, subjected him to racist verbal abuse and then physically attacked him, during which they tried to tie a home-made noose around his neck in a mock lynching fashion.

In the notorious Full Sutton segregation unit he was badly beaten after complaining about racist abuse. He was then charged with assaulting prison staff, who required a justification for 'restraining' him so violently. He was subsequently acquitted at Hull Crown Court. The jury found that he had acted in lawful self-defence when attacked by prison staff. When Sean again complained of racist abuse whilst in the segregation unit at Frankland in September 2005 he was systematically beaten up by staff, who then inevitably made a counter allegation that he had attacked them without

the slightest provocation. Sean is now pursuing a civil action against the Prison Service for damages.

In December 2005 Sean was transferred to Manchester prison from HMP Wakefield and immediately encountered hostility and victimisation.

Just before Christmas staff engineered a confrontation and then moved Sean to the prison's punishment unit. Sean continued to complain about his treatment and claimed it was motivated by straight forward racism. One afternoon in the first week of January a gang of staff entered Sean's cell, racially abused and subjected him to a sustained physical assault that left him battered and bleeding. Medical reports and photographs attest to his injuries.

Sean's treatment typifies the reaction of the prison system to black prisoners who defiantly resist the racism that permeates the prison system from the top to bottom. Please show support for Sean Higgins by writing letters to The Governor, HMP Manchester, Southall Street, Manchester M60 9AH and Philip Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service, Cleland House, Page Street, London SW1P 4LN.

John Bowden, HMP Saughton



FRFI supporters joined an afternoon vigil outside HMP and YOI Styal, Cheshire, on 18 January 2006, to mark the third anniversary of the death of Sarah Elizabeth Campbell, who died in January 2003 aged 18. Sarah was the youngest of six women to die in a 12-month period at Styal. The cause of her death was anti-depressant prescription drug poisoning. At the inquest in January 2005 the jury delivered a scathing indictment of the prison authorities and said a 'failure in the duty of care' had contributed to her death, and there had been 'avoidable delays' in summoning the ambulance. The inquest heard shocking evidence that on the day Sarah died, staff (including a nurse) left her unattended in a cell in the segregation block and locked the door, despite knowing she had taken an overdose. Deborah Coles, Co-Director of campaign group INQUEST has referred to the Styal deaths as 'a clear example of corporate manslaughter'. Sarah's mother, Pauline Campbell, told FRFI: 'Three years after the death of my only child, there is still no formal acceptance by the Home Office that they have a responsibility for Sarah's death.'

Flights to torture

CAT WIENER

The British government has been complicit in the illegal kidnapping and torture of terrorist suspects by the CIA, and has lied repeatedly to cover up its role.

As early as last summer journalists investigating allegations that German citizen Khalid El Masri had been kidnapped by the CIA in Macedonia, flown to a prison 'many hours away' and tortured, were uncovering evidence of mysterious US planes landing secretly in Europe, refuelling and flying on. It is now clear that these are 'torture flights', carrying a human cargo of suspected terrorists picked up around the globe and smuggled to secret CIA-administered torture camps in Europe and the Middle East. The Guardian has evidence of 210 such landings at British airports since September 2001.

In the words of Dick Marty, of the Council of Europe, 'There is a great

deal of coherent, convergent evidence pointing to the existence of a system of "relocation" or "outsourcing of torture"... Individuals have been abducted, deprived of their liberty and transported to different destinations in Europe, to be handed over to countries in which they have suffered degrading treatment and torture... governments were aware of what was happening'.

This 'outsourcing' of torture routinely practised by the CIA goes under the euphemism of 'extraordinary rendition'.

Lies and moral turpitude

In December, in response to questions in the House of Commons, the government lied through its teeth. The records demanded by journalists and MPs had been lost or destroyed by Whitehall, had never existed or could not be supplied because of 'disproportionate cost'. Ministers lined up to deny knowledge of such flights. Prime Minister Tony Blair told Charles

Kennedy on 7 December: 'In respect of airports, I do not know what the Right Honourable gentleman is referring to.' Foreign Minister Jack Straw told the Foreign Affairs Committee on 13 December 2005:

'Unless we all start to believe in conspiracy theories and that the officials are lying, that I am lying, that behind this is some kind of secret state which is in league with some dark forces in the United States... there simply is no truth in the claims that the United Kingdom has been involved in rendition, full stop.'

On 20 January 2006 The New Statesman published the full text of a leaked briefing sent from the Foreign Office to 10 Downing Street on 7 December. It reveals that ministers were aware of secret US interrogation centres and knew that allowing torture flights to use British airports was almost certainly illegal. However, the briefing highlights the moral and legal turpitude of the government's position by arguing that the government must accept US assurances – on the one hand not to jeopardise its alliance with the US but, moreover, so that Britain can continue to outsource its own ter-

rorist suspects back to countries where torture is routine, such as Egypt and Algeria, on the basis of spurious 'memoranda of understanding' [that torture will not be used] which human rights organisations have dismissed as 'not worth the paper they are written on'.

Torture by any other name

The US is attempting to get around international bans on torture (which it characterises as 'quaint') by redefining it as separate from 'cruel, degrading or unusual punishment'. In Abu Ghraib and other torture centres, US officers oversee and carry out beatings, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, 'waterboarding' and other forms of torture with official sanction. Most recently, a US officer was found guilty only of 'homicidal negligence' after he murdered an Iraqi detainee by stuffing him headfirst into a sleeping bag, binding him with electrical cable, straddling him and covering his mouth. Apparently, he was not authorised to sit on prisoners. His captain had told him: 'The gloves are coming off, gentlemen... we want these individuals broken.'

Despite Britain's long and shameful history of practising torture – most recently in Greece where a senior M16 officer is alleged to have coordinated the torture of Pakistani suspects after the 7 July London bombings – it has, overtly at least, been bound by international treaties. Now the government is attempting to argue that the European Convention on Human Rights, which bans torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, is the product of a past age which needs to be adapted to new circumstances, legitimising what Amnesty International has called 'a tacit belief that torture can be condoned under certain circumstances'. Only a ruling by the law lords in December prevented the government from allowing secret evidence gathered by torture in third countries to be used in British courts.

Spain and Italy have been forced to act against US torture flights. In Ireland, protests are growing – one protester attacked the planes with an axe. Meanwhile the British government continues to cover up for the US, complicit in what Noam Chomsky has called 'war crime as defined by Nuremberg'.

FRFI ROUNDUP

Around Britain fighting imperialism and racism

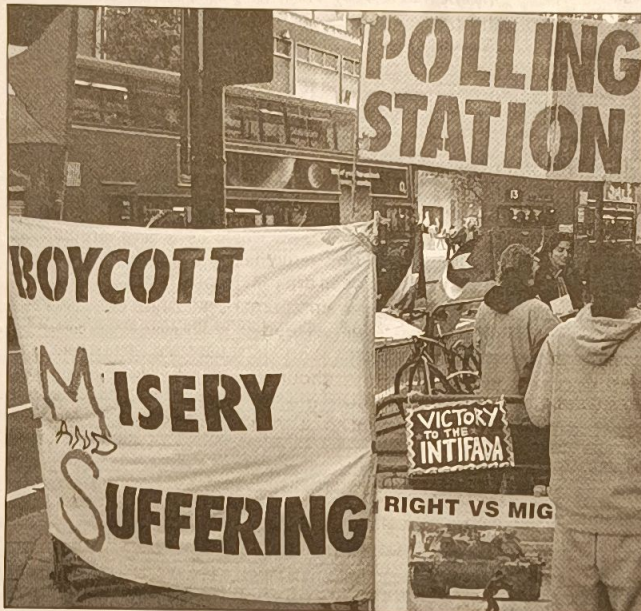
The Victory to the Intifada campaign in London continues its pickets of Marks and Spencer, Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Zionism, every Thursday outside its flagship store on Oxford Street from 6-8pm. On 11 January VTI took part in a live televised debate on the Islam channel on the campaign to boycott Israeli goods.

On Saturday 10 December VTI targeted M&S once again, this time in support of the Boycott Israeli Goods campaign national day of action. In December, VTI activists participated in a demonstration organised by the Camden Abu Dis friendship society in Camden. The event featured street theatre and a large cardboard wall.

In London, we have been working with students at LSE, King's and SOAS to build FRFI societies and the Student Anti-Imperialist Network (SAIN). Weekly events on campus have included street meetings and political theatre: in February the theatre will focus on Guantanamo in Cuba. The FRFI LSE society will also be showing a film about resistance from within Zionist Israel and discussing the recent elections, as well as holding a regional SAIN dayschool on imperialism, war and resistance.

In Newcastle in December student supporters mounted noisy Thursday evening pickets of M&S in the city centre which will resume this term.

In the North East, FRFI supporters helped build the second public meeting of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) on 11 January. The meeting agreed a basic platform for the network, including the right of refugees to organise to defend themselves as necessary against attacks by the state. FRFI activists began regular



VTI protest at M&S in Oxford Street

pickets of North Tyneside Reporting Centre the day after an Iranian man set himself on fire there, and hope to involve wider forces in these over the coming months. Regular street actions against the deportation and criminalisation of asylum seekers continue in Durham and Newcastle city centres, forming important links with anti-imperialists from local migrant communities.

FRFI supporters in Manchester have been actively campaigning in the Support Eucharika and Timeyi anti-deportation campaign. On 18 January

Manchester FRFI and SAIN activists took part in a vigil to mark the third anniversary of the death of Sarah Campbell at Styal prison, organised by Sarah's mother, Pauline Campbell. We will continue to support Pauline Campbell's struggle for justice.

Student activists and FRFI veterans organised Chester's first picket of Marks and Spencer. The protest attracted so much local support that another Chester M&S picket is planned for 4 February. In Longsight, and around Salford and Manchester universities, street actions have taken

ments in Cuba.

In February, events are planned in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Durham, Manchester and London to mark the week of action in support of the Cuban Five. The appeal courts will further rule on the case on 13 February. The appeal verdict in August last year indicated that the five men should go free, but they remain in gaol in the US, not guilty but proud of the fact that they acted to defend the Cuban Revolution from imperialist sabotage. Join members of Rock around the Blockade on Saturday 11 February outside the US consulate in Edinburgh at 12.30pm and on the north pavement of Trafalgar Square in London at midday to demonstrate our outrage at the ongoing incarceration of these principled revolutionaries. As they say in Cuba *Volveran* – they will come home.

On 18 January RATB supporters in the Northeast held a successful meeting at Durham University to discuss the alliances against imperialism now developing across Latin America. This involved many new students, keen to learn about the Cuban and Venezuelan example.

Manchester RCG/FRFI has been out on the streets in the new year drawing the links between oppression in Britain, and revolutionary struggles in oppressed nations. Support for socialist Cuba remains central to our work, with comrades protesting about the US occupa-

tion of Guantanamo Bay and in solidarity with the prisoners' hunger strike. This means both calling for the immediate release of the hundreds of illegally detained prisoners and exposing the British Labour government's disgusting role in defending the US torture camp. It also means demanding that the US withdraw from this part of Cuba, occupied against the will of the Cuban people for so many years. Manchester's Market Street has been the fighting ground for this important work, with lively stalls growing in size and volume – our purpose is to demonstrate Cuba's proof that true social justice, for all, not just a tiny elite, can only be achieved by building socialism.

Exciting developments in Latin America provide an inspiring background for our campaigning work in 2006 – the Year of the Energy Revolution in Cuba. We ask all progressive people to join us in supporting revolutionary forces in the region.

Get involved in the work of Rock around the Blockade, contact us by phone or email (020 7837 1688 or email office@ratb.org.uk). Join our egroup by emailing: viva_cuba-subscribe@yahoo.com.

Che Guevara 2006 calendars are still available at £10 – a bargain for the whole year! Send cheques or PO made out to Rock around the Blockade, to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

Events

LONDON

Saturday 11 February 1-3pm
Street theatre and stall: *Cuban Five must go free*

North side of Trafalgar Square

Saturday 4 March 12-5pm
SAIN dayschool on war, imperialism and resistance
LSE, Houghton Street, WC2

Saturday 18 March

Join London FRFI's contingent on the Stop the War march

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Picket of Marks & Spencer,
Marble Arch end of Oxford Street

For further details call 020 7837 1688 or email london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

EDINBURGH

Saturday 11 February

Free The Cuban Five protest 11am
Duke of Wellington Statue, Princes St
12.30pm United States Consulate,
Regent Terrace, Regent Road
2pm Mission Against Terror, Film
CWU Club, 15 Brunswick St
Contact scotlandratb@yahoo.co.uk

NORTH EAST

NEWCASTLE

Wednesday 8 February 7pm

Public meeting: *Cuba, Terrorism and the Occupation of Guantanamo Bay*
Back room of the Leazes Inn, off
Barracks Road, Newcastle

Thursday 9 February 8pm
Boycott Bacardi Bar Bust
(meet outside Newcastle University
Student Union)

Wednesday 22 February 7pm
Film: *Injustice*, on deaths in custody
Room 2.5, Daysh Building, Claremont
Road (meet outside ground floor
entrance from 6.45pm)

Wednesday 8 March 7pm
Public meeting: *War, Imperialism and Iraq*
Back room of the Leazes Inn, off
Barracks Road, Newcastle

Thursdays 16 February, 2 March and 16
March 6-8pm
Pickets of M&S, Northumberland Street

Wednesday 22 March 7pm
Film: *Matzen: Anti-Zionist Israelis*
Room 2.5, Daysh Building, Claremont
Road (meet outside ground floor
entrance from 6.45pm)

place calling for troops out of Iraq.

In January comrades protested outside Manchester Midland Hotel, where ex-US Secretary of State Colin Powell was guest of honour at a Jewish National Fund fundraising dinner.

The main focus for comrades in Scotland has been actively supporting local anti-deportation campaigns (for full report of anti-deportation activities in Scotland and around the country, see back page). Comrades also demonstrated against Colin Powell at another annual Jewish National Fund Dinner, this time at the Glasgow Hilton and supported the Bloody Sunday marches in Glasgow and Derry.

DURHAM

Wednesday 15 February 7pm

Public meeting: *Deaths in Custody*
Elvet Riverside Lecture Rooms, New
Elvet (meet in the foyer from 6.45pm)

Wednesday 1 March 7pm

Film: *Control Room*
Elvet Riverside Lecture Room (as above)

Wednesday 15 March 7pm

Public meeting: *Labour: A Party Fit for Imperialism* (as above)

For further details call 07813 073 846 or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com

MANCHESTER

Tuesday 7 February 12 noon

Defend Eucharika & Timeyi Campaign
meeting, St George's Church, Abbey
Hey, Gorton, 7.30pm

Free the Cuban Five! Week of action

Wednesday 8 February 12 noon
Street action, Manchester University –
outside SU, 12 noon.

Thursday 9 February 12 noon

Street action, outside Salford University.
Saturday 11 February 12 noon
Protest, Market Street

Saturday 11 February

Day of action for Congolese refugees,
Oldham Street Methodist Hall.

Wednesday 15 February 7.30pm

Rock around the Blockade meeting
Friends Meeting House, Mount Street

Saturday 18 February 12 noon

Victory to the Iraqi people's
resistance! stall, Longsight Market

Saturday 25 February 12 noon

Victory to the Intifada! picket of Marks &
Spencer, Market Street

Wednesday 1 March 7.30pm

Defend the M&S Picket Campaign meet-
ing on Palestine, Friends Meeting
House, Mount Street

Saturday 4 March

SAIN dayschool in London – minibus
going from Salford and Manchester,
contact 07940 961 169.

Sunday 19 March 2pm

Anti-Imperialist Forum Cross Street
Chapel

CHESTER

Saturday 4 February 12-3pm

Marks & Spencer picket, City Centre,
Contact 07816 547 066 / manchester-
frfi@revolutionarycommunist.com

Visit www.manchesterfrfi.5u.com



Rocking around Britain with RATB

Rock around, the Blockade has received confirmation that the sound system, taken to Caimanera in eastern Cuba by the brigade in July 2005 was inaugurated on 1 January, the 37th anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution. Fundraising work for 2006 for the Union of Young Communists started with a social evening jointly organised with Turkish and Kurdish comrades with food, live music and dancing.

The 2003 triumph of revolutionary forces in Venezuela against a US-backed coup was captured in the inspiring film *The Revolution will not be televised*, which was shown by Rock around the Blockade in collaboration with LSE FRFI society in December in London. Other work alongside LSE FRFI student society this term will include political street theatre depicting revolutionary Cuba with social justice and respect for human rights versus illegally-occupied Guantanamo Bay in Cuba where the US, with tacit British support, holds innocent civilians without charge or trial and condemns them to barbaric conditions and torture. Petitioning for the freedom of all prisoners in Guantanamo torture camps has brought together the issues of the illegal war in Iraq, the human rights abuses by imperialism and the ongoing assault on our civil liberties by the Labour government in Britain. FRFI LSE student society will also host a meeting this term to discuss develop-



Street meeting in Market Street, Manchester

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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Best wishes

Wishing you the best of everything at Christmas and throughout the year.

Thank you for continuing to send the FRFI and giving an alternative view of the world in place of the blizzard of propaganda and hypocrisy we are subjected to on all sides.

I haven't bought cards for years due to restrictions on everything, even stamps, from the outside, since private companies took over the canteens everything is bought directly through them and of course the companies meet the shareholders' demands for larger profits every year.

RONNIE EASTERBROOK (B88459)
– Britain's oldest and longest serving political prisoner
HMP Wakefield,
5 Love Lane, Wakefield,
WF2 9AG

Statement of 61 detainees at Harmondsworth

'We, the detainees of Harmondsworth, having considered the various ill treatment being meted out to us, have come out with the following complaints that need to be addressed and abated immediately. The following points could have led to the unwarranted death of one of our beloved friends.

1. It is absolutely ridiculous and obviously unjustifiable to keep immigrants against their wish, even those who are willing to go back to their country voluntarily. Asylum seekers' fate has been decided even before they go to court and as a result they are automatically refused asylum. We are all therefore left in dehumanising and depressing conditions for most of our lives. We strongly resist these de-

hazardous and unhealthy environment, as every single window in all the rooms in the various wings are sealed. Communicable diseases are therefore likely to be transferred from one detainee to another. The rooms most times are always very hot and uncomfortable. We are not breathing normally and are usually very weak. We are gradually suffocating to death. What a degrading condition.

5. The available facilities, specifically the central air conditioning systems, do not function; they are only hanging on the ceilings like decorative frames. You can imagine a facility designed to make up for the windowless nature of the building not functioning for months and human beings

7. Asylum seekers are even denied chances to exhaust all their appeal rights. We are usually denied access to the high court, which is an independent body from the immigration tribunal. We ask that opportunity be given to us to pursue our appeals.

8. The food being given to detainees would be rejected by dogs. The food is predictably rice and potatoes, with some horrible sauce, day in day out. Most detainees are almost starving themselves to death as we are all tired of eating the same food every single day without any chance of buying alternative varieties of food, as is the case in other detention centres.

9. The way officers disrespect detainees is disgusting and very humiliating. Officers are fond of threatening detainees with warning letters for no just cause; most times we are being accosted and approached like children. We are asking this to stop with immediate effect.

10. The sanitary conditions are very poor, making the whole environment smell; this is exacerbated by poor ventilation. We are therefore seizing this opportunity to advise management of our plight and demand for immediate redress of all the stated complaints.

You will agree with us that people are held and detained for longer than necessary most of the time, for even two years and more. We ask that those due to be removed be removed quickly to their various countries, and those who are being considered for being able to stay should be released as soon as possible, rather than being kept in the detention centres against their wishes, knowing fully well it is against United Nations and human rights regulations.

Owing to the loss of our fellow detainee, every other detainee is currently living under perpetual fear and no body knows who will be the next victim. We are therefore demanding that all detainees currently being held should, as a matter of urgency, be released.'

Signed by 61 Harmondsworth detainees

(Information from National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns)



meaning actions being meted out to us and ask that we be released immediately.

2. Freedom of speech is totally denied us, as we are not given the opportunity to contribute our own views and opinions in such a way as to make positive impact on our conditions of living. In fact, our opinions are baseless and irrelevant as far as the management and staff of United Kingdom Detention Services (UKDS) is concerned. We therefore call for a complete reversal.

3. Freedom of movement is totally ruled out and every outlet leading to various association areas like gymnasium, education and worship centres are permanently locked against easy access. UKDS officers make us feel that we are an inconvenience and our movement is only at the disposal of the authority.

4. The most alarming problem facing detainees is their exposure to a

are locked in here. This is indisputably barbaric – it recalls for us the slavery era of our ancestors.

6. The management are aware of how passionately religious Africans and other cultures are. They are using this against us by debarring or discouraging detainees from freely walking into worship centres without booking 24 hours before the service. This to has affected worshippers and consequently tears on their emotions because this is about the only way they could have a form of spiritual relief to be able to overcome the torture and depressed state they are going through. Only a few days ago we prayed for a detainee in church who was contemplating suicide. What is the fate of those who find it difficult to cope with the restraints such procedures impose on them? We are therefore clamouring that people should be allowed to worship without any constraint.

Immigration status determines health care

The Labour government has introduced charges for health care for people whose application for asylum has been rejected or leave to remain refused. These vulnerable people who have not yet been removed from Britain will have to pay for every NHS service or not get treatment. There are exemptions – emergency care, treatment of TB and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The treatment of HIV, however, is not exempted, although diagnosis and counselling is. In a situation where preventative treatment exists for HIV (in the form of anti-retroviral drugs) and there are British guidelines on how infected individuals should be treated, making only emergency treatment available puts the infected person at risk of more serious complications and death, puts the clinician in a difficult ethical situation and ultimately will lead to more use of expensive resources. Many people are infected with both TB (exempted from charges) and HIV (not exempted). They may be seen by the same team of health care professionals, in the same clinic, at the same hospital, but receive different care related only to their immigration status. It is surely unethical to deny treatment based solely on immigration status to HIV positive pregnant women when

there is treatment known to lead to a reduction in transmission of HIV from mother to child from 25-30% down to less than 1%.

The Labour government health strategy is to encourage HIV testing so that individuals can behave responsibly in terms of transmission and seek appropriate preventative treatment that is available in Britain and which reduces morbidity and mortality and prolongs life. Many people seeking asylum in Britain come from areas of the world with high HIV rates. Most people seeking asylum in Britain do not have the money to pay for treatment so that testing and counselling become a pointless exercise.

There is currently a pressure group demanding that the Labour government include HIV, as it should be, in the list of STI and be exempt from charges. There are health professionals in east London (and no doubt other places) who are preparing to provide health care services free for people who are no longer officially allowed free health care.

The racist imperialist Labour government proves again and again that it doesn't act in the interest of people. It is urgent that we challenge this now.

HANNAH CALLER
London

Victim of wrongful conviction speaks out

In December 2005, Susan May spoke in public for the first time since she was released on parole earlier that year. 61-year-old Susan, who was gaoled for life in 1993 for the murder of her elderly aunt Hilda Marchbank, addressed a conference set up by the United Against Injustice campaign organisation at the Friends Meeting House in Manchester. Susan May has always protested her innocence and has a large number of supporters in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

'I have found it quite amazing that I am sat up here talking to you here today' she began, remarking on how she always believed she would never be released from prison unless she won an appeal against her conviction. 'I am still a convicted person and the way I conducted myself in prison, constantly maintaining my innocence and refusing to do the courses, I never expected to be released from prison. I lost count of the times it was drummed into me that I would never get out of prison.'

Despite refusing to participate in the 'rehabilitation' process, Susan May was released in April 2005 after serving her 12-year tariff. Her murder conviction still stands but she is determined to clear her name and gain justice not only for her, but also for her aunt.

this for years and years and years without it being a truthful message that you are innocent.'

The Criminal Cases Review Commission is currently examining Susan May's conviction on the basis of evidence that was never presented to the jury at her trial. If they believe the evidence casts doubts about her guilt they have the power to refer her case to the Court of Appeal.

At trial it was claimed a palm print, belonging to Ms May, in a bloodstain on a wall near Mrs Marchbank's body showed she had touched the wall while her hands were covered in blood. A leading German scientist, Professor Brinkman, has now demonstrated the stain was not blood, which significantly undermines the case because it only links her to the scene of the crime rather than the crime itself. Other evidence, which allegedly links known criminals to the crime, was only made available to her solicitors after the trial. Susan May is certain that the evidence, if the trial jury had been made aware of it, would have forced the prosecution's case against her to collapse.

She has been left deeply damaged: 'There is an anger, a frustration, a hurt and a pain and it's all consuming and I still feel like that today even though I am out of prison but I don't feel free. Since I've come out I've really struggled because prison is damaging. I've been damaged because of what I've been through, what I've seen and what I've experienced in prison. It is damaging. I'm damaged and I might be damaged for the rest of my life. I don't know.'

SCOTT LOMAX
Chesterfield

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Defend asylum seekers

The government is making full use of its already far-reaching powers and has recently begun to electronically tag asylum seekers who register new claims at reporting/enforcement centres. Arrests, removals and deportations continue, with families torn apart and a rising toll of self-inflicted deaths among those who fear deportation will literally be a fate worse than death. However asylum seekers and their supporters are not sitting back and allowing the government to implement its racist agenda without a murmur. On the streets and inside the detention centres organisation is growing. FRFI comrades are involved in campaigns, many of which focus on the 'reporting centres' at which asylum seekers are forced to sign on weekly or monthly, with no allowance made for travel costs and no exemptions on grounds of age or disability. As it is not uncommon for immigration officials to arrest, detain and deport people when they go to sign on, reporting centres are places of fear. The more that campaigns focus on them and highlight their role in terrorising asylum seekers, the harder it will be for people to be spirited away to detention centres and deported.

Newcastle - resisting oppression

On 17 January Amir Saman Behzadian, who faces deportation to Iran, set himself alight in front of immigration officials outside North Shields reporting centre. He was taken to hospital with a third-degree burn on his arm and other burns on his back and neck. In the hospital journalists arrived to interview him but the police blocked access and transferred Amir to a police station before he had even been treated. He told FRFI that his action was a protest against the inhumane way asylum seekers are being treated. He had many problems in Iran but he never thought of killing himself. Now he can see no way forward and he feels that no one will help him. 'I am not crazy. I understand well. I don't want charity. Where can I live? I have nowhere to live. This is the problem of all asylum seekers, not just me'.

North Shields reporting centre is over eight miles from Newcastle city centre and costs over £3 by public transport. 'Failed asylum seekers' have to report every week even though they are given no means of getting there. Newcastle FRFI is planning to develop regular solidarity pickets outside the centre as part of the Tyneside Community Action for Refugees network, which brings together local and refugee communities in defence of asylum seekers.

Scotland - fighting back against attacks on asylum seekers

On 1 January, 4,000 'failed' asylum seekers in Glasgow awoke to find a letter headed 'Assisted Voluntary Return - £3,000 Assistance for Each Returnee'. Far from being the generous offer or easy money portrayed in the right-wing press, this is a sinister attempt to undermine the asylum claims of anyone who enquires about the scheme and to try and bribe asylum seekers into returning to the violence or poverty that they fled. It coincides with a push by the city council to evict hundreds of people refused asylum prior to the handover of asylum accommodation to private companies in February.

In the last FRFI we reported on the use of dawn raids and snatch squads.

As the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill 2005 goes through Parliament, the Labour government is stepping up its drive to deport more 'failed asylum seekers' and tighten controls on anyone entering the country to claim asylum. The latest Bill formalises the ending last August of 'indefinite leave to remain' status. It criminalises employers who take on workers without permits, reduces appeals yet further and increases the powers of border control officials to check identities, require fingerprints, obtain information about passengers and share information with the police, Immigration Service and Revenue and Customs department.

These have not stopped, however consistent mobilisation of activists has had a radical effect on their frequency. Prior to November 2005 there was an average of three raids a week; since regular early-morning protests at the Brand Street Immigration Offices began, there have been no more than two raids in total.

The weekly pickets began six months ago with just a single individual, Ahmed Khan, but have grown significantly. Members of the RCG and the No Borders Network, as well as various anarchists, liberals and asylum-seeking families themselves now protest every Saturday. There are also frequent early morning weekday pickets, often in reaction to rumours of a dawn raid. A Home Office source has described this level of activity as 'unprecedented in the UK'.

On 12 December, African refugee and church groups organised a march of about 150 people for the right of asylum seekers to work. This is one of the major concerns facing Glasgow's asylum communities. Far from being the 'spongers' hysterically denounced in the media, asylum seekers are prevented from working to supplement their pitiful state hand-outs. Others do not even receive this pittance, resulting in their being driven into destitution. Even the winter clothes allowance for asylum seekers in Glasgow has been withdrawn this year.

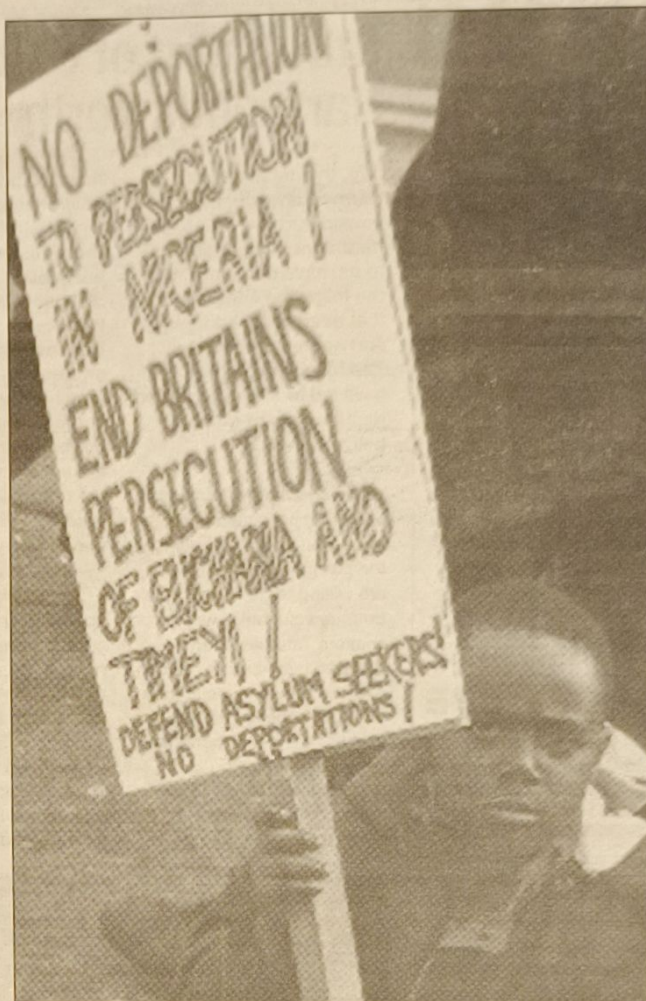
The march was led by Pastor Daly, who had just returned to Glasgow after he and his family were kidnapped by the British state in a deportation attempt that failed due to swift solidarity action. The main banner read 'We belong to Scotland'. Overwhelmingly composed of poor asylum seekers, mainly mothers with small children, the march was a valiant show of strength by the most oppressed section of the Scottish proletariat.

The RCG was the only left group at this demonstration, marching with placards defending the right to work and calling for an end to Labour Party

repression of asylum seekers and immigrants. The largest organisations of the left, such as the Scottish Socialist Party and even the mainstream Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, refused to come out in solidarity. A completely disproportionate police presence accompanied the march and attempted to prevent Pastor Daly and others from making speeches in George Square. This was courageously defied and Daly denounced governmental oppression and made the anti-imperialist point that many people flee their homelands in Africa for wealthy European countries because of famine and war caused by the colonial past and present of the rich countries themselves, so it is not the oppressed peoples of the world who owe Britain anything but quite the reverse.

So while asylum seekers and their supporters are protesting against these vicious policies, what does the British trade union movement have to say? On 24 November 2005, General Secretary Mark Serwotka and President Jane Goodrich of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), a supposedly 'left-wing' trade union, issued a statement regarding the protests against dawn raids and deportations: 'Members' health and safety is our prime concern in this matter. PCS is committed to ensuring that its members in the Immigration Service, and elsewhere, have a right to a safe and secure working environment, and to be treated with dignity...We will take every necessary step to support members in the Immigration Service.'

Some workers at Brand Street have shouted racist abuse at protestor Ahmed Khan, and one security worker was booked by police for threatening him with 'poking his eyes out'. Presumably the PCS is more concerned about these people's health and safety than it is about the fate of anyone facing deportation. An Indymedia report on Serwotka's statement correctly described this as 'not only racist but contrary to even the most elementary principles of socialism.'



Manchester - stop deportations!

As reported in previous issues of FRFI, Eucharika Jakpa and her four-year-old son Timeyi were refused asylum in Britain after fleeing the Niger Delta war zone in Nigeria. The Defend Eucharika and Timeyi Campaign (DETC) was set up last year with the help of Manchester RCG to fight for their right to stay in Britain.

Eucharika's initial application was botched with her solicitor abandoning her at the last minute. Her appeal is proving equally difficult. In January a solicitor charged Eucharika £85 for a consultation and sent a letter to asylum offices saying 'Mr Jakpa[sic] was appealing on grounds of mental health, leaving out crucial evidence about Eucharika's situation in Nigeria, where her husband and daughter disappeared in a war instigated by multinational companies like Shell.'

On 27 January Eucharika was told to 'prepare her travel documents' and called to the notorious Dallas Court holding centre. DETC held a demonstration outside. It turned out that day was not 'D'-day for Eucharika, but the mental torment continued as she was questioned her about her birthplace, ethnicity, schools, teachers' names, dates and places of birth of family members and dates of her husband and daughter's deaths. She was then pressured to sign the meeting's minutes, and have her and Timeyi's passport pictures taken. There were queues of tens more refugees outside awaiting the same uncertain fate.

Eucharika is keen to connect the issues of asylum with the situation in Nigeria, where Britain plays the insidious game of divide and rule to keep control of resources, profits and labour power. (Contact defend_eucharika@yahoo.com)

Justina Ogbé and two-year-old Yonre also fled the Niger Delta. Justina's husband was killed within days of Yonre's birth. The Home Office acknowledges that their story is true, but says they could live elsewhere in Nigeria. In reality, all deportees to Nigeria are immediately arrested, and over 95% of Nigerian prisoners routinely brutalised and tortured.

Innocent is seeking asylum from homophobic and political persecution in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Following one of many arrests for protesting he was made to choose between 15 years in prison or Secret Service training. In Bulwou prison he suffered rape, beatings, and torture. At least 3.8 million people have died in the civil war since 1998, yet Labour deported 65 people to DRC in 2004, many of whom were then raped and tortured.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! opposes all deportations and will work with any individual or organisation who wants to campaign against the Labour government's racist asylum and immigration policy.

**Here to stay! Here to fight!
No deportations!**

Joseph Eskovitch,
Annabelle Richards,
Louis Brehony and Nicki Jameson

DEATH IN DETENTION

On 19 January 26-year-old Bereket Yohannes became the seventh asylum seeker to take his own life in a UK detention centre. Bereket was found hanged in the showers at Harmondsworth; he was terrified of deportation to Eritrea and had found the appalling physical conditions in the detention centre unbearable.

Following Bereket's death, Harmondsworth detainees formed a representative committee, staged a short peaceful protest and presented a ten-point letter of complaint signed by 61 detainees to UKDS, the private company which manages the detention centre (see letters' page). UKDS exacted immediate retribution by moving all those involved to isolation cells. Many of these detainees have now been transferred to Colnbrook Short Term Holding Centre and two to Dungavel Removal Centre in Scotland.