

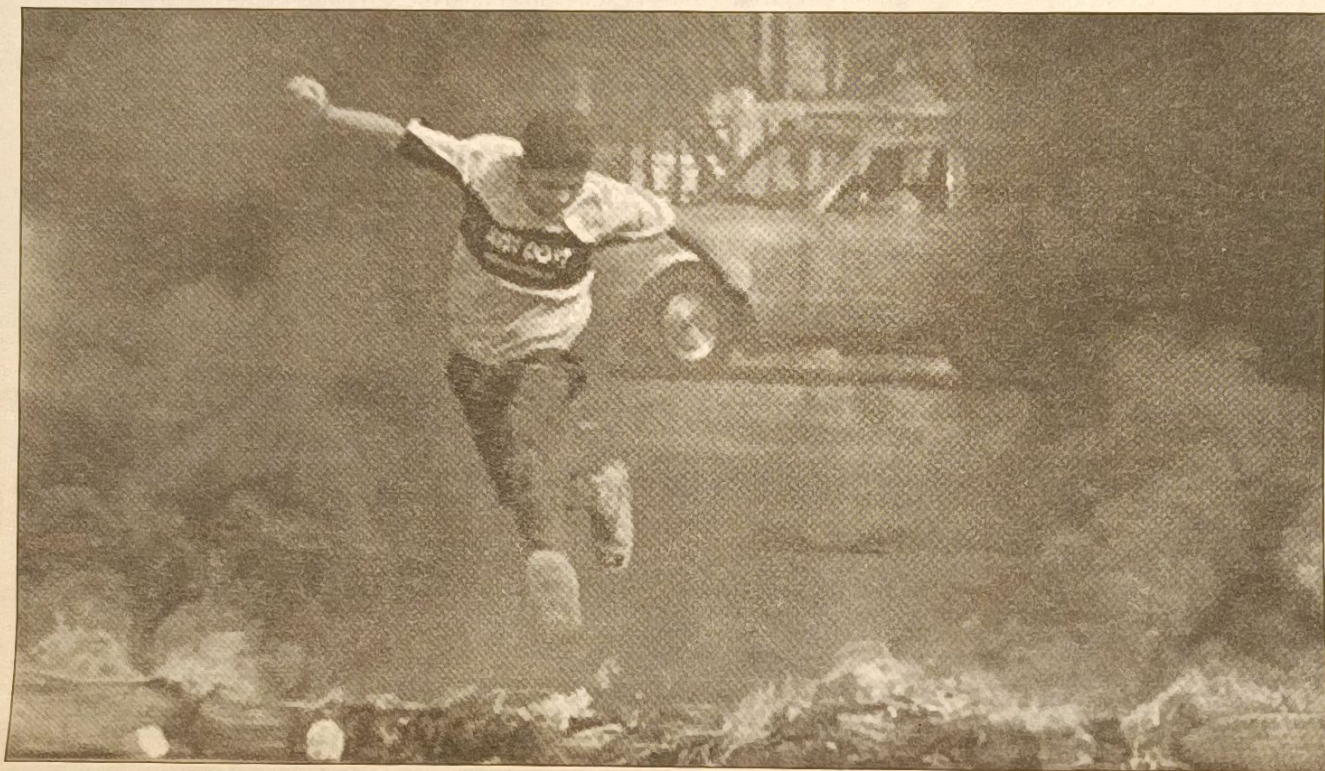
FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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IRAQ



IMPERIALISTS DOWN now get them out

The determined resistance of the Iraqi people to the occupation of their country and growing divisions among the ruling classes in the US and Britain have forced a critical reassessment of policy by the imperialist governments. In the November US mid-term elections the Republicans lost control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, forcing the immediate resignation of leading warmonger Defence Secretary Rumsfeld. Within a few days of the election President Bush was in discussion with the Iraq Study Group (ISG) about changes in policy. JIM CRAVEN reports.

In September, the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) reported 'the American invasion and occupation of Iraq has helped spawn a new generation of Islamic radicalism' and the 'occupation and injustice' had fuelled what it called 'violent jihad'. This was followed in October by comments from the previously loyal Republican leader of the Senate Armed Services

Committee, John Warner, who said there was 'a very serious situation' in Iraq and events were 'simply drifting sideways'. A US diplomat told the Arabic TV station Al-Jazeera that the US had shown 'arrogance' and 'stupidity' in Iraq, while another US diplomat and consultant to the ISG, David Mack, said, 'We are really at a point where any talk of a victory is an illusion.'

Imperialists forced to change policy

The ISG was created as a means of camouflaging a change in direction. Its head is James Baker, ex-Secretary of State for George Bush senior, who opposed the invasion. Leaks from the ISG suggest it will recommend co-operation with Iran and Syria (members of President Bush's axis of evil) to help achieve stability in Iraq. The imperialists hope this will allow a phased withdrawal of some troops over the next 18 months. Remaining troops may then withdraw to heavily fortified bases within Iraq or even to bases in neighbouring countries. Talks are already underway in Jordan with leaders of the Iraqi resistance. The British government has also been having talks with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh about an exit strategy for British troops and help from Syria and Iran. Blair's chief foreign policy adviser recently visited

Syria. On 22 November Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett said Britain could transfer security operations in southern Iraq to Iraqi control by spring 2007, but she said we are 'not cutting and running'.

Popular support plummets

According to US opinion polls, only 20% of the population believe the occupying forces are winning the war, whereas almost two-thirds now oppose the war and believe it was a mistake. Orchestrating Saddam Hussein's show trial to produce a guilty verdict two days before the US November elections failed to impress. In Britain, a poll found 72% of the population now believe the war cannot be won and 62% want troops withdrawn as soon as possible. A Commons motion demanding an inquiry into the Iraq war was narrowly defeated thanks to the cowardly attitude of the Labour left. Only 12 of them voted for the inquiry.

Ruling class worried

In October, General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, launched an unprecedented attack on government policy, saying: 'We should get ourselves out sometime soon because our presence exacerbates the security problems... Whatever consent we may have had (from the Iraqi people) has largely turned to intolerance.' Even Labour Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett admitted that future historians might judge the invasion of Iraq as 'a foreign policy disaster'.

Such comments and events in the US should not, however, be interpreted as a retreat from imperialist warmongering. The new US Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, is an experienced and reliable servant of the US ruling class. He was involved in the Iran-Contra cover-up and served as Director of the CIA from 1991 to 1993. It must be remembered that the

continued on page 4

Organise to resist imperialist barbarity

Just when the imperialists thought they had triumphed and were without rivals, they are confronted by resistance they cannot subdue in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. The determination of oppressed peoples to fight back has exposed the barbarity of Zionism and imperialism. What chances has humanity of surviving if it is not driven to rage and action by the sight of the endless slaughter of Palestinians by the Israeli state – sealing them in, starving and shelling them to death? The attack on Iraq, intended to cow the Middle East into submission, has demonstrated the imperialists' weakness; Bush and Blair's reputations are hanging in tatters.

'The civilisation and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and the drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilisation and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge. [What a civilisation] the great problem of which is how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over.' (Karl Marx) In October 2004 *The Lancet* calculated 100,000 violent deaths in Iraq attributable to the 2003 US and British invasion; by October 2006 *The Lancet* calculation stood at 654,965, excluding Fallujah: one in every 40 Iraqis slain. Former US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld predicted that 'at some time the Iraqis will get tired of getting killed'. This is the depraved mentality of people who kill without compunction to defend their privileges and power: a US and a British ruling class whose privilege and power has grown through control over Middle Eastern oil supplies. Now that control is threatened and savagery is unleashed in its defence.

Time after time the US and British governments have defended Israel in the United Nations. There was no more reliable ally of apartheid



South Africa when it came to the use of its UN veto than British Labour governments, now it is Israel they protect. Day after day this summer Israel blew Lebanon to bits and the world saw howling parents dragging their mutilated children from the wreckage. The British Labour government ran to the side of Israel and used its UN veto to stop the world from voting to halt the atrocity. What they support in defence of their own interests is racial hatred and fascism. These are the words of Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Strategic Threats, Avigdor Lieberman, spoken at an Israeli government cabinet meeting: 'At 8am we will bomb all the commercial centres... at noon we'll bomb their gas stations... at two we will bomb their banks.' While Transport Minister in 2003 Lieberman was reported as saying that 'the prisoners should be drowned in the Dead Sea and he would provide the buses to take them there'. In May he called Palestinian members of the Knesset parliament Nazi collaborators who should be killed for meeting with Hamas members of Palestine's government. This fascist, intoxicated with a hatred of Palestinians to match the Nazis' hatred of Jews, is the end product of imperialism in the Middle East. In October Lieberman was invited to join the government; he represents the Zionist state.

Harlan Ullman, the creator of Shock and Awe, stated

that he wanted for Baghdad an 'effect, rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes'. Fallujah resisted and had to be made an example of. In October 2004 a city of 300,000 people and 50,000 homes was flattened by US soldiers and bombers as British troops guarded the approaches. 75% of Fallujah's homes were destroyed, 60 schools were destroyed and 65 mosques and shrines. US snipers picked off ambulances taking the wounded to hospital. The death toll of Fallujah's citizens runs into thousands. This is how US and British imperialism act when challenged.

British imperialism is decaying and parasitic capitalism. Huge concentrations of wealth rule over us and reach into almost every corner of the world. The gyrations of party politics are a façade, disguising the real power that directs them. They serve a destructive system that does not just attack those abroad, but also people in the imperialist countries themselves. Today, as the system decays, the racist state and Labour government that wages war on oppressed nations turns its machinery against workers in the heartland. An iron grid of laws is clamped upon us. Rights wrung from ruling classes in the Magna Carta 800 years ago, in the English Civil War and by the London mobs of the 18th and 19th centuries are being taken away from us: habeas corpus, the right to silence, freedoms of assembly and speech. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is revealed. Baring the brunt of these attacks today in Britain are asylum seekers and Asian people. If these people are not defended, then tomorrow new targets will be punished for daring to show the least resistance to the will of a class intent on keeping its wealth and its power at any cost.

The Palestinian people survive and resist. Iraq and Afghanistan resist. North Korea resists. Millions of people in Latin America are mobilising to fight imperialism. Cuba and Venezuela are showing us that a new world is possible. We must support them.

This rotten, parasitic, decaying capitalism will fight like mad to survive, but, like rulers before, it has seen the writing on the wall in Babylon. Organise! We can change the world!

We will never submit

This is the message of the Palestinians to the world

No matter how brutal and inhumane the occupation becomes, and no matter what it does, we are staying here: we will never leave. The defiance of the Palestinian people in the face of an increasingly barbaric occupation has been a beacon to the working class and oppressed of the world. Whilst the Palestinian people remain undefeated, imperialism's rule over the Middle East remains under constant threat. Hence its increasingly desperate attempts to crush the Intifada by building up the enemy within – President Abbas and his bourgeois Fatah allies – and by giving free licence to the Zionists to deploy whatever blitzkrieg tactics it sees fit to kill, maim and destroy a risen people.

BOB SHEPHERD, FIONA DONOVAN and YEHYA AYESH report.

GAZA:

Zionist barbarism and Palestinian defiance

Imperialism and Zionism equals barbarism. That is the only conclusion to draw from the slaughter that took place in November in Gaza. Between 1 and 15 November, the Zionist invasion and occupation of the town of Beit Hanoun in the north of Gaza killed 83 Palestinians. 54 of the dead were civilians, including 20 children; 264 Palestinians, including 76 children, were wounded, many maimed, disfigured and disabled for life.

Justifying this, the Zionists said they were trying to stop Palestinian rocket attacks. However, not one Israeli had been killed by these weapons in 2006 prior to the invasion. The only purpose of the massacre was to try yet again to force the Palestinian people to give up their resistance and bow down before imperialism. Two incidents stand out. On 3 November in response to calls put out on local radio and TV stations, a demonstration of unarmed women gathered around a mosque to defend resistance fighters who were trapped inside. The Zionists opened fire on the women, killing two and wounding ten. The second took place in the early morning of 8 November when Israeli tank shells ripped into at least seven houses in the town killing 20 people, including nine children, and wounding 58. The local hospital director stated that some of the wounded were 'horribly disfigured' from the shelling. The Zionists claimed the shelling was a 'technical mistake' as if it was normal to be able to direct tank fire into civilian areas. Overall, since the capture of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit on 25 June the Zionists have massacred: 434 Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, 82 of them children, and wounded 1,456, including 424 children.

On 18 October an Italian TV documentary revealed that Israel has been using experimental weapons in Gaza. The investigation came after doctors in Gaza reported inexplicable wounds and devastating injuries following recent Israeli



Palestinians form a human shield on the roof of a house threatened with attack by the Israelis

attacks. Tests revealed that the injuries were likely to be the result of a new weapon dropped by unmanned drones. The weapon shares the characteristics of Dense Inert Metal Explosive (DIME) developed by the US military. This is a carbon shell that splinters on impact. Its explosion emits a blast of tungsten gas that burns and destroys everything within a four metre radius. Victims who live are either sprayed with fragments of hot shrapnel invisible to X-rays and which cause severe burns, or with a hot metal powder which has caused at least 62 victims to have one or both of their lower limbs amputated. This new weapon is clearly being 'battle tested' for the US military by its Israeli allies using the Palestinians as guinea pigs.

It was no surprise when on 11 November the US vetoed a UN Security Council resolution put by Qatar condemning the Israeli military action. John Bolton the US Ambassador said: 'the text did not display an even-handed characterisation of the events in Gaza and was politically motivated'. Britain abstained using the pretext that the resolution was 'not balanced'. With such hypocritical phrases imperialism defends the slaughter of the oppressed.

It has been left to the Palestinian people to find new ways of combating Zionist terror tactics, one of which they

used for the first time in mid-November. The Zionists have a system of calling Palestinians by phone to tell them to leave their home immediately as it is about to be destroyed by missiles fired from F16 fighter bombers. However, in the space of two days this policy of collective punishment was successfully challenged three times by the mass mobilisation of Palestinians in Gaza.

On 19 November Ahmed Baroud, a Popular Resistance Committees commander in Jabalia refugee camp, received one of these calls. Instead of fleeing he called people to come to his house to protect it. Up to 1,000 people, including Prime Minister Hanniya, surrounded his house, gathering on its roof and so preventing the air attack from happening. The next day the home of a Hamas militant in Beit Lahia was surrounded by hundreds of people in response to an Israeli phone call threatening to blow it up. Later that same day 800 people formed a human shield around the home of another militant in a Gaza City suburb stopping yet another Israeli air strike.

Hamas recognised the significance of these actions and called on the Palestinian masses and resistance factions to 'develop mechanisms of popular participation in such heroic acts that will, ultimately, foil the Israeli policy of shelling Palestinian homes'.

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ABBAS

The enemy within

For nearly a year now imperialism has been trying to destroy the Hamas government. Since its election in January 2006, the EU and the US have imposed a financial blockade in an effort to get the people to turn against their elected representatives. Throughout this period Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has proved a willing tool in their efforts.

Obviously Abbas has been working with Hamas to form a government of national unity. However, at the same time he has fomented discontent amongst PA employees who have not been paid for months because there has been no money. At the end of September his Fatah allies escalated demonstrations by PA employees in Gaza, supporting them with armed detachments of PA security forces to confront Hamas supporters. In the subsequent fighting, nine Palestinians were killed. At the same time, in the West Bank, Fatah organised demonstrations that set fire to Hamas and government offices in Ramallah. Rumours of a Fatah coup were in the air and Abbas was openly talking about dissolving the government, stating 'I will

use my constitutional authority in the PA bye-law at the proper time'.

As part of this process, Condoleezza Rice met with him at the beginning of October and announced that the US would help 'improve' Abbas's security forces. This involved a grant of \$20 million to Abbas's office for training and associated tasks. There is now a US military camp in Jericho where members of the PA Presidential Guard are being trained under the supervision of General Keith Dayton, the US security coordinator for the Occupied Territories. Meanwhile Abbas told a press conference: 'Today we say that any government to be formed has to be fully committed to all the commitments of the Palestinian Authority towards the Arab world and the international community and has to honour all kinds of agreements that were signed in the past between the Palestine Authority and the Arab parties'. In other words, it has to honour previous compromises.

In addition, the US has allocated \$42 million to fund a programme for Palestinian groups and individuals it deems capable of 'democracy building'. The US spokesperson in Jeru-

salem stated that the programme aims to 'enhance civil society and democratic institutions and provide assistance to media outlets'; an official US report says it also supports the creation of 'democratic alternatives to authoritarian or radical Islamist political options'.

The US is not alone in building up Fatah's military capability: Israel has also allowed shipments of arms to pass through its checkpoints for Abbas. In mid-November, Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister agreed to supply the PA with 1,000 M-16 rifles: 'I approved the shipment because we are running out of time and we need Mahmoud Abbas's help in the PA at this point in time'.

However, the slaughter of Palestinian civilians in Beit Hanoun has changed the situation for the moment and forced Abbas to be more conciliatory. On 18 November he met with the Hamas Prime Minister Hananiya and the proposed head of the new unity government, Professor Mohammed Eid Shubair. Hamas and Fatah representatives met to negotiate the distribution of ministerial portfolios. Discussions continue but whatever their outcome, it is clear that there is no long-term future for a government that includes both anti and pro-imperialist forces. As we go to press a ceasefire has been agreed in Gaza; it is not possible at this time to say what this represents.

WEST BANK

No end to settlement expansion

While the world looks on, Israel is not only using its war machinery against the Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza, but it is also busily continuing to create 'facts on the ground' in the West Bank.

Creating 'facts on the ground' has been a very successful strategy for the Zionists to gain legitimacy for their racist state. During the so-called 'peace process', which institutionalised the conquest of Palestinian land and expansion of settlements, Israel continued to build new settlements on stolen Palestinian land. The number of Israeli settlements doubled in the West Bank, and whilst 8,500 settlers were withdrawn from Gaza in 2005, twice as many settlers moved into the West Bank.

This process continues. Construction is Israel's second biggest industry after arms manufacturing. Huge and specially modified trucks are carving great highways across the West Bank, cutting through Bedouin villages to join together ever-multiplying settlements. Meanwhile Palestinian people are being held prisoners in their towns and cities, cut off by checkpoints, an electronic fence and a huge concrete wall from their land and their families, from clinics, hospitals, schools and universities.

Armed Israeli soldiers dictate entry into and exit from the main Palestinian population centres in the West Bank. Palestinians have to hold a special permit to leave their cities, even to visit other parts of the West Bank, with hundreds of checkpoints ensuring total restriction of movement. Applying for permits is a slow and difficult procedure that is subject to change, and they are rarely granted. As a Palestinian taxi driver put it 'a child born in Nablus today could live and die without seeing or knowing any other Palestinian city'. Even those who are granted a permit, such as students at Al Najah University in Nablus who live in the outlying villages, have to spend hours every day to get through Israeli checkpoints and may even be turned back according to the whims of occupation soldiers.

In East Jerusalem, Palestinian villages are suffocating in the midst of large Israeli settlements. For example, Beit Safafa, an Arab village that lies between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, is surrounded by five Israeli settlements, which are all connected by main roads. At one point a three-lane carriageway cuts Beit Safafa in two. Until recently there was no pedestrian crossing, bridge or tunnel to join the two sides of the village. It took the death of two Palestinian children before the Israeli authorities built a small roundabout to make it possible to cross the busy settler road. In addition, most Palestinian villages in East Jerusalem are not signposted and have no traffic signals. Where signposts do exist, they give



the Palestinian villages alien Hebrew names.

To the south and west of Beit Safafa lies the huge Israeli settlement of Gilo, which resembles a modern European city. Last year, on the road to Bethlehem from Jerusalem there was a big Israeli checkpoint known as Gilo checkpoint. All traffic going into the West Bank to Bethlehem or coming from the West Bank to Jerusalem had to pass through this checkpoint, and many from the West Bank were denied entry. Today, it has gone. The road lies clear until the approach to Bethlehem where Israel's massive nine-metre high concrete Apartheid Wall appears. The only way in is through a gate in the Wall, a sliding sheet of thick metal like the sealed lid of a toxic container: it is a massive new permanent checkpoint like a border crossing. Inside Bethlehem, what was the main road to Jerusalem has been cut in two by a section of the Wall. Huge settlements flank Bethlehem; these are connected to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv by a highway that cuts through the mountain.

The northwest section of the Wall around Bethlehem is isolating the city from Jerusalem and cuts in deeply to annex land to the Gilo and Har Gilo settlements. The Wall continues to the northeast of Beit Sahoor, Al Khalis and Al Nomaan villages to annex Har Homa settlement and secures its expansion on Al Nomaan lands. From the other side, the Wall will continue from northwest to southwest of Al Khadir, trapping the Palestinians who live there. In total, 71,000 dunums (1,000m²) of land are being seized in the Bethlehem district and the Apartheid Wall reaches into the heart of the city, in order to annex Rachel's Tomb. Checkpoints, the Wall and the fenced-in settler-only highways will secure the complete ghettoisation of Bethlehem.

In the southeast of Jerusalem the Occupation has already started building the new settlements in Mount Scopus and in eastern Abu Dis. Infrastructure is also being developed for the 'Noof Zahay' settlement in the heart of Mount Scopus. This settlement, in conjunction with the Wall, will slice the village of Sawahra into four separate parts. Jewish settlers no longer need to maliciously attack Pal-

estian farmers trying to collect their olive harvests. The fruit is being left to rot on the trees because farmers from Sawahra can no longer reach their groves.

The most notorious project oversees the expansion of Ma'aleh Adumim, one of the biggest Zionist settlements, and secures its contiguity with colonies across Jerusalem. In order to form one enormous settler bloc, over 4,000 housing units will be built on 12,000 dunums of land stolen from various Palestinian villages. Boasting tourist amenities, universities, hotels and a system of settler roads, the bloc will include a new police headquarters for the West Bank. About 75% of the plan's total area is earmarked for a park that will surround all these developments. The current built-up area of Ma'aleh Adumim covers only 15% of what is planned: an area of at least 53 square kilometers (larger than Tel Aviv) stretching from Jerusalem to Jericho.

To the north of Jerusalem stands another huge section of concrete wall and another large and very permanent looking border crossing. This is Qalandiya checkpoint. All Jerusalemites wishing to go to Ramallah or beyond in the West Bank must pass through Qalandiya. More importantly, all those Palestinians from the West Bank wishing to go to Jerusalem, or south to Bethlehem or Hebron (also part of the West Bank) must also go through this checkpoint. A huge structure of repression and control, the checkpoint of Qalandiya consists of a series of racist harassment schemes, a maze of corridors and loud-speaker commands given by invisible Occupation forces. The few Palestinians permitted to visit Jerusalem are caged-in between the metal doors at the will of the Occupation, screened and controlled before they reach their capital.

East Jerusalem's colonisation is almost complete. Once the Wall is finished it will total 181km. It will leave the majority of the 190,000 Palestinians in and around Jerusalem facing two options: live under siege in Jerusalem's ghetto neighbourhoods, or go into exile - either into what remains of the West Bank, or abroad. With exile will come the permanent loss of the right to live in or even visit the capital.

LEBANON

Imperialists foment civil war



Crowds attending the funeral of Pierre Gemayel in Beirut

On 21 November, unknown forces assassinated Pierre Gemayel, a leader of the fascist Christian Phalange party in Beirut. Immediately the imperialists, along with their puppet March 14 Forces government accused Syria, just as they had when Rafik Al Hariri was assassinated in February 2005. This will stoke up sectarian tensions across Lebanon in advance of mass demonstration called by Hizbullah to support its demand for a new government.

Hizbullah has been calling for a National Unity government since its victory in the war with Israel. At the time it had only two ministers which clearly did not reflect its strength and support. At present, the majority of ministers are from the March 14 Forces and are pro-imperialist and anti-Syrian. Hizbullah is supported by the Christian-based Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) led by Michael Aoun which has

no ministers at all. Both Hizbullah and the FPM are calling for an end to the confessional electoral system where parliamentary seats and ministers are decided by a formula based on religious affiliation.

On 11 November the two Hizbullah ministers and three Amal ministers resigned. They were followed on 13 November by the resignation of another minister, an ally of the President. Hizbullah has called for demonstrations aimed at forcing the government of Fouad Siniora either to resign in favour of a National Unity government or hold new parliamentary elections. Hizbullah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, said that the protests, when called, could last for weeks 'until we impose via our peaceful, civilised and democratic means, the downfall of the illegitimate, unconstitutional government, the government of (US Ambassador) Feltman'.

Imperialism is concerned at

the prospect of Hizbullah increasing its influence in Lebanon and the US has issued a statement hypocritically condemning 'any attempt to destabilise Lebanon's democratically-elected government through such tactics as manufactured demonstrations and violence, or by physically threatening its leaders' which 'would at the very least be a clear violation of Lebanon's sovereignty'. Meanwhile Israel has withdrawn its forces from Lebanon apart from an area in Ghajar, a village on the border between Lebanon and the Golan Heights. It still occupies the Shebaa Farms. The death toll continues to rise from the cluster bombs dropped by Israel; they have killed over 150 people between the ceasefire and the beginning of November, many of them children, according to the UN Mine Action Centre. There could be up to a million cluster bomblets scattered in the south of the country.

IRAQ

IMPERIALISTS DOWN now get them out

continued from page 1

US Democratic Party initially supported virtually every aspect of the war in Iraq and the so-called 'war on terror'. There has been no suggestion that it will withdraw funding for the Iraq war or change policy in Afghanistan. The Democrats and other ruling class critics such as Dannatt are not opposed to the strategy of using military force to impose their political and economic will. What concerns them is that the difficulties being experienced in Iraq and the military resources being tied up there are hindering the capability of the US and Britain to police their wider imperialist interests. As Dannatt said: 'Our presence in Iraq exacerbates the difficulties we are facing around the world... Our troops are stretched to capacity. Almost everyone is going to end up in Iraq and Afghanistan.' Far from reducing the use of military power Dannatt wants increased spending on the armed forces, the money for which, he hinted, should come from the social security budget.

The British ruling class knows that, for the foreseeable future, Britain must continue to ride on the back of the US military to defend Britain's huge global interests. In November, Labour Prime Minister Blair reiterated this position when he said that any rift with the US would seriously damage those interests - echoing that other arch-imperialist Winston Churchill who once said 'We should never get out of step with the Americans - never'.

War machine fails to subdue the Iraqi people

US forces in Iraq increased from 126,000 to 141,000 during the summer. In August, more than 7,000 coalition troops and 20,000 members of the Iraqi security forces launched Operation Together Forward, an intensive drive to gain control of Baghdad. Despite these moves resistance attacks on the imperialist and puppet forces increased by over 20% in October. 104 US troops were killed, the fourth worst month for them since the invasion. Larry Diamond, former adviser to the US occupation authority and adviser to the ISG admitted, 'The failure of the Baghdad initiative is convincing evidence that a military solution is not going to work.'

At the end of September 1,000 British troops together with 2,300 Iraqi troops launched a similar operation in the south. A Territorial Army officer described it as 'almost a last attempt to be seen to be doing something'. This too had no significant impact. On 20 October in Amarah, the town in Maysan Province where British forces had nominally handed over control of security to Iraqi police in August, members of the Mehdi Army, followers of the Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr, razed police stations to the ground and took control of the town.

Sectarian violence fired by imperialist forces

Any hopes the imperialists have of reducing troop numbers while still retaining control of Iraq depend on handing over some security responsibilities to Iraqi puppet forces. The British want in the near future to make Maysan the third southern province to be handed over in order to relieve troops for service in Afghanistan. However, the events in Amarah and

the attack on the British boat near Basra in November that killed four British service personnel demonstrate how precarious such a decision could be. US General George Casey claimed that Iraqi forces were 75% ready and would take over in 12 to 18 months. But Stuart Bowen, US Inspector-General for Iraq, admitted '... significant challenges remain that put at risk the goal of transferring responsibility to the Iraqis by 1 January 2008'.

Under present conditions of occupation any attempt to create an effective Iraqi national security force is doomed to failure because the main Shia militias and their supporters have infiltrated the highly corrupt Iraqi police and army. Local commanders bear more allegiance to the militias than to the government. The Iraqi people do not trust the Iraqi police or army as such and turn to their respective militias for protection. Everyone realises that the repeated calls by the US for a clamp down on all militias is being used by them as cover to attack the Mehdi army alone because they have consistently opposed the occupation and been willing to engage the occupying forces in heavy fighting.

Much of the blame for the sectarian violence presently taking place in the country lies firmly with the occupying imperialist forces. Shortly after the invasion the CIA set up Iraqi death squads to help them put down the Resistance. In the south the British allowed the Badr militia to work alongside the Iraqi police. There were several reports that British troops stood aside while sectarian killings were taking place and even that British special forces were responsible for planting bombs that sparked sectarian violence. Terrorising the local people with death squads and divide and rule tactics are long established

'Of course, none of these difficulties mean the imperialists intend to give up on Iraq. Nor will they allow any change in policy to be regarded as in any sense a defeat, for to do so would be a major blow to their wider strategy of maintaining global economic and political hegemony through the threat of military force.'

means by which British imperialism has sought to quell opposition in the oppressed countries. At the beginning of 2005 the Pentagon trained Iraqis for what it called 'irregular missions'. The operation was code-named the 'Salvador Option' after US counter-revolutionary operations in Central America 20 years ago that resulted in 70,000 deaths. Adviser to the 'Salvador Option' was James Steele, the man who had commanded the US military in El Salvador.

Despite the sectarian violence the Iraqi people have no doubt who their main enemies are. A survey by the University of Maryland a few weeks ago found 80% of Iraqis believe the US military is 'provoking more conflict than it is preventing'; 71% want US troops out within a year and 62% of Shias and 92% of Sunnis approve of attacks on US-led forces.

Of course, none of these difficulties mean the imperialists intend to give up on Iraq. Nor will they allow any change in policy to be regarded as in



Demonstration against British troops in Basra

any sense a defeat, for to do so would be a major blow to their wider strategy of maintaining global economic and political hegemony through the threat of military force. Furthermore, despite the turmoil, the oil multinationals have continued scheming to secure Iraqi oil. Prominent among them have been the British and Anglo-Dutch giants BP and Shell.

The price of Iraqi oil

Immediately after the invasion the Coalition Provisional Authority hired oil executives to advise them. The most senior was Phil Carroll, former head of Shell in the US. Later advisers included Terry Adams and Bob Morgan of BP. In 2004 Iyad Allawi, head of the Iraqi interim government, issued guidelines for foreign involvement in oil development and argued that there should be no public debate on the proposals because it would delay progress. No wonder Allawi (who supported the massacre in Fallujah) was the imperialists' favoured Iraqi politician in the later elections.

Meanwhile, both Shell and BP bid for the contract to process geological data from the main Iraqi oil fields: a contract Shell won. Technical information and friends in high places are the two most valuable assets when developing new oil fields. In late summer 2004 Shell appointed a 'country chairman' for Iraq to its board and advertised for an Iraqi communications officer who had to be 'an Iraqi national who understood and had connections in the network of Iraqi families of significance'. Shell also sponsored conferences with Iraqi oil ministry speakers, funded the training of Iraqi oil technicians and provided them with technical manuals. In October 2004 the Iraqi oil minister announced in the Shell in-house magazine that 2005 would be the 'year of dialogue' with international oil companies.

Officials from the Iraqi oil ministry worked closely with executives from the major oil companies, including BP, to draft proposals for developing Iraqi oilfields and the necessary legislation to permit it. The multinationals wanted Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs), which effectively allow the oil giants to operate as private companies, developing new oilfields as they wish and paying taxes rather than royalties. The oil-monitoring group Platform has estimated PSAs would give the foreign companies control of up to 87% of Iraqi oil reserves and a return on investment of between 42% and 162%. This would result in the theft of as much as \$200 billion that would belong to the Iraqi people if oil were state-owned.

In case the Iraqi puppets faltered in their treachery, the IMF in late

January 2006 released its standby agreement allowing future financing facilities for the Iraqi government and cancelling 30% of Iraq's debt to the Paris Club of creditor nations. In return the Iraqis had to comply with the IMF's conditions on economic policy, including a slashing of fuel subsidies and a requirement that the IMF be involved in drafting the oil legislation, which must then be passed into law by the end of 2006. Members of the Iraqi oil ministry were summoned to the US for further work on the oil legislation so that immediately after the Iraqi elections in May 2006 the new oil minister, Husayn al-Shahrastani, was able to announce that one of the top priorities would be to pass a law allowing Iraq to sign contracts with the largest overseas oil companies. In July, US Energy Secretary Bodman insisted on reviewing the draft law and then arranged for al-Shahrastani to visit Washington where the draft could be scrutinised by representatives of all the top oil companies, including Shell and BP. By the end of August the draft legislation had still not been seen by the Iraqi parliament. In October 2006 the Iraqi government announced the form that oil contracts would take and that they would be signed before the end of next year. Again, the announcements were made not to the Iraqi people, but at conferences in Australia and Abu Dhabi.

All the major oil vultures will now start circling. Shell is in a particularly strong position having already picked up contracts to provide equipment for Iraq's oil terminals, to design Iraq's Gas Master Plan and to advise on the expansion of the Missan oilfield in addition to its geology contract, and due to its well-groomed Iraqi contacts. In addition, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, ex-Conservative foreign secretary, has been lobbying US Vice-President Dick Cheney on behalf of Shell and the Australian oil company BHP Billiton of which Rifkind is Director of International Strategy. Rifkind also happens to be chair of Armor Group the largest private security firm operating in Iraq. There are over 25,000 such foreign mercenaries in the country. In April this year all of the five Iraqi trade union federations called unanimously on the government to 'refuse all foreign take-overs in the oil sector whether by privatisation or by production sharing agreements'. Given Shell's involvement with the massacre of the Ogoni people in Nigeria we can expect further 'co-operation' between Shell and Rifkind's thugs should the Iraqi people resist the theft of their oil.

Massive death toll for the Iraqi people

In October the medical journal *The Lancet* reported a survey of Iraqi

deaths carried out by Johns Hopkins University in the United States and doctors from the Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad. The survey revealed there had been 655,000 Iraqis killed because of the invasion and the occupation. Of these, 196,000 violent deaths were at the hands of the imperialist forces. Needless to say President Bush immediately attacked the survey, saying, 'I don't consider this a credible report and neither does General Casey and neither do Iraqi officials.' But the survey involved well-proven methods of cluster sampling. Such surveys in other countries have been accepted without question by the imperialist governments when the results were conducive to their interests.

Homelessness and suffering

Altogether 1.6 million Iraqis have left the country in the last three years. Another 1.5 million have been forced to leave their homes within the country, many now having to live six or seven to a room in whatever shelter they can find. The Iraqi Ministry of Labour says that the incidence of poverty has increased by 35% since 2003. Some reports say around eight million Iraqis live on less than \$1 a day. If the money being spent on the war was instead distributed among the Iraqi people every man woman and child would receive more than \$10 a day.

According to the Iraqi Ministry of Health half of all Iraqi children are suffering some form of malnutrition and one in ten is suffering from chronic disease or illness. 60% of Iraqis are unemployed. Iraq's electricity network is in a state of collapse. Homes, hospitals and schools rely on generators, the cost of which has skyrocketed since the IMF insisted on fuel price increases. A quarter of all Iraq's doctors have left the country. Hospitals are so short of medicines and equipment they are even having to re-use intravenous tubes and needles. Of the 180 health clinics the US had promised to build by 2005, only four have been completed and none have opened.

Articles 55 and 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention state that 'the Occupying Power' has the duty of ensuring food and medical supplies, medical services, public health and hygiene for the population. Bush and Blair would, of course, wash their hands of the crimes being committed against the Iraqi people and, pointing towards their puppets in Baghdad, claim their troops are not the occupying power but are in Iraq at the invitation of the 'democratically elected Iraqi government'. Perhaps nothing could better illustrate the cynical and callous inhumanity that is imperialism.

Resistance flares in Afghanistan

Attacks by resistance fighters in Afghanistan during the early autumn were described by one British officer as 'the most intensive fighting British forces had seen since the Korean War'. The frequency of attacks is now more than four times what it was a year ago, running at an average of 600 attacks each month. In October, Brigadier Ed Butler, former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, admitted that his troops had come close to running out of supplies and that 'some may have underestimated the tenacity and ferocity of the Taliban'. He now suggests imperialist forces may have to be in Afghanistan for 20 years. US Ambassador Ronald Neumann agrees, saying that the US would remain 'multiple years' and spend 'multiple billions' to avoid failure.

Resistance fighters are not just Taliban

To describe all those opposing the occupation of Afghanistan as Taliban is mere propaganda on the part of the imperialists. Anyone who opposes the puppet government of Hamid Karzai or the rampant corruption of its local officials are labelled Taliban. It is part of the same terror and divide and rule tactics the British have always used in counter-insurgency operations. So, for example, local warlords are sent to patrol tribesmen with whom they have blood feuds. When the tribesmen defend themselves or fight back they too are labelled Taliban.

On 19 October the first British death from a suicide bomb occurred. Such bombings are now frequent in Kabul. There were 106 in Afghanistan in the first ten months of 2006 alone as compared with just 17 in the whole of 2005. British troops have been forced to withdraw from the streets of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk because 'suicide bombers are walking around looking for us'. A British soldier was quoted in the *Daily Mail* as saying: 'It is a lot worse than people know back home. It is a massive cover-up really, to not get the real truth.' By the beginning of November, 41 British troops had died in Afghanistan. They are being killed at a greater rate than in Iraq.

Resistance forces grow

Puppet Afghan president Hamid Karzai once claimed there were just '200 core fighters' in the resistance. There are now so many volunteers from the Afghan refugee community in Pakistan and elsewhere wanting to join as fighters or suicide bombers that resistance leaders have had to restrict their flow across the border for fear of chaos. British Lt-Colonel Andy Price said 'For every Taliban you kill you recruit three or four more'. Human Rights Watch point out that the growing number of non-combatants being killed in Afghanistan also fuels the resistance. On 26 October, 85 people were killed by a NATO bombing raid in the village of Panjwayi near Kandahar. Major Mark Knittig claimed that only 12 people were killed and that the attacks were against the Taliban. NATO had said the previous month that they had already cleared the area of Taliban. Knittig said 'NATO always uses precision strikes', but the raids consisted of four or five hours of bombing in which 25 homes were completely destroyed. Abdul Aye who lost 22 members of his family in the attack said: 'These

tragedies just keep continuing. There were no Taliban.'

Slaughter in Pakistan

In Pakistan, President Musharraf is facing mounting opposition because of his collaboration with the imperialists. He was forced to withdraw Pakistani troops from Waziristan, making it easier for resistance fighters to cross the nearby Afghan border. On 30 October, Pakistan launched a helicopter missile attack against a *madrasa* at Chingai on the border. At least 80 people were killed. Apart from their teacher all those slaughtered were young students, some as young as seven. The helicopters involved were reported as being from the US. The raid was almost certainly carried out at their insistence as a warning against any other opposition such as that at Waziristan. It took place just two miles from Damadha where a US Predator drone killed 19 Pakistanis in January.

Ruling class divided again

As problems mount for the occupying forces in Afghanistan the same divisions within the ruling classes and between the imperialist nations are emerging as have occurred over Iraq. Sir Richard Dannatt argued that NATO troops are better placed to contain fighting in Afghanistan than in Iraq, but ex-Chief of Staff General (Lord) Charles Guthrie described as 'cuckoo' Britain fighting in Afghanistan while still in Iraq. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said it was impossible to win in Afghanistan 'by military means alone'. In September all the main NATO nations refused to send more troops to the south of Afghanistan. This resulted in the US having to transfer 12,000 troops from elsewhere in Afghanistan. By the end of October the US was again putting pressure on Spain, France, Italy and Germany to send more troops. These arguments are not just fuelled by the intensity of the fighting but by rivalries, as each imperialist nation jostles to take advantage of the situations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Record opium - little reconstruction

Poppy eradication was one of the excuses the imperialists gave for their occupation of Afghanistan. In October the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said the drugs situation was 'out of control'. Opium cultivation rose by 59% last year to an all-time record level. The Afghan puppet government and army are riddled with drug barons. Afghanistan supplies 92% of the world's opium. And what of the humanitarian and reconstruction projects that we were told were the true purpose of British forces in Afghanistan? ...so far just one BBC report on a rather shabby drug rehabilitation centre that looked distinctly set up for the cameras. Projects by other agencies are collapsing. 30 aid workers have been killed this year. In November the World Food Programme announced it had no funds left to feed three million Afghans this winter. Less than half the Afghan population now thinks the country is heading in the right direction. A small number of massively rich Afghans are clearing away slum dwellers in Shirpur to build four and five storey mansions. The UN Development Programme says only four countries in the world are now poorer than Afghanistan.

Jim Craven

Lifting the veil on racism

On 5 October the Leader of the House of Commons, Labour MP for Blackburn, former Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary Jack Straw wrote in his local newspaper about his objections to Muslim women wearing the full veil, or niqab. Almost immediately attacks on Muslims escalated throughout Britain with assaults on women with veils, beatings, intimidation, gang violence and petrol bombings of mosques. Prime Minister Blair and Tory leader David Cameron weighed in with their own variations on the anti-Muslim theme. All this was just the latest ratcheting up of a sustained attack that has been orchestrated with increasing fervour for the past five years against anyone who is or looks like they might be a Muslim.

Liberal commentators and middle class Muslim organisations have labelled this 'Islamophobia' and the websites, commissions and forums that have sprung up characterise it as some new type of prejudice or religious intolerance. In reality this is nothing new; it is old-fashioned imperialist racism. The vilification of Muslims in Britain is intrinsically linked to Britain's wars against the predominantly Muslim people of the Middle East and Afghanistan, in just the same way the racism against Irish people in the 1970s and 1980s was tied up with Britain's military occupation of the north of Ireland.

Racism is always present as a weapon in class societies but is brought to the forefront and sharpened up when ruling class interests and social stability are under threat. Imperialism justifies conquest of other nations by racist supremacy. It combats the threat of unified opposition at home by encouraging racism. The invaded and occupied nations are depicted as aggressors who threaten Britain and must be disarmed, neutralised and crushed.

Today, British armed forces are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan in wars that are increasingly unpopular with the population as a whole and with Muslims in particular. So the ruling class once again favours and encourages racism as a tool of control.

This operates at three levels. At the official state level there is the declaration of hostilities and the introduction of emergency laws. A raft of legislation is introduced, intended to criminalise and limit protest against British occupation. Just as internment and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 were designed to render all Irish people guilty by association with the movement to liberate their country, and aimed to terrorise those living in England into denouncing their compatriots, the current anti-terror laws are aimed at preventing Muslims in Britain showing any solidarity with the resistance to the occupations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine.

Then there is the unofficial state racism which is unleashed in a flood of opinion and media coverage of issues such as Britishness or women and the veil, which builds a consensus that Muslims are the 'other', that they are inherently undemocratic and pose a threat to civil liberties. Finally the fascists who verbally and physically attack and insult Muslim people are unleashed on the streets and in the neighbourhoods. In this way the demonisation of Muslim people is formalised and made acceptable all the way through from military occupation, via the media and into the gutter of racist attacks.

Added to this, certain realignment has been necessary to reinforce pro-war propaganda. The first step is to demolish current race relations structures and replace them with a

unemployment rate, at 16% for men and 18% for women, is three times the national average. Among Black African Muslims the rates are worse at nearly 30%. A third of all Muslims in Britain live in the most deprived areas, with 41% living in substandard accommodation. More than 40% of Bangladeshi households are over-crowded, compared with 6% of white British households. One in three Muslim homes has dependent children but no working adults. A third of all British Muslims have no qualifications.



strengthened patriotic programme. The Commission for Race Equality has been transformed from a lobby for different ethnic groups into a tool for moulding racial minorities into enforced assimilation under the flag of Britishness. Chancellor Gordon Brown positions himself for the post of next Prime Minister by extolling Britishness. The Church of England Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, warns that wearing the veil does not conform to British 'norms of decency', teachers at British universities are invited to monitor students to help root out 'extremist activity' and Muslim parents are publicly warned to spy on their children in case they become indoctrinated by 'radical' ideas. In all cases the politicisation of Muslim people in response to British policies in the Middle East is vilified as 'radicalisation', 'extremism' and 'terrorism'.

It is claimed that the refusal of Asians living in the northern cities to integrate into British society was responsible for the 2001 uprisings when youths fought in the streets. There was pretence of shock that suicide bombers on London transport in July 2005, who killed 52 people and injured hundreds, were British. That British Asians should feel vengeful about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and against British support for Israel was presented as a failure of integration into British values and blamed on the 'diversity agenda of multiculturalism'.

In targeting the Muslim population in Britain the racists are attacking one of the most deprived sections of the working class. Muslims make up around 3% of the population, yet their

When Straw described the veil 'as a visible statement of separation', he set Muslims up to become targets of persecution. Fear and hatred are freely disseminated as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue and Israel threatens the Palestinian people with British and US weaponry. However, the 'fear' and 'Islamophobia' (fear of Muslims) are extremely selective. The British ruling class does not fear Muslims when they are useful business partners and allies. In 1988 the Thatcher government secured the £40 billion Al Yamamah contract for arms sales to Saudi Arabia that included 132 Tornado and Hawk aircraft from which Mark Thatcher made a personal £12 million in commissions. Muslims are targeted only when they are identified with the fight against imperialism.

In 1979 the first issue of FRFI reported on a successful campaign in Leeds to defend a 15-year-old Rastafarian school student threatened with expulsion unless he cut off his dreadlocks. Black school students and their parents were leading protests against educational cut-backs and inequalities and exposing the colonial mentality of many in the schooling system. In response the full range of racist attacks was unleashed upon the black community including the SUS laws under which thousands of black youth were stopped and detained by the police on suspicion of crimes.

Racism has many forms and disguises but must always be recognised for what it is - a tool of the ruling class. We must stand united against it.

Susan Davidson

Healthcare: capitalism's perverse incentives

HANNAH CALLER

'That any sane nation, having observed that you could provide for the supply of bread by giving bakers a pecuniary interest in baking for you, should go on to give a surgeon a pecuniary interest in cutting off your leg, is enough to make one despair.' George Bernard Shaw, Preface to *Doctors: The doctor's dilemma* – a tragedy

Payment by Results

In 2004, the first wave of foundation trusts took on Payment by Results (PbR). The intention is that over 80% will be under the system by 2008. PbR is trumpeted as a system that will provide a fair and transparent way of funding local services, and one that makes a predictable, single and nationally predetermined payment to the provider of health care for every patient treated in hospital.

It seems simple: admit, treat, code and be paid with a standard tariff... However, first the services delivered must cover their costs and, second, the payment is calculated using a complicated formula which takes into account the complexity and cost of interventions recorded during a patient's treatment. Each intervention has a code and therefore recording every activity becomes critical for ensuring income recovery.

With such a system, maximising income rather than organising the most appropriate treatment becomes the first priority. It introduces a set of perverse incentives which can compromise the independent judgment of doctors, and



which allow managers to judge every service on the income it generates rather than whether it meets the needs of the person or the community concerned.

The consequence of PbR are already with us. Foundation hospitals with PbR get better paid the more they investigate (a CT scan done in A&E will generate a much greater tariff than if no scan is done). They also get paid more the longer someone stays in hospital, the busier the department is, and the longer the list of past medical problems on the patient's discharge letter.

So managers start panicking if A&E is quiet and start seeing discharge letters as invoices rather than communication between health care workers. Short-stay wards with the aim of early discharge become a problem – not because people are being sent home too early but

because a 48-hour stay means hundreds of pounds more in payment from the Primary Care Trust compared to 47 hours. The future will see hospital departments that do not generate income and are not financially viable either losing that service altogether or passing it to a private company. PbR will be used as a tool to justify cuts in services.

That such cuts are going to take place is evident from a letter that David Nicholson, NHS chief executive, sent to all MPs on the first day of the parliamentary recess in early November. In it he announced that there are to be more closures of A&E departments and maternity and children services in England. Fewer beds in hospitals will be needed as he envisages more people being treated in 'local clinics' and 'high-tech specialist centres'. The following day came the

revelation that a third of the NHS trusts in England are forecasting deficits totalling about £1.2 billion. 175 trusts expect to fail to meet their obligation to break even. Richard Douglas, the Department of Health director of finance, is warning of more redundancies and ward closures. One of the biggest forecast deficits is Queen Elizabeth Hospital in London with an expected overspend of £37.1 million, 32.3% of its turnover.

How this affects individual hospitals is being demonstrated by the Homerton hospital in east London, one of the first ten trusts to get Foundation status. Its medical director announced in 2005 that 'there is much more financial awareness, especially of our responsibility to control costs; it has led to a greater rigour about our plans and their financial implications'. What that 'rigour' means now a year later is becoming evident: ward closures with enforced relocation of nursing staff, reduction in services, post freezes, and cuts in vitally important clinical nurse specialist jobs.

Newly qualified nurses are applying for health care assistant jobs or moving out of nursing before their careers have begun because fewer jobs are being advertised country-wide than the number of nurses who are qualifying. Drop-in-the-ocean savings such as stopping tea bag and coffee supplies for staff take on disproportionate importance. The hospital painting and decorating team, which five years ago painted wards while they were empty, are now painting around sick people, moving their beds away from the wall to get behind them. A ban on overtime means that they can no longer use weekends to paint areas only used in the weekdays.

Health care cannot be adequately provided in this manner. Patients will be treated more and more as commodities. Tariffs cannot be worked out for kindness, compassion, patience, empathy or humour – these vital components of human interaction will no longer count for anything.

International News

Brazilian elections

On 29 October President Lula won his second presidential election, increasing his first round vote of 48.61% to 60.83%. His supporters were the poor, from the least developed parts of the country and city slums. But this personal vote couldn't conceal the loss of four Senatorial and eight Chamber of Deputies seats in the 1 October legislative vote. Already a minority party, depending on the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) and a range of smaller parties for support, the Workers Party now faces more difficulties in governing. The PMDB holds 108 seats in both houses (about 20%), an increase of 14 seats, compared to the Workers Party's 93 (about 16%). The majority of the PMDB vote for Lula in a waiting game. Lula is in no position to challenge his domestic bourgeoisie or imperialism. He has conformed to the demands of the IMF which itself, as in Chile and Argentina, is now prepared to see a minimum expenditure on the poor, the creation of a sector of state paupers, who, saved from starvation, are just that bit less likely to drive radical change. As in Nicaragua the process favours social democratic illusions whilst new formulae are concocted to increase the low rate of capital accumulation at the further expense of the workers.

Nicaragua

The 5 November presidential election victory of Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) over US-backed investment banker Eduardo Montealegre, represents a shift in the political agenda of the national bourgeoisie. Ortega is conciliatory towards the US, but the US, in the form of former Defence Secretary Rumsfeld, issued veiled threats to influence the election result. The criminal Oliver North visited Managua and also told people not to vote for Ortega. North was US President Reagan's aide in funding the 'contras', whose counter-revolutionary campaign between 1980 and 1990 was responsible for the deaths of 50,000 Nicaraguans. The FSLN now supports church-backed legislation outlawing all grounds for abortion. The Sandinista Renewal Movement, which accuses Ortega of opportunism, took six seats from the FSLN in the National Assembly elections. Nicaragua is the second poorest state in the Americas after Haiti, 80% of Nicaraguans live on less than \$1 a day. While the FSLN holds the presidency they remain a minority in the Assembly. Close ties to the US will be maintained but the rejection of the favoured US candidate is a rejection of US bullying.

Alvaro Michaels

Education Notes

The Labour Party at prayer

This Labour government has attacked state education since 1997. It has accelerated the privatisation of every school support service possible: supply staff, payrolls, examinations, cleaning, meals, transport, sports facilities and special needs support. It has diluted local education authority control of secondary schools by introducing competition through league tables and rebranding schools as 'specialist', 'beacon', 'city technology' and 'education action zones'. Labour is now flogging schools to assorted businesses and interest groups as Academy schools for the promise of a few thousand pounds' payment.

Then they discovered the jewel in the crown which had been under their noses all the time: church schools. Though established in the state education system, their distinctiveness had vanished with the decline of church attendance in Britain. Pupils from across the range attended church schools; if they were seen to be 'better' it was only because of local factors. The sudden discovery of 'faith communities' complimented Labour's agenda of curbing the powers of local education authorities and cultivating respect for hierarchy and religious humility in working class pupils. With encouragement, Church of England and Catholic schools immediately became selective. Parents took to attending church to get their child into anything other than what was contemptuously termed a 'bog standard' comprehensive.

The Conservative Party at prayer

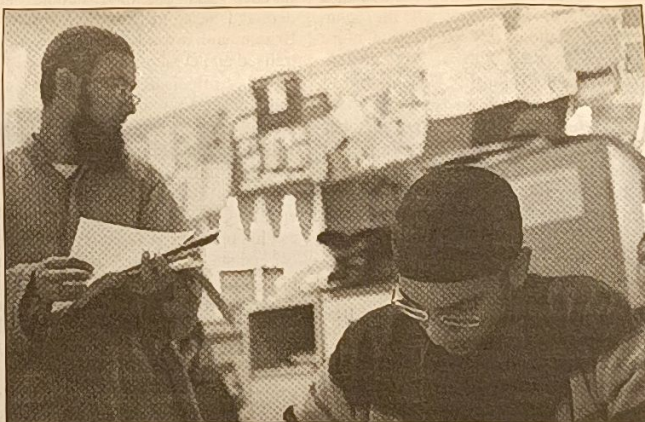
In 1902 the Conservative government introduced an Education Bill to extend secondary education because it was feared

that Britain 'was falling behind all its continental and American rivals in the matter of education'. However, Prime Minister Balfour was antagonistic to the county borough council school boards because they were influenced by socialists and supported by the rates of local taxpayers whose votes he wanted. The Conservatives therefore entered a coalition with the Church of England to increase the public funding of church schools from 77% to 100%. Although all Christian denominations could 'have' their own schools, there was great hostility between Catholics and Protestants – who complained about 'putting Rome on the rates'.

The National Union of Teachers campaigned against the 1902 Bill 'because it destroys the present system of undenominational teaching – why should this system be destroyed to allow one particular religious body to "capture the schools"?'.

The 1902 Education Bill was passed and the Church of England became and has remained the largest religious group to receive state funding for schools. One hundred years later a new Education Bill, introduced this time by the Labour Party, attempts to revive the flagging influence of church schools and legislates for them to 'capture the schools' again. The 2005 Education Bill will even give new powers to faith schools to discriminate on religious grounds in hiring thousands of support staff.

Critics of the faith school agenda include individual Conservative and Labour MPs as well as the GMB union and the National Secular Society. Education Secretary Alan Johnson tried to deflect criticism of new faith schools by making it compulsory to take in 25% of pupils from other backgrounds, but



the Catholic and Jewish schools refused. Like overnight celebrities, religious leaders have sensed that they can punch above their weight and grab a bigger share of public finances. In England and Wales 74% of the population describe themselves as Christian but only 7% of Christians in the UK attend church. Out of a total of 31,400 state schools there are 7,000 denominational, or faith, schools: 600 secondary and 6,400 primaries. Of these 6,955 are Christian (2,000 of which are Catholic), 36 are Jewish, five are Muslim and two are Sikh.

A recipe for intolerance?

Faith schools in the private sector, including 120 Islamic schools, now plan to join the state sector when the new bill is passed. Though Muslims make up only 3% of the population in England and Wales, Islam is the second biggest religion after Christianity. This was overlooked in Education Minister David Blunkett's original enthusiasm for faith schools and has caused something of a rethink by sections of the Labour government. Surveys show that 82% of people do not think that any religious

school should be subsidised by the state. In the north of Ireland the separation of pupils into Catholic and Protestant schools reflects and perpetuates the sectarian divide. Once again yet another Labour flagship initiative is plunged into chaos while parents, teachers and pupils are left to pick up the pieces.

Who are the criminals?

All senior members of Labour's election cabinet are currently being questioned by the police to explain what they know about the cash for honours scandal which involves about £14 million in undeclared loans. Meanwhile the government's £10 million Safer Schools scheme that uses police officers to stem violence and bad behaviour in schools has led to sharp rise in juvenile arrests. Minor offences for which children were previously disciplined by schools are now more likely to lead to a criminal record, with 210,000 young people prosecuted last year, an increase of 27% in three years. The ever-expanding database of DNA records now holds the details of 51,000 children arrested and freed without charge.

Susan Davidson

Nepal peace deal

The 10-year revolt in Nepal has reached a critical new stage. The Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)) has reached a power-sharing agreement with the democratic bourgeois forces in the country, known as the Seven Party Alliance (SPA). Members of the CPN(M) will take positions in a temporary cabinet where they will share ministerial posts equally with the SPA. In return the PLA agreed to have its weapons monitored by the UN. In a unique arrangement, the PLA's weapons have been put in storage and are monitored by UN officials. However, the PLA have the keys to the store rooms. The PLA has also agreed to remain in five base camps around the country. The Nepalese Army (known until recently as the Royal Nepalese Army) has agreed not to undertake any manoeuvres. The PLA has not laid down its arms and it is not considering decommissioning. 10,000 people have been killed during the past 10 years. The CPN(M) is exploring a peaceful end to the conflict after mass mobilisations in April forced the king to restore parliamentary rule.

Andrew Alexander

BRITAIN

Parasitic and decaying capitalism

Britain is a major imperialist power. Over the last 150 years, the very structure of British capital and, therefore, the nature of the working class movement have been determined by this obvious, but, until recently, seldom acknowledged reality. The imperialist character of Britain has been decisive in determining all the major economic and political developments in this country. Yet it has taken the brutal and barbaric US and British occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the growing resistance to that occupation to force the term 'imperialism' back into the political vocabulary of the left. DAVID YAFFE analyses the nature of British imperialism.¹

Acknowledgment of the existence of imperialism is a step forward and is to be welcomed.² But, as will be shown, the British left acknowledges the existence of imperialism only to deny imperialism's central characteristics. This is inevitably reflected in practical political activity and presents a serious obstacle to the development of a revolutionary working class movement in Britain. That is why it has to be exposed. It is, therefore, necessary to briefly outline the central characteristics of imperialism before analysing the particular concrete features of British imperialism today.

Imperialism is fundamentally monopoly capitalism. It is the historical period of the decay of capitalism and is characterised by parasitism. Imperialism is the era of finance capital in which enormously concentrated banking capital has fused with industrial and commercial capital. The export of capital – that is global investment – as opposed to export of commodities becomes the distinguishing feature of imperialism.

As a result capitalism has grown into a global system of national oppression and of financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of advanced countries. Imperialism divides the world between oppressed and oppressor nations; at the same time it brings about class differentiation within both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – the existence of purely parasitic financiers [rentier class] and the labour aristocracy bribed out of the superprofits of imperialism. Finally, after the territorial division of the world by a small number of rich capitalist countries at the beginning of the 20th century, the different pace of development of monopoly capitalism in different countries drives nations into conflicts that can only be resolved by force – that is by war.³

Lenin was concerned to show how imperialism splits the working class movement and creates opportunist currents in the working class movement internationally, arguing that the 'fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism.' That is why he attacks Kautsky⁴ who attempted to contain irreconcilable trends of the left and right within the same socialist movement, to justify

'unity' with the apologists of imperialism, refused to fight opportunism, and found himself and his followers united with the extreme (right) opportunists supporting imperialist war. Kautsky detached the politics of imperialism from its economics. Kautskyism, Lenin argued, is not an independent trend, because it has no roots either in the masses or in the privileged stratum of the working class which had gone over to the side of the bourgeoisie. It attempts to reconcile the working class with the 'bourgeois labour party' to preserve the unity of the working class with that party. It is, Lenin argued, the 'inevitable fruit of the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie, whose entire way of life holds them captive to bourgeois and petty bourgeois prejudices'. Such tendencies have to be combated by the party of the proletariat.⁵

Although Britain does not yet have a mass socialist movement, Kautskyism began to emerge as an ideological trend within the anti-war, anti-capitalist movement when it had the potential to develop into a mass movement against imperialism. The Labour Party's role in aligning Britain with US imperialism in the renewed wars in Afghanistan and Iraq altered the political parameters. It was no longer credible for those claiming socialist credentials to maintain political links with the openly imperialist Labour Party and attempt to build a mass socialist movement with significant forces within the official Labour movement. A new mass 'socialist' movement could only be built outside the Labour Party and official Labour movement.

Hence the turn of the largest left organisation in Britain, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), towards the anti-capitalist and anti-war movement with few links to the traditional Labour movement. Likewise the SWP played a central and crucial role in building Respect and, in Scotland, aligned its organisation with the Scottish Socialist Party in its efforts to build a new social democratic party, a more credible 'bourgeois labour party'. So in the rapidly growing anti-war movement, which peaked just before the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the SWP leadership successfully fought to contain the inevitable right and left trends in that movement within one 'mass' opportunist organisation, preventing a deci-

sive break with the 'bourgeois labour party', with the right opportunists, and blocking the emergence of a mass anti-imperialist anti-war movement. This is the form Kautskyism has taken in Britain and to combat it we need to understand the nature of British imperialism in the present period.

A parasitic and decaying capitalism

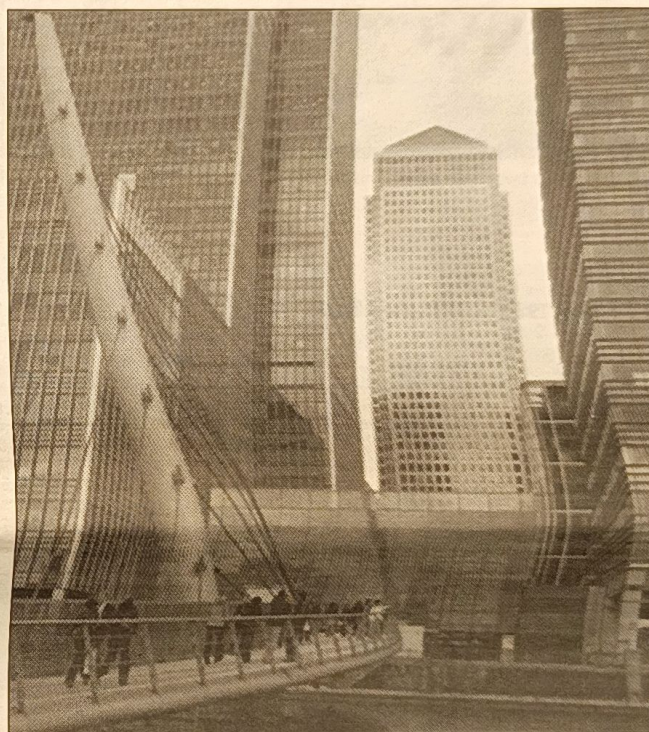
'Capitalism which began its development with petty usury capital is ending its development with gigantic usury capital.' (Lenin *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* CW 22 p233)

Lenin was describing French imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century but it is even more applicable to British imperialism today. Britain's relative industrial decline has been combined with a dynamic, aggressive imperialist expansion of commerce and finance overseas. This development has now reached unprecedented levels.

Britain's overseas assets in 2005 were £4,837.1bn, nearly four times Britain's GDP. 56.4% of these assets, £2,727.1bn, more than double Britain's GDP, were 'other investments', mainly loans and deposits abroad by UK banks – a 'gigantic usury capital'. Only 15.6% of the overseas assets, £753.2bn, were direct investments (an investment in an enterprise abroad with 10% or more shares or voting stock), and 27.5%, £1,332.1bn, were portfolio investments (investments in shares, bonds and money market instruments).

Britain's overseas assets are now increasing every year by around 60% of Britain's GDP. Since 1997 when the Labour government came to power they have increased nearly two and a half times. In 2005 at the current exchange rate they were 92% of the size of US foreign assets – \$9,190.5bn to \$10,008.7bn.⁶ However the foreign assets of the US were only equivalent to around 80% of the US GDP. (See Table 1.)

Britain's foreign assets are matched by even greater foreign liabilities of £5,006.0bn leaving a net external debt



'The government has to fight the City's corner not just in Brussels but in New York, India and China and other centres around the world.'

of £168.9bn, 13.8% of GDP. This has increased more than three times since 1997. Yet despite this external debt, the flow of income into Britain from its foreign assets is considerably greater than the payments flowing out of Britain to foreign residents holding British assets. Britain generates investment income surpluses from increasing net debt. This is a recent and unprecedented development which Britain currently shares with the United States.

Net earnings on Britain's international investment account in 2005 were a very significant £29.8bn. This is because Britain has earned a higher rate of return on its total external assets than it paid out on its total external liabilities. In 2004 the rates of return were 3.8% and 3.0% respectively, a signifi-

cant difference given the enormous size of foreign assets and liabilities. This statistic, however, conceals the rates of return on foreign assets and foreign liabilities in different parts of the world. Britain earned a 3.4% rate of return on foreign assets in the EU and paid out a 3.2% rate of return on its liabilities to the EU. In the case of the US the rates of return were 3.7% and 3.5% respectively. However in areas which include

Table 1
Britain's external assets £bn

	1997	% of Total	% of GDP	2005	% of Total	% of GDP	% Increase 1997-2005
Direct investment	232.4	11.8	28.7	753.2	15.6	59.4	214.1
Portfolio investment	651.0	32.9	80.3	1,332.1	27.5	108.8	104.6
Other investment	1,070.4	54.2	132.0	2,727.1	56.4	222.7	154.8
Reserve assets	22.8			24.7			
Total	1,976.5		244.0	4,837.1		395.0	144.7

1 This is an edited and extended version of a talk David Yaffe gave to the RCG conference on 29 October 2006.

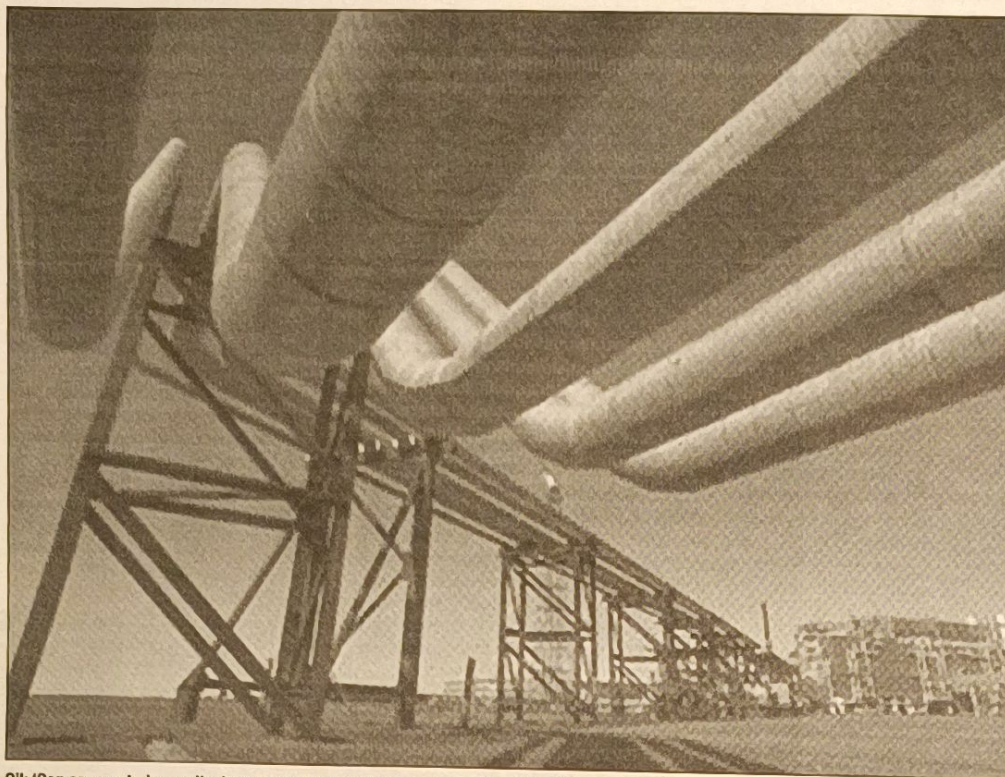
2 Only last year Tony Benn, a regular speaker on Stop the War platforms and darling of much of the British left, repeated his long held view that Britain is a colony of the United States. See *Socialist Register 2005* p328, Merlin Press 2004.

3 These characteristic features of imperialism were outlined by Lenin in his writings at the time of World War I – the first imperialist war – in particular in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* in CW Vol 23 pp185-304.

4 Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) was a leading theoretician of German Social Democracy and the Second International. Lenin called him a renegade for betraying the working class movement during the first imperialist war.

5 See *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* CW Vol 23 p119 and *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, CW Vol 23 p192 and p302.

6 All statistics, unless stated otherwise, are taken from the relevant UK Official National Statistics at www.statistics.gov.uk.



Oil: 'Can anyone today really deny the existence of monopoly profits or the domination of the 'Third World' by the rich imperialist nations?'

Table 2

FDI Inflows 1992-2005, FDI stock 2005
\$ billion and % of total

Country group	1992-1997	%	2000	%	2004	%	2005 (stock)	%
Imperialist	180.8	58.1	1,108.0	79.8	396.1	55.7	7,117.1	70.3
Underdeveloped	118.6	38.2	252.5	18.2	275.0	38.7	2,757.0	27.2
Ex-socialist nations	11.5	3.7	27.5	2.0	39.6	5.6	255.7	2.5
World	310.9		1,388.0		710.7		10,129.7	

most of the oppressed and less developed capitalist nations, the differences on the rates of return were far greater. So for Asia the rates of return were 3.8% and 2.2% respectively (if Japan is excluded the difference in rates of return for Asia rises to around 3.5%)⁷ and for the Rest of the World 5.0% and 2.6% respectively, an enormous differential. So Britain borrows cheaply to invest in assets that earn a higher rate of return. In particular it has been accumulating mainly low risk, and low yield net banking liabilities and has been increasing net assets in higher yielding foreign direct investment (FDI). These dramatic statistics illustrate the parasitic nature of British capitalism.

In 2005, Britain had a balance of payments deficit of £26.6bn. The country spent around 2.2% of GDP more than it earned. The deficit on trade in goods was a massive £67.3bn, a record cash amount, and 5.5% of GDP. It will almost certainly deteriorate further as the trade balance in oil has now gone into deficit (£1.2bn in 2005) for the first time since 1979. Without the surplus on services trade of £23.1bn⁸ and the net income flow on the international investment account of £29.8bn sucked in from surplus-value produced in every corner of the world, the standard of living of the British people would have significantly fallen. Labour's justification for 'humanitarian wars', its support for military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside the US, is explicable in terms of the need to protect these vital global investments.

Denying imperialism

Yet many on the British left deny the parasitic character of imperialism. Typical is Chris Harman of the SWP when he argues:

'Whatever may have been the case a century ago, it makes no sense to see

the advanced countries as "parasitic", living off the former colonial world. Nor does it make sense to see workers in the West gaining from the "super-exploitation" in the Third World. Those who run the system do not miss an opportunity to exploit workers anywhere, however poor they are. But the centres of exploitation, as indicated by the FDI figures, are where industry already exists.' (International Socialism (IS) 99 Summer 2003 p39-40)

This is a slightly different formulation of a position that has always been at the centre of the theoretical principles of the SWP.⁹ More recently Harman has gone further and seems to suggest that the imperialists did not benefit at all from colonialism, and indeed flourished economically in the post-war period on losing their overseas possessions. 'So the British, French, Dutch and Belgian economies all boomed after the loss of their colonies', because the most profitable destinations for investment turned out to be the other 'advanced' indus-



Bangladesh: '...the super-exploitation of the underdeveloped nations cannot be in doubt.'

trial countries.¹⁰ So it would appear that the imperialists had no reason to be imperialists at all – a blanket denial of the neo-colonial settlement that emerged out of the Second World War and of the monopoly profits plundered from the underdeveloped nations throughout the post-war period.

All this reactionary bluster from Harman is to deny the existence of high monopoly profits drawn out of the underdeveloped world as the material basis of a privileged layer of the working class in the imperialist countries. His argument for this is unsustainable. For we are not dealing with the 'normal' exploitation of workers 'anywhere' under capitalism but with super-exploitation of the underdeveloped nations under monopoly capitalism, that is, imperialism. We are not speaking of the 'normal' profits from competitive capitalism but of the high monopoly profits of finance capital, when a handful of very rich capitalist nations have a stranglehold on the majority of countries of the world. Can anyone today really deny the existence of monopoly profits or the domination of the 'Third World' by the rich imperialist nations?

Harman attempts to do this by concentrating on one component of capital exports, foreign direct investment (FDI) but he shows little understanding of its composition and significance. FDI figures, he argues, show that the 'centres of exploitation' are where 'industry already exists'. He does this by conveniently disregarding the massive shift away from FDI in production industries towards services in the so-called 'advanced' capitalist countries¹¹ (that is, imperialist countries – a category Harman is reluctant to use). Further he fails to acknowledge that, over the last decade, an increasingly large proportion of the high FDI between imperialist countries takes the form of cross-border mergers and acquisitions (M&As) – an ever intensifying concentration of existing capital – and not new 'greenfield' investment.¹² The recent upsurge in FDI in 2005 and the first half of 2006 reflects the greater level of M&As (an 88% rise of M&As in 2005 over 2004) especially among the imperialist nations.¹³ Five countries (US, UK, Germany, France and Japan) are responsible for more than half the accumulated outward stock of FDI in 2005 and just 10 countries for over 70%. So a small number of imperialist countries control the vast majority of the FDI throughout the world. (See Table 2.¹⁴)

Finally Harman even ignores the nature and extent of FDI in the underdeveloped nations. The share of global FDI going to the underdeveloped and ex-socialist nations fell from an average 42% in the period 1992-1997 to 20% in 2000, the peak of the mergers and acquisitions boom, rising again to 44.3% in 2004 during the period of low growth in the imperialist countries after 2001. So the share of FDI in the underdeveloped countries has been highest in periods of recession and low growth in the main imperialist countries, as corporations are forced to export surplus capital to areas of potential expansion and growing markets. Even accumulated stock figures for 2005 show that, on average, FDI in the underdeveloped regions is around 30% of the total global stock. Given that even official figures (ignoring other unofficial means of extracting super-profits from the oppressed nations such as transfer pricing, unequal exchange, special tax regimes, fees and commissions etc) show that the rate of return on investment in the underdeveloped countries is often around double that from the imperialist nations¹⁵ – the super-exploitation of the underdeveloped nations cannot be in doubt.

Harman purposely concentrates on FDI in a forlorn attempt to deny the classic Leninist position on imperialism. Yet he contradicts even his extraordinary position in the very same article when he states that 'debt servicing transfers alone \$300 billion a year from

the "developing countries" to the wealthy in the advanced world' (IS 99 p69). Sneaking in the word 'wealthy' should deceive no one.¹⁶ In fact debt servicing is much higher than \$300bn a year, reaching almost double that amount in 2005. Despite this, the external debt of underdeveloped countries continues to grow. It is simply a means to further extortion. (See Table 3.¹⁷)

The external debt of the underdeveloped countries between 1998 and 2005 increased by 25.1% from \$2,407.5bn to \$3,012.3bn, despite these countries having paid back \$3,653.3bn to the imperialist banks, governments and their official international institutions over the same period. This is simply plunder of

7 Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin Autumn 2006 p293.

8 Britain with 7.6% of the world's total export trade in commercial services is second only to the US with 14.6%. Germany is third with 5.9%.

9 See for example *Socialist Worker* 28 April 1979 and our discussion in *Revolutionary Communist* 9 p3.

10 Harman, *Socialist Review* November 2006.

11 See *World Investment Report* (WIR) 2004 *The shift towards services* UN 2004. The share of services in the outward FDI stock from developed countries was 67% in 2004 and that of manufacturing 28%. There has also been a steep rise in FDI into the primary sector, especially in petroleum. See WIR 2006, pxxviii and p116.

12 See 'Globalisation: parasitic and decaying capitalism' in *FRFI* 158 December 2000/January 2001. Between 80% and 90% of cross-border M&As take place in the imperialist countries with some 50-65% of it destroying shareholder value. They are defensive in character, a barrier against takeover rather than a means to enhance productivity and accumulation, a further expression of the parasitic and decaying character of imperialism. 'Greenfield' FDI adds to production capacity in the host country.

13 A new feature of M&As is increasing investment by private equity funds – \$135bn in 2005. Such financial service institutions tend to have a relatively short term horizon and are often seen as 'asset strippers' out for a rapid and high rate of return. They are included in FDI statistics if the 'investment' is more than 10% of equity – another feature of the parasitic character of a growing proportion of FDI in the main imperialist nations.

14 Figures from WIR 2004 and 2006. These statistics understate the amount of FDI in the underdeveloped world due to nations from the ex-socialist countries and other small capitalist nations having joined the EU and now included in the imperialist countries category. Wages in the new EU member states in 2005 were about 70% lower than those in the EU-15. High monopoly profits are being made by multinational corporations and banks investing in those countries.

15 In only three of the 14 years 1980-1993 were rates of return on US FDI marginally higher in the developed countries overall. For the other 11 years they were much higher in the underdeveloped countries and in some years more than double that in the imperialist countries. In Africa the rates of return were three or four times greater than for the imperialist countries. See WIR 1995 p94. More recently income on FDI in the top six FDI recipient countries in Latin America and the Caribbean increased by 177% to \$42bn between 2002 and 2005. WIR 2006 p68.

16 He also seeks to lay the blame on the local ruling classes of the Third World for the super-exploitation of their population for acting as debt collectors for the Western banks, multinationals and investors and even their domestic capitalists (IS 99 *ibid*). Needing to pass responsibility on to the local ruling classes in the Third World for the exploitation of their population appears to have become the SWP's opportunist justification for rejecting the division of the world between oppressor and oppressed nations (between 'core and periphery') under imperialism. See Megan Trudell SR September 2006 p23.

17 These figures from the IMF's *World Economic Outlook* September 2006 exclude Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. Such countries are seen as part of the 'developed' capitalist world in IMF statistics.

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Table 3
Underdeveloped countries' external debt and debt servicing payments
1998-2005
\$ billion

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
External debt	2,407.5	2,447.6	2,366.9	2,380.6	2,450.7	2,674.6	2,918.8	3,012.3
Debt-servicing	370.8	403.7	455.4	435.0	422.4	478.1	490.1	597.8

the resources of the oppressed nations by imperialism. This debt can never be paid back and will continue to grow.

The plunder of the underdeveloped countries does not end here. To this must be added portfolio investment by imperialist investors in shares and bonds in underdeveloped countries' stock and bond markets. Harman acknowledges this when he says there 'can be no end to the squeezing' (IS 99 p69), but he argues 'the economies of the Third World are too small' for these new forms of exploitation to solve the problems of capitalism of the advanced countries as the old forms did in Hobson's, and presumably Lenin's, time (IS 99 p70). This attempts to shift the focus of the argument yet again 'to solving the problems of capitalism of the advanced countries' and shows little comprehension of Lenin's standpoint on imperialism. Harman is clutching at straws because he is determined to deny the reality, that is, the parasitic nature of imperialism and secondly, the super-profits sucked out of the underdeveloped nations as the materialist basis of a labour aristocracy in the imperialist countries.

There is one additional special feature of imperialism which again demonstrates its parasitic character and shows how it helps to sustain a labour aristocracy in the imperialist countries. That is the role of immigration into the imperialist countries from those countries that imperialism has dominated and plundered. Lenin thought this point important enough to be inserted into the Bolshevik party programme. In speaking of the unskilled labour imported from underdeveloped countries he says:

*"The exploitation of worse paid labour from backward countries is particularly characteristic of imperialism. On this exploitation rests, to a certain degree, the parasitism of rich imperialist countries which bribe a part of their workers with higher wages while shamelessly and unrestrainedly exploiting the labour of "cheap" foreign workers."*¹⁸

Harman and the SWP cannot brush aside this critical point. It has been a constant feature of British capitalism's history. Nor can their position be sustained in the face of overwhelming evidence produced above that imperialism is parasitic and decaying capitalism. For socialists from the oldest imperialist nation, living in an imperialist country that sustains the standard of living of its citizens through the income generated by a 'gigantic usury capital', their position is inexcusable.

Inter-imperialist rivalry

The British left's position on inter-imperialist rivalry shows another move towards a Kautskyst¹⁹ standpoint. Typical again is the SWP when it rules out any serious prospects of a European imperialism challenging US dominance of the world economy. So the SWP's Callinicos says that 'there is no chance that the inter-capitalist economic rivalries among countries in the transatlantic zone will break out into military confrontations' (IS 108 Autumn 2005). Harman concurs, denying the likelihood of wars which would ravage the heartlands of the advanced capitalist countries. One reason, he says, is the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons. The other is that 'the very interpenetration of the advanced capitalist economies

puts pressure on states to exercise power outside their own boundaries'. Few capitalists, he argues, 'want their national state to destroy huge chunks of their property in other states – and most of their property will be in the other advanced capitalist countries'. For Harman the result of all this is that the major capitalist nations will conveniently 'settle their differences in the less industrialised parts of the world' (IS 99 p65), while Callinicos, ruling out any European military challenge to the US, sees China as the great power with which the US is most likely to go to war.²⁰ This is not only spurious but wishful thinking.

Lenin dealt with this kind of thinking when he pointed out these 'little' wars, so-called because few from the imperialist countries died in contrast to the hundreds of thousands belonging to the nations they were subjugating, were the prelude to a 'big' war between the contesting imperialist powers.²¹ What differences are the 'major capitalist nations (settling) in less industrialised parts of the world'? They are fighting for spheres of influence, for domination of the less developed parts of the world and for the right to plunder and extract super-profits from the greatest number of countries. Harman agrees that the US no longer has 'overwhelming economic supremacy compared to the other industrially advanced countries' and particularly the European Union. If US imperialism invaded Iraq and Afghanistan 'to strengthen its hand massively in economic and military standoffs with the other big powers'²² is not an eventual showdown between the two dominant world economic forces, the EU and US, inevitable?

Elsewhere FRFI has shown how, over the last 25 years, there has been a changing balance of power between the US, EU and Japan.²³ The relative economic decline of the US began in the 1970s and continues. The EU, which expanded to 25 countries on 1 May 2004, is economically stronger than the US and its overseas interests are rapidly growing in relation to the US, whether of the export of capital or commodities. The EU now has a larger GDP than the US. (See Table 4.)

Real demand in the US economy is rising much faster than real output. The US is spending some 6.4% of GDP, \$805bn more than it is earning. This has led to a progressive rise of US net external debt to the rest of the world, estimated at \$2.55 trillion at the end of 2005. This is not sustainable. Sooner or later this will be reflected in a major fall in the value of the dollar relative to the euro.

These changes in economic strength must eventually lead to a redivision of the world according to economic power. Lenin was very precise about this:

Table 5
Workforce jobs in Britain, 1979-2005
thousands

	Manufacturing	Distribution, Hotels & Restaurants	Finance & Business Services	Education, Health & Public Admin	Total Services	Total Jobs
1979	7,094	5,497	2,889	5,693	16,911	27,220
1990	5,203	6,463	4,442	6,470	20,501	29,100
1997	4,514	6,587	4,993	6,662	21,499	28,566
2005	3,383	7,078	6,097	7,790	24,711	30,810

Table 4
Inter-imperialist rivalry, EU and US
\$ trillion (% are of global total)

	EU	US
GDP (2005)	13.450 (30.3%)	12.490 (28.2%)
Exports (2005) ²⁴	1.330 (17.2%)	0.904 (11.7%)
FDI outward stock (2005)	5.475 (51.3%)	2.051 (19.2%)

"The capitalists divide the world, not out of any particular malice, but because the degree of concentration which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to obtain profits. And they divide it "in proportion to capital", "in proportion to strength", because there cannot be any other method of division under commodity production and capitalism. But strength varies with the degree of economic and political development. In order to understand what is taking place, it is necessary to know what questions are settled by the changes in strength. The question as to whether these changes are "purely" economic or non-economic (eg, military) is a secondary one, which cannot in the least affect fundamental views on the latest epoch of capitalism. To substitute the question of the form of the struggle and agreements (today peaceful, tomorrow warlike, the next day warlike again) for the question of the substance of the struggle and agreements between capitalist associations is to sink to the role of a sophist". (Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, CW 22 p252-3)

The issue of a European challenge to US domination, of the euro replacing the dollar as the dominant world currency, and the possibility of military conflict between the EU and US, cannot be simply dismissed in the cavalier way of many on the left. It is important to remember that after the US replaced Britain as the strongest economic power, it took two world wars, the great depression and fascism before the US became the dominant global imperialist power – 45 years from the turn of the 20th century. And it took quite a few more years before the dollar pushed

aside sterling as one of the world's key currencies.

Until Europe is not only able to replace the dollar standard with the euro but is willing to run the risk of a trade and investment war, with whatever consequences that entails, the US will continue to expand its current account deficit and the US economy will continue to live beyond its means. Europe is clearly biding its time watching as US imperialism continues to exhaust its resources on wars against the underdeveloped world. At some stage in the near future it will be forced to act and the world will again be redivided 'according to economic power'. As one economics writer recently put it: 'The idea that the US will give up global financial hegemony without a fight seems fanciful in the extreme'.²⁵

This is the context in which Britain's role as ally of the US in the brutal war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan has led to an increasingly strained relationship with the EU. How long the British economy can sustain itself outside Europe, with Britain becoming more and more dependent on the parasitic dealings of the City of London, remains to be seen. The British ruling class knows that sooner or later it will have to make a choice between Europe and the United States. Whatever choice is forced on the ruling class, it is certain that any independent role of the City of London will be severely curtailed.

Economic and social consequences in Britain

All the conditions of economic and political life are being governed by the parasitic characteristics of British capitalism. The vast majority of workers are now employed in the services sector with financial and business services becoming more prominent. While not

all service sector jobs are unproductive, it is undeniable that there has been a massive redistribution of labour from the productive to unproductive sectors. (See Table 5.)

Between 1979 and 2005 the total number of workforce jobs has increased 13.2%, while public service jobs have risen by 36.8%, total service jobs by 46.1%, and finance and business services by a massive 111%. Manufacturing jobs have over the same period declined by more than half – 52.3%. Workforce jobs in the manufacturing sector in September 2006 at 3.03m are at the lowest level since records began in 1841. Manufacturing output at the end of 2005 was no higher than it was when Labour came into power in 1997. Over the same period Britain's industrial base fell to less than 16% of the British economy. In 2005 financial services alone accounted for 8.5% of GDP, up from 5.5% five years ago, while the share of manufacturing has fallen by over one third in 10 years to 13.6% of GDP.

Britain's share of total world exports has fallen to 3.6%, putting Britain in seventh place internationally, well behind Germany (9.8%), US (8.7%), and China (7.36%). Britain's share of the world's manufacturing output fell from 3.8% to 3% in the last 10 years, while China's share rose from 4.2% to 8% over the same period. Even South Korea's share has overtaken Britain's, rising from 2.2% to 3.4%.

Gross value added figures from 1997 to 2004 (latest information) show the rapidly growing importance of financial and business services to the British economy. In 1997 gross value added at basic prices by the manufacturing sector was £150.8bn (20.9%) and that of finance and business services sector £189.9bn (26.4%) out of a total value added of £720.6bn. In 2004 the value added by the manufacturing sector had fallen to £147.5bn (14.1%), while that from finance and business services had increased to £344.5bn (33%) out of a total of £1,044.2bn. That is, more than 2.3 times the contribution of gross value added to the British economy by manufacturing. Distribution, hotels and catering at £160.6bn (15.4%) also added a higher gross value than manufacturing. Landlords buying rental properties were the biggest contributors to economic growth from 1992 to 2004 with income



'With such vital Imperialist interests to protect, Labour's justification for "humanitarian wars" is explicable.'

¹⁸ Lenin Revision of the Party Programme CW 26 p168.

¹⁹ Kautsky argued just before the first imperialist war that international cartels, an expression of the internationalisation of capital, gave hope of peace among the major capitalist nations.

²⁰ China may be an emerging capitalist power but it is in no position to take on the US, EU or Japan. See 'China Myths and Realities' in FRFI 193 October/November 2006 for a discussion of the relative economic power of China.

²¹ War and Revolution CW 24 p406.

²² In Harman's article it is not clear whether the conquest of Iraq was a policy of a section of the US ruling class – the neocons – or a necessity for a relatively declining imperialist power. See Harman SR November 2006

²³ See FRFI 158 op cit and 'The world economy facing war and recession' in FRFI 171 February/March 2003.

²⁴ These figures treat the EU as an entity and exclude intra-EU trade. So shares of global exports differ from those of all country exports as a percentage of total world exports below. They are taken from the WTO: 2006 Press Releases. This is not true for FDI outward stock which includes intra-EU FDI. Extra EU outward FDI stock will be about half the intra-EU amount.

²⁵ Larry Elliot The Guardian 2 October 2006. However like the SWP he appears to dismiss the possibility of the euro replacing the dollar as reserve currency, looking to the renminbi or rupee to play such a role. Like the SWP, he conveniently appears to rule out military conflict and therefore revolutionary developments taking place in Europe.

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!



FRFI and supporters of the Anti-Imperialist Bloc on the march against Labour's drive for war in Iraq

from letting private homes rising by £45bn. Income from banking and finance came next with a rise of £36bn or 139% over the 12-year period.

At the core of these developments is the City of London, which was a major, if not the leading, financial centre for a great deal of the post-WWII period. Even today out of seven categories of international financial business, Britain is ahead on four, the US on three and other countries are nowhere. Britain leads in international banking with a share of 20% (US 9%); in foreign exchange – a trade of some \$1,900bn a day – with a share of 31% (US 19%); in foreign equity trading with a share of 42% (US 31%) and in over-the-counter derivatives with a share of 42% (US 22%). The banking sector is responsible for 70% of the massive 'other investments' assets of Britain. This results from Britain's role as the leading international banking centre. The parasitism of British capitalism is most adequately reflected by the fact that the London international centre is dominated by foreign banks, which are responsible for just under 80% of Britain's external 'other investment' assets. Britain is increasingly playing the role of an off-shore haven for international banking. The main British banks made record profits of £33bn in 2005 and expect to make even higher profits this year. HSBC, Britain's largest bank, operates in 76 countries and, through a recent take-over, has become the largest banking group in Central America.

Alongside these developments there has been a growth in very highly paid workers at one extreme and millions of poorly paid ones at the other. A million people work in the money management business in Britain, and a record 335,700 now work in London's international financial and professional services centre. 42% of Britain's financial sector's income is generated in London. This work is very lucrative. City bonuses this year reached a record £19bn, equivalent to Britain's entire annual transport budget. Modern fortunes are more likely to be made from financial wheeler-dealing, speculation and asset stripping than any productive, wealth-creating activity.

The share of Britain's wealth owned

by the top 1% of the population rose from 17% in 1989 to 23% in 2002. The share going to the bottom half of the population has fallen from 10% to 6% over the same period. In 2000 chief executives of FTSE companies earned around 25 times the pay of average workers. It is now close to 120 times. Record salaries are being paid to newly-qualified accountants and IT contractors working in the City as new layers of privileged workers seek to share in the gains of the burgeoning financial and business sectors. Management consultancy grew by 266% over a 12-year period to 2004 spurred on by, among other developments, the growing privatisation of public assets under the Labour government. Whitehall consultants advising government departments are now costing more than £2.2bn a year, leading to lucrative employment for another group of highly-privileged workers.

Despite more than 13 years of economic growth the Labour government has barely begun to reverse the massive increase in poverty of the Tory years and inequality has continued to grow. Labour has reduced the percentage of people living in poverty (below 60% of the median income after housing costs) from 25% in 1996/7 to 20% in 2004/5 and the number of children living in poverty from 33% to 27% in the same period. Yet in 1979 around 13% of people lived in poverty and 14% of children, so no real progress has been made, despite the fact that during Labour's period of office real median family incomes rose by 26%. Under Labour inequality increased with the top 10% increasing their share of income from 27.7% to 29.1%, while the bottom 10% saw their share fall from 2.0% to 1.7%. Inequality between the bottom 20% and top 20% also grew but by a smaller amount and for those in between there was only a very slight reduction.

Real problems are on the horizon. Business investment in 2005 was at the lowest level in relation to the rest of the economy since 1967. Unemployment has hit the highest level for three and a half years. Insolvencies are at record levels – 23,351 insolvency filings in the first quarter of 2006, a 73% rise on a year earlier. Mortgage repossessions are

at a 13-year high – 22,997 in the first quarter of 2006, a 57% rise on the previous year. These developments are not surprising as consumer debt at £1,160bn is almost the size of Britain's GDP and three times the level of the 1990s. Mortgage debt increased three times to £967bn, unsecured borrowing four times to reach £135bn, credit card debt seven times since the 1990s to reach £58bn. The average British household owes £83,772 if mortgage debt is included and the average British person £3,175 if it is excluded. Britain is responsible for a third of all unsecured debt in Europe.

This reality creates difficulties for the left in Britain for it is an unmistakable expression of the parasitic character of British capitalism and of the related changes in the structure of the working class in Britain. The left must underplay this development. So the SWP's Jane Hardy tells us that while 'British capitalism has faced a more rapid fall in manufacturing than other advanced countries...the picture of the collapse of manufacturing is simply a nonsense. Britain is still a significant exporter of [merchandise] goods being ranked sixth in the global economy, with almost the same world share of exports as China'. The fall in manufacturing has, she says, been 'long in the making' and is attributed to the complacency bred by monopolistic domination over captive colonial markets in the 19th century and

'The lessons learned from a Leninist understanding of imperialism make it clear that an anti-war anti-imperialist movement can be built only on the basis of a political movement that breaks completely and unequivocally with the British Labour Party.'

the British ruling classes continuing inflated sense of importance and delusions of grandeur.²⁶ This entire contradictory fluster is necessary for her to reach her dishonest and opportunist conclusion: 'The working class is not disappearing. It is working in different places. Neither is it turning into a privileged layer with better working conditions and wages...Although some people in the City earn exorbitant salaries, many jobs in finance are repetitive, hard and badly paid.' (IS 106 Spring 2005 pp48, 51, 64)

It is a diversion to suggest that anyone is arguing that the working class is disappearing. What the argument is about is the nature of and divisions within the working class under imperialism. And for the left in Britain to deny the parasitic nature of imperialism, with the existence of a privileged layer of the working class based on the super-exploitation of the oppressed nations of the world, is the 'inevitable fruit of the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie, whose entire way of life holds them captive to bourgeois and petty bourgeois prejudices' (Lenin).

The political outcome

The parasitic character of British capitalism, its dependence on the earnings from its vast overseas assets and particularly those of its parasitic banking sector to sustain the British economy, show its vulnerability to any external shocks. With such vital imperialist interests to protect, Labour's justification for 'humanitarian wars' is explicable. Britain's relationship to Europe and the impasse the British ruling class finds itself in over this question, whose resolution will have dramatic consequences for the rivalry between European and US imperialism and for the future role of the City of London, again can only be understood in this context. These facts underlie the Labour Party's commitment to the war on Iraq and its efforts to draw in the other European imperialist countries, and also the divisions in the British ruling class on the war. It finally makes clear the foundation of Labour's hostility to the growing resistance to imperialism in the oppressed nations.

The need to defend the interests of Britain's financial sector and the City of London's vast international interests and connections has been a central feature of Labour's policies, whether giving independence to the Bank of England, ensuring a 'strong' pound, or winning and dining with international bankers at the Mansion House. Hywell Williams calls the City the 'true governor of Britain, with a world view of global markets...that has turned political elites into its supine agents' (*The Guardian* 11 April 2006). This is a valid characterisation of a Labour Party whose leaders personify parasitic capitalism. Ed Balls, advisor to Gordon Brown, and a possible cabinet member in a future Brown Labour government, tells us that 'Labour had done a lot to help shore up the City's success, it kept the UK out of the euro', and he says that the government has to fight the City's corner not just in Brussels but in New York, India and China and other centres around the world. (*Financial Times* 23 May 2006) Gordon Brown is chairing a campaign led by a 'high level group of key stakeholders from business and government' to promote the interests of London as the world's leading financial centre. Ken Livingstone, mayor of London, is a member of this group. (*Financial Times* 20 July 2006)

The ruling class understands the centrality of British imperialism and in particular the need to sustain that 'gigantic usury capital' with all the consequences outlined. Any Labour government elected to run British capitalism has to defend the interests of British imperialism and, in particular, take measures to promote the financial interests of the City. This creates massive problems for the British petty bourgeois left, which has always seen its political relationship

to the official Labour movement as a crucial component in the development of a mass movement opposed to capitalism. But how is it possible to maintain links with a Labour Party that has openly aligned Britain with US imperialism in the brutal war against Afghanistan and Iraq? The SWP as the leading and dominant force in the anti-war movement has sought to provide an answer.

All the SWP's forlorn efforts to dismiss the parasitic character of imperialism, to exaggerate the role of manufacturing in the British economy, and to deny the existence of privileged layers of the working class and the split in the working class movement have the same class basis as their opportunist politics in the anti-war, anti-capitalist movement. They have to find some way to retain their links with the imperialist Labour Party while leading a mass movement against British imperialism's war in the Middle East directed by the self-same Labour Party.

They have done this by ensuring that the anti-war movement did not turn into an anti-imperialist anti-war movement, for that would have necessitated breaking all links with the British Labour Party. This explains their opportunist politics in the anti-war movement. So the SWP's John Rees smugly affirms of the Stop the War movement that:

'Attempts to narrow the campaign, so that it adopted specifically anti-imperialist objectives, thus potentially excluding pacifists or those simply opposed to this war for particular reasons or, most importantly, those just coming into the movement, who had not had the opportunity to become anti-imperialists on principle, were rejected.' (John Rees *Imperialism and Resistance* 2006 p225).

And fellow SWP leader Lindsey German tells us to welcome new supporters of the Stop the War coalition who have learnt they were wrong through bitter experience, and especially 'our elected representatives'. Every MP, no matter if they supported the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and whose opinions have changed with the blockade and bombing of Lebanon, should be welcome.

'Every MP who speaks out publicly against government policy, who is quoted in a newspaper, who comes on a Stop the War platform, brings a new voice to the anti-war movement which is likely to influence a wider range of people' (SR September 2006)

It is by such crass opportunism that the left attempted to oppose the war and yet keep links with the party which is conducting the war. This is the form Kautskyism has taken in Britain and the reason why no mass movement against imperialism has been built.

The lessons learned from a Leninist understanding of imperialism make it clear that an anti-war anti-imperialist movement can be built only on the basis of a political movement that breaks completely and unequivocally with the British Labour Party.

²⁶ Events have rapidly overtaken Jane Hardy. In 2005 China's share of global exports of goods was more than double Britain's share. For a materialist explanation of the relative decline of British manufacturing since the last decades of the 19th century which avoids the pitfalls of Jane Hardy's subjective and psychological mind-set see part 1 of 'The Labour Aristocracy and Imperialism' in FRFI 161 June/July 2001.

US elections: the changing of the guard

STEVE PALMER

'The object of our policy has to be to get our little white asses out of there as soon as possible.'
Anonymous Iraq Study Group participant

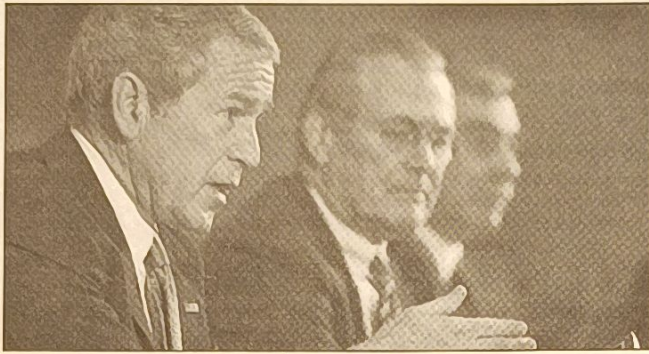
The November 2006 mid-term elections have resulted in the Democrats winning a majority of seats in both Houses of Congress. How did this happen and what does it mean?

Past issues of FRFI have covered the growing disenchantment of the US ruling class with its Neoconservative functionaries in the Bush administration. While very satisfied with the economic fruits of the Bush administration – tax cuts and the record rise in profitability – the ruling class is deeply concerned about foreign, domestic and immigration policy.

The Bush regime has alienated most major allies, fostered hostility to the US and made it difficult for the US to intervene elsewhere – in Latin America, for example. Its policies of torture and detention have made US pontifications on human rights a sick joke. The war in Iraq, which lies behind this, has exhausted its army, drained the economy and become an internal political liability.

Domestically, there have been massive violations of civil liberties from arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, denial of access to lawyers, violation of due process and widespread phone-tapping and eavesdropping. These have fostered deep political divisions.

Right-wing zealots believed that aggressively racist anti-immigrant policies would help re-elect the Republicans. This was disproved during the election, when anti-immigrant candidates and measures were generally voted down. But this Neo-



Bush with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld – an early casualty of the Republican mid-term elections defeat

con activist zeal has made it difficult for the ruling class to set up its guest-worker programme and has provoked millions of immigrant workers into political activity on an unprecedented scale.

It was time for a change and the November election was the most expensive and most vicious mid-term election ever. Altogether some \$2.8bn was spent on the election. Capitalists switched allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic party: in the 2002 mid-term corporate donors gave the Democrats \$248.6m and Republicans \$342.2m; in 2006, the amounts were balanced: \$616m and \$632.2m respectively.

'Respectable' criticism of the war began to grow, accompanied by leaked intelligence estimates, juicy memoirs from various rats jumping ship and verbal sniping from retired generals.

Dirt was thrown in every direction. Sexual scandals were a strong favourite. Some candidates publicized sado-masochistic and paedophilic fantasies in their opponents' novels. Representative Foley was exposed for his 'inappropriate relationships' with underage young boys. Ted Haggart, a prominent married right-wing evangelist campaigning against gay marriage was exposed as a customer by a gay sex-worker, angry at his client's hypocrisy.

George Allen, Republican candidate

for Senator in Virginia, ridiculed an Indian American as 'Macaca' – a species of monkey and a racist epithet – a particularly stupid move, since the man, Mr Sidarth, was videoing him at the time. Harold Ford, a right-wing Democrat who happens to be black, was the object of racist sexual innuendo in a Republican campaign advertisement.

And if it wasn't sex or race, it was money: a host of leading Republican politicians and a few Democrats were exposed in bribery scandals centering around the right-wing lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Dissatisfaction with the war, unease with repression at home and continuous scandals encouraged floating voters to tilt toward the Democrats.

Where's this going?

The most important challenge facing the ruling class right now is what to do about Iraq. The US is facing certain defeat; its goal of a pro-imperialist democracy lies in shreds and its Middle East policy has ended up strengthening everybody in the region it considers an enemy – Hizbullah, Hamas, Iran, Al Qaida. 'Stay the course' isn't working, so it's time to try something different. The core of the ruling class realizes this. The first step has been to fire Defense Secretary Rumsfeld immediately after the election.

Almost simultaneously, Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi and John Conyers, expected to chair the House Judiciary Committee, made clear that presidential impeachment is off the table.²

At the same time, wiser sections of the Republicans and Democrats realise that whoever is left holding the Iraqi disaster is going to lose the 2008 election. So the hunt is on for both bipartisan and partisan 'solutions'.

Early in 2006, leading centre-right Republicans started to plot how to bring the Neocon delinquents back under adult control, and, somehow, develop a plan for getting out of Iraq. And so they set up the unofficial Iraq Study Group (ISG). The group includes both Republicans and Democrats: two former Secretaries of State, a former Attorney General, an ex-Justice of the Supreme Court and former Senators. Expert advisors are drawn from companies like Citigroup, Cambridge Energy Associates and a host of other hardcore ruling class corporations and institutions. James Baker, the 'Velvet Hammer', former Secretary of State, heads the group. Baker has been described as Papa Bush's consigliere – a mafia godfather's right-hand man and 'fixer'.

Sworn to secrecy, the ISG has been remarkably leak-proof. It is clear, however, that its members are far less fixated on imposing bourgeois so-called 'democracy' on Iraq than ensuring that US overall strategic interests are preserved. So the idea of talking with Iran and Syria, an impossibility to Neocons, is perfectly acceptable, provided that US interests are met. With its bipartisan composition, made up of retired statesmen and stateswomen and having independent status, the ISG has a legitimacy which invites support from almost all ruling class factions – if it can come up with a plan for leaving.

Sections of the Democratic Party have recognized that they can no longer whine about Iraq but have actually got to get off the fence and do something about it, if they are to hold power after 2008. Representative John Murtha grasped this late in 2005 and strongly proposed moving US troops 'over the horizon', out of Iraq into bordering countries (see FRFI 188). At the time it was as if he'd been sprayed by a skunk – Democrats couldn't run away fast enough. Holding her nose, House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi dangled him at arm's length: 'Mr. Murtha speaks for himself'. However,

Pelosi soon realised that if the Democrats didn't develop an alternative to 'stay the course', they would face the same problem as the Republicans: popular support for immediate withdrawal, the only realistic option, would continue to grow and they could end up sharing direct responsibility for the quagmire. However, her attempts to swing Democrats behind a clear, consistent and different position, through backing Murtha for Majority Leader of the House, have run into opposition from sections of the Democrats who naively continue to chase Republican votes. Steny Hoyer, who was elected Leader, sounds like the administration: 'a precipitous withdrawal of American forces in Iraq could lead to disaster, spawning a civil war, fostering a haven for terrorists and damaging our nation's security and credibility.'

Before the election, bourgeois politicians tried to avoid disagreement on Iraq policy. But now everyone is engaged in 'reviewing', 'exploring options' or tating some 'fresh thinking'. The Bush administration has suddenly commissioned its own hasty review, to report before the ISG does. Vice-President Cheney has announced: 'America is going to complete our mission', whatever that means. The Pentagon, too, has conducted its own internal review, rumoured to advocate a short-term increase in troops. Prospective Republican presidential candidate and war criminal John McCain advocates increasing troops. Prize for dumbest policy goes to Democrat Charlie Rangel, who's proposing to bring back the draft – this is from someone supposed to be in opposition!

At this rate, there'll be some muddlesome compromise attempt to fix the impossibly broken war. In 2008 the vote could be split by a third party peace candidate, the Democrats could lose and then there would be another Republican in the White House.

1 Unlike the Speaker in the British House of Commons, the Speaker in the US House of Representatives exercises great control by setting the House agenda, selecting speakers, choosing Chairs of Committees and other aspects of House business.

2 In January, Conyers had produced a 350-page document giving detailed grounds for impeaching members of the administration. Immediately after the election, this document disappeared from the House website.

MEXICO

Class struggle intensifies

ROBERT CLOUGH

Mexico is in the grip of a social and political crisis exacerbated by July's rigged presidential election. The victorious ruling class candidate, Felipe Calderon, will be inaugurated on 1 December amidst massive protests in Mexico City; the backdrop will be a terror campaign against the working class, indigenous people and peasantry in Oaxaca and Chiapas in the south of the country.



Barricade burns at Oaxaca University

The protests have been called by the Democratic National Convention, an assembly of over a million people held on 16 September 2006 in Mexico City. The Convention also agreed that Lopez Obrador, the defeated socialist candi-

date, should establish a parallel government on Revolution Day, 20 November. Obrador lost the fraudulent election by 237,000 votes out of 40 million cast. The ruling class was never going to let him take office. Hundreds of thousands assembled in Mexico City on 20 November to celebrate Obrador's inauguration as their president. Obrador pledged to continue the struggle against the 'neofascist reactionaries' of the Calderon government.

Popular anger has been heightened

by the brutal re-occupation of Oaxaca City, under popular control since 70,000 teachers went on strike in May. The state governor's attempt on 14 June to remove strikers from the city centre backfired, resulting in huge demonstrations and the

formation of the Oaxacan People's Assembly (APPO) which took over the city, forcing the governor to flee. At its First State Assembly on 27-29 September APPO affirmed it would be 'democratic, popular, inclusive, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and anti-capitalist'. On 27 October, plainclothes police and paramilitary allies attacked APPO barricades, killing three, including Brad Will, an Indymedia reporter. Two days later the government sent in the federal police to crush the movement, but failed to take the university and its radio station, crucial for APPO organisation. National and international protests forced the government to arrest Will's murderers: though two municipal police were allowed to escape. Zapatista supporters blockaded roads in the Chiapas in solidarity. On 5 November, over a million people marched through Oaxaca City demanding the withdrawal of the federal police and the resignation of governor Ruis. Up to 12 people have been killed since 27 October; 140 have been arrested and 39 'disappeared'.

Brutal attacks are taking place in the Chiapas. On 13 November, 240 police and paramilitaries attacked peasants in Viejo Velasco, killing four and abducting four more. The victims' houses and livestock were destroyed. In Chol de Tumbala an indigenous community is under threat of forcible removal by the Mexican army. 20 November saw more Zapatista road blockades in the Chiapas; the popular movements have served notice that they will intensify their struggle against the ruling class and its US allies.

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BOLIVIA

Showdown approaches

ROBERT CLOUGH

On 15 November, Bolivia's House of Representatives approved President Morales's land reform bill and sent it to the Senate, where opposition party members hold a majority.

The proposal would distribute some 77,000 square miles of underused state and privately-owned property to the landless. Two days later, the Constituent Assembly resolved an issue which had prevented any progress for three months since its establishment in August: whether every decision it made required a two-thirds majority, or if this was required only for the vote on the final constitution. The reactionary parties favoured the former, Morales' Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) the latter. On 17 November, Bolivia's Constitutional Court rejected opposition complaints, allowing the 137 MAS Assembly delegates – a majority – to vote for progress.

These events have ratcheted up tension in Bolivia. Earlier in November, Morales had proposed limiting the powers of regional governors, placing them under executive review and even subject to presidential dismissal. By 20 November, six of nine state governors from the most affluent regions had broken off communications with central government. Morales warned against any rejection of the land reform by the Senate

where the MAS and its allies are in a minority: 'The people will rise up to modify those norms by force, in benefit of the majority', he said. Prior to the vote, 1,000 landless peasants marched 1,000 kilometres to demonstrate the mass support for the proposal. 12 million acres of Bolivian lands are shared between two million families, but fewer than 100 families own 60 million acres more, mostly acquired during illegal handouts in the 1970s and 1980s.

Progress has been made in negotiating new production contracts with foreign energy firms following the 1 May decree nationalising oil and gas reserves. Companies will have to pay the Bolivian government 50% royalties and tax on output. It is estimated that this will yield an annual income of \$1.3bn for the Bolivian government in 2007, an increase of 10% in GNP, compared with the \$100m it secured from the previous corrupt contracts.

It is land reform that is the focus of opposition from the rich. On 22 November, leaders of the two main opposition parties, Podemos and National Unity, threatened to boycott the Senate. Holding 14 out of 27 seats they would make it inquorate and paralyse the government. A process of destabilising Bolivia is under way as the ruling class tries to undermine even the modest reforms that the Morales government proposes.

Cuba fights corruption

'What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is, therefore, in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes.'

(Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*)

In November 2005, Fidel Castro made a profound speech to leaders of student organisations in Havana, asking them to question the future of the revolution, and to consider whether the process could be destroyed by mistakes, corruption and bureaucratic tendencies (see FRFI 189 February/March 2006). Theft and unequal distribution of resources, he said, had become a growing threat. Castro's speech sparked a large-scale debate among Cubans about the development of socialism in their country and how these problems can be overcome through self-criticism and mass participation.

Following the collapse of the socialist bloc, Cuba lost 85% of its trade and was forced to introduce the US dollar and elements of capitalist production. Cuba is emerging from this 'special period', sustaining a good level of economic growth, helped by a growing relationship with revolutionary Venezuela. The dollar is gone. It is because of this relative economic strength and stability that such debates become possible. With a higher life expectancy and steadily rising living standards, discussion can begin about how to build on the huge social progress already made. The debates are linked to the political and social offensive of the Battle of Ideas, launched in 2000 to push forward socialist development and deepen revolutionary consciousness throughout the whole of the population.

In October 2006 *Juventud Rebelde*, the newspaper of the Union of Young Communists (UJC), ran a series of three hard-hitting articles detailing research done by UJC cadres on theft and other problems undermining productivity in state services.* An example was given from a communal canteen in Havana:

'What Violeta Guzman said was moving: "Here they serve us very little food and it's of poor quality... It's true that it is low-priced but then I have to go to the agricultural market to buy herbs and make a good sauce at home so that my sick son can eat it. I save no money at all and the purpose of the Revolution is to help us".'

And the problem is not confined to catering:

- 52% of the workplaces checked by the UJC survey had problems of overpricing;
- popular food centres, workers' cafes, service units, bakers and pharmacies all showed cause for concern;
- worst were agricultural markets, where in 68% of those inspected instances of 'scams' and cheating were uncovered.

These problems are being examined scientifically and optimistically by Cuban communists. Researchers from the Philosophy Institute have begun a project on socialist property in Cuba, 'a stepping stone to an essential inquiry focused on more than just economic considerations'. According to the last of the three UJC articles, 'to these scholars, socialism's economic difficulties spring precisely from the fact that this is, historically, a very young system in which many things have yet to be changed'.

In his speech, Castro said that the biggest mistake of societies, including Cuba, which have attempted to build socialism, was to think that they really knew how to do it. Dr Ernesto Molina, an economist from the Higher Institute of International Relations, pointed to some basic facts: 'capitalism created the working class, the bearer of socialist revolution. Socialism found its opportunity in the very heart of capitalism, but it

was born in Third World countries and with the great mission of facing up to that huge industry.' As a result domestic production has to be particularly competitive in order to deal effectively with global capitalist competitiveness, 'the major external threat hanging over socialist property'.

'In Cuba, a developing country, socialism was not born to a highly developed capitalist nation, as Karl Marx had described. We came into an underdeveloped economic structure that takes very long to change. The good news is, our socialist property can be planned, and therefore you have a long-term strategy in your hands.'

According to Dr Omar Everleny, of the Centre for Studies on Cuban Economics, 'We put the blame on the special period, but the fact is that things were not working in the field of services even before 1989. There was a shortage of consumables and other irregularities that harmed everyone, even the hard currency outlets'. Raising the living standard of the people, he said, is the best incentive to tackle corruption: 'It's incredible, not to say impossible, to think that for a salary of little more than 200 pesos an employee is willing to offer a good service.'

Marcelo Yera, from the National Economic Research Institute points out that 'In our case, around 3,800 state-owned enterprises comprising over 60,000 grassroots units have such responsibility [for planning]... having in Cuba a state enterprise system free from bureaucratic ties is perfectly feasible'. He continues:

'One of transitional socialism's economic principles is the centralisation of the main means of production, which doesn't mean decision-making

US hypocrisy on 'terrorism' exposed

On 15 November, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial condemned the US's stance on self-confessed bomber and terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, stating that 'dithering on the part of the US is leaving the nation open to charges of hypocrisy in the war on terror – specifically, to the charge that some forms of terrorism are more acceptable than others'.

Luis Posada Carriles has admitted bombing hotels in Havana, attempting to assassinate Fidel Castro and having played a leading role in blowing up a Cubana flight in October 1976, killing all 73 people aboard (with prior CIA knowledge). Yet, 18 months after his arrest in the United States, he has yet to be charged. He remains detained solely on immigration issues.

Both Cuba and Venezuela have requested Posada's extradition and have been rejected. In May 2005 a

judge ruled he should be deported to another country, but none of the six proposed by the US is willing to take him. In November, a federal judge gave the US government until 1 February 2007 to bring a case against Posada or he will be freed.

The US administration finds itself in a quandary: Posada has made it clear that if he is brought to trial he will reveal the full extent of CIA and FBI collusion with his terrorist activities over the decades.

Contrast this with the treatment of Fernando Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero and Rene Gonzalez – the Cuban 5 – who remain in prison eight years after their arrest, convicted for their activities exposing CIA and US government funding for Miami based anti-Cuban terror groups. So much for the 'war against terrorism'.

Hannah Callier

To mark the fifth anniversary of their trial, Cuba is calling for a new Solidarity Campaign with the Cuban 5 from 12 to 27 December. To get involved go to www.ratb.org.uk. To send letters of support to the Cuban 5, see opposite page for addresses.



has to be as centralised. We need to maintain a proper balance between the often confused centralisation (strategic decision-making) and decentralisation (operational decision-making)... We thought that by so doing socialism would be forever in place, but we had made a mechanical instead of a dialectical negation of capitalism when we adopted its best organisational practices which, as Che pointed out, have nothing to do with its exploitative nature.'

The key to the success of this transformation will be mass participation. In October the Cuban Workers Federation, which 96% of workers on the island belong to, held its 19th Congress. Their report pointed to the efforts of workers, particularly their contribution to economic advances over the past five years. The document calls for a genuine work ethic based

on strict control over social resources and goods.

Mario Millet Ronquillo, a union leader from Santiago commented: 'What we are proposing is trying to implement the fundamental law of socialism...from each according to his work and to each according to his capacity. Hopefully this can be implemented in all areas, at all work centres, and with all workers...Discipline has improved. I believe the union has a big task ahead and we have to continue strengthening the consciousness of the workers. We must demonstrate that the way to emerge from the special period is not through theft, but through awareness.'

Louis Brehony

* These articles are available on our website at www.ratb.org.uk/html/ujc1006.pdf with thanks to Walter Lippmann.

UN votes against US blockade

On 9 November, Cuba won a significant victory at the United Nations, with 183 countries supporting its annual demand for the lifting of the illegal US blockade. Only the United States, its notorious ally Israel and the tiny US-dependent Pacific nations of the Marshall Islands and Palau opposed the resolution. This is the highest level of support since Cuba first presented the resolution 15 years ago and indicates an increased willingness by oppressed nations to unite against US imperialism.

Presenting the resolution, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque spoke of the blockade as an 'economic war' which 'constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Over the last 48 years, the US blockade has caused economic damages to Cuba in excess of \$86 billion'.

Roque gave the lie to US claims that the blockade is 'a bilateral issue' with a detailed description of how it impacts on the sovereignty and rights of third nations. For example:

- The Torricelli law of 1992 prevents the companies of other countries from trading with Cuba and bans from US ports for six months ships that have

previously transported goods to or from Cuba.

- The Helms-Burton law of 1996 bans US imports that contain Cuban raw materials and bans companies from other countries from exporting to Cuba products that contain more than 10% of US components. Business owners who trade with Cuba will find that they and their families may be prohibited from entering the US or face trial there if they do enter.

• The US has now passed legislation refusing all exports relating to medical equipment that can be used by Cuba in health programmes abroad – a direct attempt to stifle the extraordinary efforts of Cuban medical staff in helping those in developing countries from Venezuela to Pakistan.

Roque put the blockade in the context of US plans for the recolonisation of Cuba approved by President Bush in 2004 and again in an updated version in 2006. The proposals include:

- returning all property in Cuba to its former owners;
- a Permanent Committee of the US Government for the Economic Reconstruction of Cuba which would privatise health and education and abolish social security and pensions (with

pensioners offered construction work, instead, in a so-called 'Cuban Retirees Corps');

- a Central Adoption Service for Children, to give away to families in the US children of parents killed or locked up for trying to resist US 'transition'.

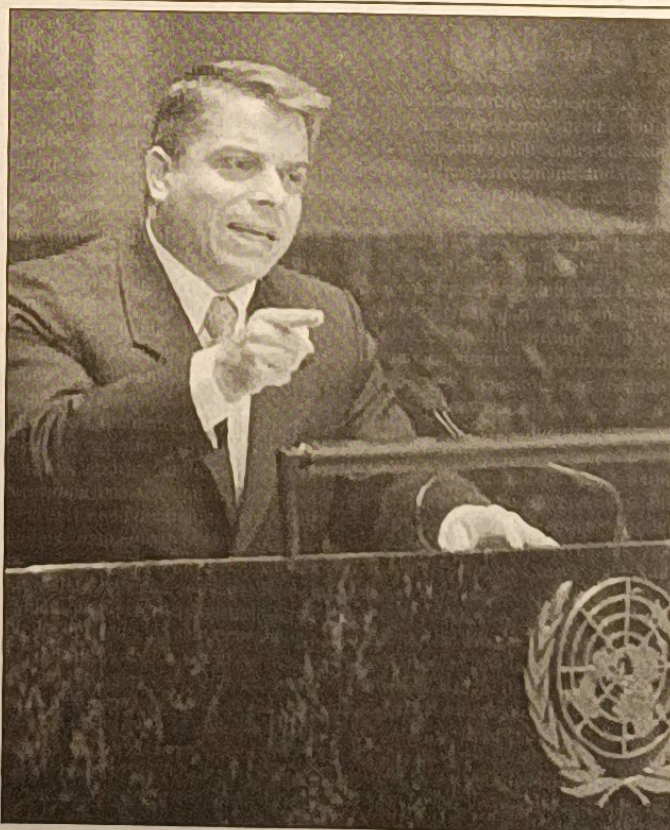
Meanwhile, behind the constant threat of military aggression, the US administration is channelling millions of dollars to its mercenary 'dissident' groups in Cuba and stepping up its propaganda machine and illegal anti-Cuba radio and TV broadcasts.

The US, Roque pointed out, has no moral authority to criticise Cuba:

'We have all seen the horrendous images of Abu Ghraib [and] Guantanamo... we have seen the footage of the horror of Hurricane Katrina, when human beings were condemned to die just because they were black and poor. After everything that we already know, this Assembly cannot be deceived nor manipulated.'

Roque laid bare the hypocrisy and brutality of US imperialism before the world; the UN vote is not just for Cuba but for all the oppressed nations that stood up in New York to be counted.

Cat Wiener



Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque addressing the UN

INSIDE NEWS

Irish POW protests continue

Irish Republican prisoners in Maghaberry gaol in the north of Ireland are continuing their protests, which began on 19 June, to win recognition as political prisoners. Prisoners have taken part in successive protests, including 72-hour hunger strikes, in order to highlight their case. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the gains of the historic 1981 hunger strike for political prisoners have been reversed, as part of Britain's 'normalisation process' in the north of Ireland. The prisoners are campaigning on five demands: the right to free association, freedom of movement, the right to full-time education, separate visiting facilities and the right to organise their own landings.

In response to these protests, Republican Prisoners Action Groups (RPAG) have been formed in Ireland and around the world. In Glasgow the RCG has been active in support of this campaign, for further information on the campaign see the RPAG website <http://www.freewebs.com/powstatusnow> or contact FRFI.

Irish prisoners in British gaols

There are still three Irish political prisoners in gaol in England. The British government has been saying for the past two years that their transfers to Ireland are 'imminent', thus heading off any campaigning on the men's behalf. FRFI readers are asked to show their solidarity by writing to the prisoners:

Aidan Hulme and Noel Maguire

HMP Full Sutton, York YO41 1PS
Robert Hulme, HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Worcs WR11 5TZ

Woodhill prison censors FRFI

In the last issue of FRFI we carried an article by Eric Allison about the continued imprisonment of Ray Gilbert, who has served 25 years of a life sentence for a murder he is adamant he played no part in. Ray is currently in Woodhill prison, which, having invented its own versions of the Prison Rules, decided that Ray, and other prisoners on our mailing list, would be prevented from having the paper under a '14-day rule'. Letters of protest from Larkin Publications, Miscarriages of Justice UK and individual supporters resulted in the other prisoners obtaining the paper, but not Ray, who has also been refused copies of *Statewatch*, *Freedom* and *Class War*. Readers are asked to protest against this blatant censorship by writing to the governor, Luke Serjeant, at HMP Woodhill, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes, MK4 4DA, pointing out that his actions violate Ray's

rights under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Freedom of Expression). If the prison does not back down, Larkin Publications and Ray will be taking legal action against the Prison Service.

Chris Tierney

In the last FRFI we also reported on the appalling treatment of Chris Tierney. Chris has written to us, saying: 'The October/November FRFI kindly and accurately included an article which described how I had been forcibly removed by police from a care home and returned to prison, even though I am a terminal cancer patient who does not have long to live. The article mentioned my understanding of the iniquities of the system. The most iniquitous thing is that prison is an attack on the working class. OK, the occasional middle class person or failed aristocrat ends up in gaol but that's not the purpose of the prison system.'

Readers are encouraged to send solidarity letters and cards to

Chris Tierney J28231, HMP Norwich, Knox Road, Norwich, NR1 4LU.

Overcrowding

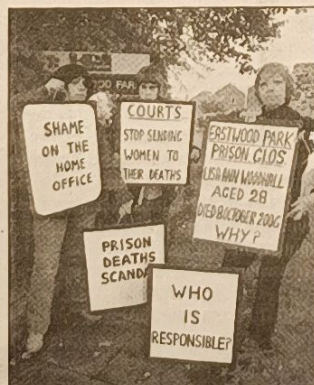
On 24 November 2006 the prison population of England and Wales stood at 79,950 – 2,500 more than this time last year, and fast approaching the 80,000 mark. In recent years, 80,000 has been cited as a 'ceiling' not to be passed; or at which the prison population should be 'stabilised', whatever that means; however there looks like no sign of this actually occurring.

In October the Prison Service introduced 'Operation Safeguard'. In response to severe overcrowding, prisoners coming from court, for whom there is no prison place, may now once again be officially accommodated in police cells. By 24 November, 67 prisoners were being held in police cells, and another 140 places were apparently ready to receive prisoners.

Even the Prison Service's own instruction explaining Operation Safeguard makes clear that this is a highly undesirable development, stating that 'police stations are generally not equipped for visits, exercise or association and any regime will be very limited. Prisoners will be given the option of one phone call to inform someone of their whereabouts as soon as practicable after their arrival at the police station'.

Pauline Campbell arrested at Eastwood Park prison

On 2 November Pauline Campbell appeared at North Avon Magistrates' Court, following her arrest on a demonstration outside Eastwood Park women's prison in Gloucestershire on 18 October 2006. The protest followed the death of 28-year-old Lisa Ann Woodhall. Lisa died in the 'care' of the prison on 8 October 2006.



Pauline has been fighting a vigorous campaign to highlight deaths in women's prisons. She told the court that 'a total of 32 women have died in the so-called care of English gaols since my daughter's death at Styal Prison three years ago, and action must be taken to end this appalling death toll – direct action if necessary – therefore I enter a plea of not guilty'.

She was remanded on unconditional bail to return to court on 22 December 2006 for a pre-trial review.

Labour government plans social fascism

The Labour Party's programme for Tony Blair's final year as Prime Minister was set out in the Queen's speech at the opening of Parliament on 15 November 2006. She announced that the government would be pressing ahead with the introduction of ID cards and a stack of repressive measures, some new, others previously rejected and now being reintroduced. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

Border and Immigration Bill

This increases the powers of immigration officers. Home Secretary John Reid plans to 'reform' the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (see FRFI 193), 'streamline' the appeals system to speed up deportations and create a new category for people who are claiming asylum but have committed serious crimes. This last measure is in response to the case of a group of desperate asylum seekers from Afghanistan who arrived in Britain in a hijacked plane. Despite attempts by 'negotiators' to persuade the hijackers and those who came with them to leave immediately, those who remained in Britain won an appeal against deportation, outraging the government. Anyone in this category will be barred from access to jobs, housing and benefits.

The new legislation will also give immigration officers direct powers of arrest without the need to call the police to assist, and further powers to seize cash and assets from suspected people smugglers. It will also extend the power to take biometric data, such as fingerprints, from foreign nationals.

Criminal Justice Bill

This is a continuation of the 'Respect' agenda announced by Blair in January 2006 and of its campaign against 'anti-social behaviour'. It is expected to boost police powers to close 'anti-social premises', such as noisy pubs and clubs, within 48 hours and force young people to move away from public spaces. It will also introduce a generic community sentence for young offenders, an idea previously abandoned along with the Youth Justice Bill in 2005.

The new Bill contains proposals that are outrageous even by British government standards, including a clause that would prevent the Court of Appeal quashing convictions on 'technicalities' when the defendants were 'plainly guilty'. There is also a plan to put a £500,000 cap on compensation paid out to wrongly convicted people who are imprisoned.

It will also double the maximum penalty for carrying a knife to four years' imprisonment and expand the use of 'conditional cautions' (on-the-spot punishment, handed out by police without trial or legal process). A new 'violent offender order' will be introduced, which imposes severe restrictions on people released from prison after completing their sentence. These orders are a bizarre hybrid between an ASBO and a life sentence and effectively mean that anyone who has served a prison sentence for a violent crime can be returned to prison for an indeterminate period of time on the flimsiest of 'evidence' that they have breached the order.

Mental Health Bill

This proposed controversial law, allowing people with 'untreatable personality disorders' to be detained, even if they have not committed a crime, is being revived. The previous draft Mental Health Bill was axed in March amid much opposition but



some of the key proposals are back here in a plan to update the 1983 Mental Health Act.



Offender Management Bill

This will allow the Home Secretary to further expand the use of private firms within the state criminal justice system. In addition to running several prisons and all the immigration detention centres in their entirety, these companies (GSL etc) already handle court security, inter-prison escorts, and electronic tagging for the Home Office.

The Bill provides for part-privatisation of the probation service and an increased role for the private firms in policing those released on licence. John Reid has already said that about one third of the probation service will be contracted out within the next 18 months.

There will also be further measures aimed at preventing mobile phones being smuggled into prisons, including body-scanning of visitors and criminal penalties for those who bring them in. Prisons are full of smuggled mobile phones and prisoners found with them receive harsh punishments including up to 42 days loss of remission or 21 days cellular confinement. Contrary to John Reid's hyped-up argument that they are in the main used by drug dealers and gang bosses, the vast majority of calls are made by prisoners desperately trying against the odds to maintain ties with loved ones. But the prison authorities hate

them as they cannot monitor the calls and cannot make money out of selling the credit. Unlike drugs, phones are not illegal outside prison, so far more people, including prison staff, are prepared to bring them in.

Anti-terrorism

Surprisingly, no anti-terror bill was actually mentioned during the Queen's Speech but the government has made it clear that yet more legislation is in the pipeline. John Reid is conducting a review of all the current laws and is likely to formulate a new bill which combines all of them, plus some new or previously rejected measures, in particular 90-day detention without trial for terror suspects.

The limit on detention without trial is currently 28 days, having been increased from 14 following a debate in November 2005 on a proposed increase to 90 days in which Labour suffered its biggest parliamentary defeat. At the time of this debate, the organisation Liberty argued in favour of making evidence obtained by phone-tapping admissible in court on the basis that this would somehow render lengthy detention without trial less necessary. The stupidity of this stance is even more apparent as Reid sets out the government's plans to put both 90-day detention and admissibility for phone-tap evidence into the new Bill.

Blair's legacy

Since coming to power in 1997 Blair's government has introduced eight new pieces of anti-terrorism legislation, and 22 criminal justice bills. It has created 3,000 new criminal offences and increased the prison population, already among the highest in Europe when Labour took over from the Tories, to a record 94,700, with thousands more subject to 'community punishments' involving surveillance, curfews, complex licence conditions and electronic monitoring. It is waging a bloody and brutal war against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan and has gone all out to criminalise anyone in this country who mounts meaningful opposition to that war. The final year of Blair's 'presidency' is set to see more of the same and worse, as Labour lurches further down the road of social fascism.

Cuban 5

Write to the Cuban 5 – let them know we have not forgotten them and show their imperialist gaolers that they are being watched by the rest of the world.

Gerardo Hernandez # 58739-004

Two life sentences
USP Victorville, PO Box 5500,
Adelanto, CA 92301, USA

Ramon Labanino (write to as Luis Medina) # 58734-004

Life sentence
USP Beaumont, PO Box 26035,
Beaumont, Texas 77720-6035, USA

Antonio Guerrero # 58741-004

Life sentence
USP Florence, PO Box 7500,
5880 State Highway 67,
South Florence, CO 81226, USA

Fernando Gonzalez (write to as Ruben Campa) #58733-004

19 years
FCI Oxford, PO Box 1000, Oxford
WI 53952-0505, USA

Rene Gonzalez # 58738-004

15 years
FCI Marianna, PO Box 7007,
Marianna, FL 32447-7007, USA

FRFI ROUNDUP

Free Palestine

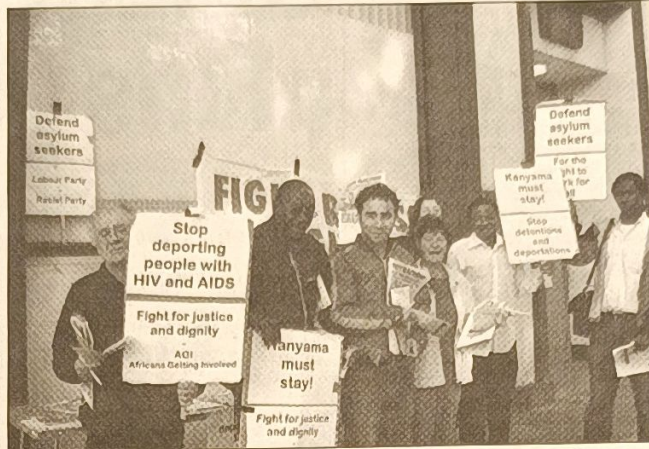
Over the past two months we have seen the brutality against the people of the Middle East escalate. British imperialism has blood on its hands in Iraq and Palestine. There is an overwhelming need for solidarity with those who are fighting back under such barbaric conditions by supporting their just struggle and opposing the murder and lies of the Labour government.

In London and Newcastle, FRFI activists have continued regular Thursday evening pickets of the Zionist company Marks & Spencer. Victory to the Intifada (VTI) also supported the 4th International Week of Solidarity against the Apartheid Wall from 9-16 November by joining students at the London School of Economics (LSE) for a street event and holding a public meeting about the wall. The meeting included a showing of *Hole in the Wall*, a film produced by the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem.

On 11 November, the annual day of solidarity against Israel's Apartheid Wall, London VTI held a demonstration outside M&S's flagship store. The demonstration featured a mock-up of the Apartheid Wall and street theatre to symbolise the brutality of the Israeli occupation. We reached hundreds of people and raised awareness of the situation in Palestine. On the same day there was a militant demonstration outside M&S on Market Street in Manchester. In the run-up to the event VTI activists met with the police. The inspector put forward a ridiculous suggestion. Apparently the Zionist 'counter-demo' had told him that they would leave our picket in peace if VTI a) stopped flying the flag of the Lebanese resistance group Hizbullah, and b) censored placards so that they wouldn't 'offend' the fascists. Of course we refused, and we continue to exercise our right to express solidarity with the armed resistance of the Palestinian and Lebanese people.

It has not been just the police and Zionists but also the 'left' which has attacked our demonstrations. On 4 November Betty Hunter, Palestine Solidarity Campaign National Secretary, launched

an unprincipled attack on the Marks & Spencer boycott campaign. Speaking at the end of an LSE dayschool she rounded on an FRFI speaker who had called on those attending the event to also support the Thursday evening pickets of Oxford Street M&S. Far from expressing support for this event, Hunter called on those present to boycott it, claiming that the picket is seen as an 'anti-semitic action, because M&S is a Jewish company'. She also claimed that the picketers brought the police harassment and Zionist intimidation that they experience onto themselves for targeting M&S. At a time when dozens of Palestinians were being slaughtered in Beit Hanoun, Hunter's purpose was to kill off any pro-Palestinian solidarity action taking place outside of PSC control. M&S is not a Jewish company and Hunter knows this. She is using the same false excuse as the Zionists themselves to attack the pickets. The PSC leadership is not only limiting pro-Palestinian activity and action but its sectarianism towards those serious about the necessary task of building an anti-imperialist struggle is directly helping the Zionist cause, not the Palestinians. They, along with the Zionists, must be confronted.



Demonstration outside Communications House, London

Support asylum seekers!

Asylum seekers in Britain are now organising in the face of racist attacks. FRFI has been actively supporting those who have taken a stand against oppression, exploitation and forced deportations.

RIGHT: RATB cyclists set off on sponsored bike ride
BELOW: VTI face Zionist abuse in Manchester



in detention centres during 2005. On 13 November members of Durham University FRFI Society, working together with the Socialist Students' Society and other activists, began a series of weekly actions on campus in solidarity with asylum seekers. One of these actions included supporting the case of a Ugandan asylum seeker Faridah (see page 16).

On 7 October in Glasgow, a militant FRFI contingent marched with asylum seekers from the Gorbals to the city centre to join up with hundreds of others protesting against the brutality of dawn raids and deportations that have been taking place in the city. FRFI members also attended protests against the visit of Labour's immigration minister Liam Byrne to Glasgow, as asylum seekers fought back directly against police repression which left one African woman hospitalised and a Turkish man injured and arrested. Comrades also stood with asylum seekers in the Pollokshaws estate, south Glasgow, on early morning vigils held to watch out for the Immigration Service's dawn-raid snatch-squad vans.

FRFI supporters in Manchester and Bolton have been increasing work in support of asylum seekers in recent months. Through the North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) we have been involved in helping to build campaigns within a broad front of support for all asylum seekers. Organising NWASDG protests outside Dallas Court Immigration Reporting Centre in Salford we have met and helped to build campaigns in support of migrants from Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Rwanda, Kurdistan, Burma and Pakistan, including the case of Halima Aboubacar (see Letters p15).

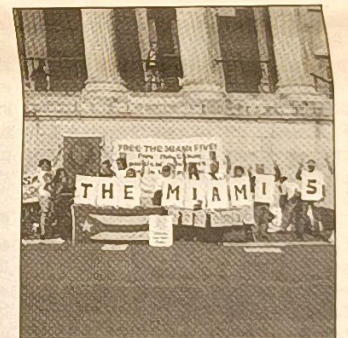
Sectarian opposition has already occurred. The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) contacted Adela, a Rwandan asylum seeker active with NWASDG as well as her own Mohoro Must Stay campaign, advising her that NCADC would not

allow itself to be a listed supporter on Adela's leaflet as long as NWASDG was on there. The reason given by NCADC's Emma Ginn was that 'NWASDG is very involved with a group called Fight Imperialism! Fight Racism! [sic]... some people (including me) find them offputting and it may narrow the appeal of your campaign. On the other hand, some may find them appealing. I don't know'. NWASDG have written to Emma Ginn asking for a meeting to resolve the issues. Adela, meanwhile, has stated her intention to keep working with NWASDG.

In London FRFI activists had a contingent on the recent migrants' rights march and have continued monthly pickets of Communication House where asylum seekers have to sign on and risk detention.

Viva Cuba!

Rock around the Blockade (RATB) held several events to mark the International Days of Action for the Cuban 5 (12 September-6 October), called by the Cuban National Assembly to mark the eighth anniversary of the arrest of the Cuban 5 and publicise the injustice of their case. A Cuban film night raised £200 toward material aid to be taken to Cuba on the next RATB brigade in Spring 2007. A further £700 was raised when RATB supporters braved wind, rain and hailstorms on a 35-mile sponsored cycle ride in Essex. On 30 September the cause of the Cuban 5 was brought to Trafalgar Square with a lively RATB rally. The event was joined by supporters of the Turkish newspaper *Atılım*, which has suffered repression in recent weeks, with many of its key journalists arrested in a crackdown by the Turkish government. FRFI had joined *Atılım* supporters on their demonstration against Turkish Airlines earlier in the day and the two groups marched together to Trafalgar Square afterwards.



Demonstration for Cuban 5 in London

In Newcastle a 'Free the 5' stall and street meeting was held on 7 October, and RATB members participated in a film showing of *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* organised by Hands Off Venezuela on 11 October. RATB members' interventions on the example of Cuba, and its contribution in supporting Venezuela and progressive movements throughout Latin America, were warmly received. On 21 October Rebel Music played host to a night of political hip hop, spoken word and rock, raising £150 towards the sound system being taken to Cuba by the 2007 brigade.

November saw FRFI members win a victory against the Labour-run Glasgow City Council. In the guise of 'anti-sectarianism', the council brought in by-laws this year banning the sale of political material outside football grounds in Scotland. These laws have been used to criminalise such symbols of anti-imperialism and resistance as the image of Che Guevara, the Palestinian flag and the Starry Plough, often displayed by the strongly Republican fans of Celtic FC. However, after several protests by FRFI outside Celtic Park in defiance of the by-laws, vendors have announced that police are no longer enforcing the laws, and tricolours with Che's famous image are again freely available. *Victoria!*

Events

LONDON

Every Thursday 6-8pm
And Saturday 16 December 12-3pm
Victory to the Intifada!
Demonstration outside Marks & Spencer, Oxford Street (Nearest tube Marble Arch)

Tuesdays 5 December and 2 January, 1-2pm
Demonstration against racist asylum and immigration laws
Outside Communications House, 210 Old Street, EC1 (Nearest tube Old Street)

Wednesday 6 December, 7-9.30pm
The Revolution will not be Televised
LSE FRFI Society film showing and discussion about the Venezuelan Revolution.
Room D311, Clement House, London School of Economics (LSE)
Aldwych, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn)

Wednesday 10 January, 7-9.30pm
Celebrate the Cuban Revolution
LSE

Wednesday 17 January, 7-9.30pm
Public meeting: Apartheid Jerusalem
LSE

For further details, call 020 7837 1688 or 07815 617 746 or email northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com/eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com/frfi_lse@yahoo.co.uk

NEWCASTLE

Monday 11 December, 6pm
FRFI Readers' Group Meeting
Contact for details and location.

Saturday 16 December, 12-3pm
Victory to the Intifada!
Demonstration outside Marks & Spencer Northumberland Street

Sunday 21 January, 6pm
Educational meeting on the history of black struggle in Britain
Venue to be confirmed

Street actions every Saturday 12-2pm
In Newcastle or Durham
For further details call 07813 073 846 or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com

MANCHESTER

Sunday 3 December, 2pm
RCG anti-imperialist forum
The fight against Labour's wars
With speakers on the Middle East and racism in Britain
Cross Street Chapel

Saturday 9 December, 11.30am
North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG)
Protest stall against deportations
Market Street
Followed at 2pm by **Organising meeting**
The Basement, Lever Street

Thursday 14 December, 12-2pm
NWASDG Protest outside Dallas Court Immigration Reporting Centre
South Langworthy Lane, Salford

Saturday 16 December, 12 noon
Victory to the Palestinian people!
Picket of Marks & Spencer Market Street

Saturday 23 December, 12 noon
Free the Cuban 5!
Protest as part of the International weeks of action, Piccadilly Gardens

For further details call 07816 547 066 or email mrcgfrfi@tiscali.net
Website: www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk
To contact NWASDG call 07779 189 794 or email fightback_05@yahoo.com
Website: www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk

GLASGOW

Tuesday 5 December, 7-9pm
Public Meeting: Imperialism and Revolution
Renfield St. Stephens Church, Kirk Lounge, Bath Street

Saturday 9 December, 1-3.30pm
Street demonstration
Iraq: Troops Out Now! Victory to the Iraqi People!
Donald Dewar Statue, Buchanan Street

Tuesday 12 December, 7-9.30pm
Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
readers and supporters meeting
Caledonian University, Room M127 George Moore Building

For further details call 07773 374858 or email: friscotland@yahoo.co.uk
Website: www.scotlandfrfi.co.uk

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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

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LETTERS

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 website: www.revolutionarycommunist.com

Report from Palestine

Palestinians on the West Bank continue to struggle to survive under Israeli occupation, which affects all aspects of life here. The school year in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) should have started on 1 September, but teachers employed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) who – like all other PA employees – have not received salaries since March 2006, went on strike. Most other PA employees had already been on strike for several months but the teachers continued working through June so students could take their exams. The teachers' strike has been portrayed as a political statement against Hamas, but for many I talked to in Beit Ummar, a village in the Hebron district of the West Bank, the decision was dictated by economic necessity – they simply did not have the money to travel to work each day, since many teach in

neighbouring villages. Like almost everybody else in the OPT, all the teachers I talked to were already in debt and struggling to provide food for their own children. Palestinians place a high value on education and these teachers were upset at the situation but clear about its cause – the international boycott of the elected Hamas government implemented at the behest of the US and UK governments.

The weeks went by, the children sat at home, negotiations for a Western-sponsored 'government of national unity' dragged on and nothing changed. Meanwhile, approximately 66,000 students lucky enough to go to private schools (mostly in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah), and some 250,000 students attending the overcrowded schools run by UNRWA (primarily, but not exclusively, in refugee camps) were studying as usual, unaffected by the international boy-

cott. These students study the same curriculum as the 750,000 students who attend government-run schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, so there was concern that they would have a huge advantage in the end-of-year exams and particularly the all-important *tawjihi*, the equivalent of A-levels. The Jordanian government, instead of pressuring the US and UK governments to end their boycott of Hamas so the crisis could be resolved, threatened not to recognise this year's *tawjihi* results, which would effectively bar Palestinian secondary school graduates from studying in Jordanian universities.

After negotiations between the government and teachers' union, the teachers temporarily suspended the strike and schools finally reopened at the beginning of

November. The teachers have still not been paid and in many places timetables have had to be rearranged so that teachers who have a longer commute only work three or four days a week to reduce the costs of transport. Other schools are running morning and afternoon shifts because of overcrowding; the average class size is 40 children. With no sign of the international boycott ending soon, enabling the government to pay the teachers' salaries, it is possible the strike will begin again as early as December, and more strikes are likely in the coming months.

The effect of the delayed school year and the uncertainty over whether the schools will remain open goes beyond the damage to students' education and the lessons missed. Children bear the physical and mental scars of the daily Israeli military invasions throughout the OPT, and the domestic violence

and family quarrels which are increasingly common because of the dire economic conditions. For many children, school is the only source of stability in their lives and a brief escape from the oppression of the occupation. The harm done to these children by the US/UK-enforced boycott of the Hamas government constitutes collective punishment of Palestine's most vulnerable citizens, who have nothing to do with elections, politics, parties or negotiations. Of course Palestinians are familiar with collective punishment from the Israeli government and military. But this time it has been designed and enforced by the US and the UK, which saw the education of 750,000 children as a pawn to extract concessions from a democratically-elected government.

DEBORAH HYAMS
 Beit Ummar, Palestine

FRFI support for Republican POWs

We fully appreciate your message of solidarity on behalf of the RCG and your revolutionary paper FRFI in support of the campaign for political status.

We hope to harness the support that undoubtedly exists in Scotland for the POWs through the vehicle of the Republican Prisoners Action Group and very much welcome the attendance of your organisation at the planned launch on Saturday.

The banning of images of Che Guevara under the guise of sectarian legislation is outrageous and represents the basest kind of political harassment. However, it is encouraging to know that the RCG has taken a principled stand in opposing it. We regularly receive harassment whilst selling *Saoirse* outside Celtic Park but refuse to be intimidated and shall continue to exercise our democratic rights.

SEAMUS READER, SECRETARY
 Francis Hughes Cumann
 Sinn Fein Poblachtach, Glasgow



Che flag available at Celtic Park football ground

Turkey violates PKK ceasefire

In October, the gaoléd leader of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), Abdullah Ocalan, announced a ceasefire, via his lawyers, aimed at resolving the Kurdish issue in 'a peaceful and democratic way'.

Under the ceasefire, the PKK will not use its weapons unless it comes under attack by the Turkish military. Moreover, the PKK called upon progressive people and non-governmental organisations to support the peace process. Significantly, Ocalan called on the US to put pressure on the

Turkish government to observe the ceasefire as well.

The Turkish bourgeoisie's position on the Kurdish issue is still based on deliberate denial of the existence of a Kurdish nation and the oppression of the Kurdish people. The governing Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) and one of the 'liberal' – ie rightwing – Islamic parties have so far refused to take any steps towards the peace process.

Since the ceasefire was announced, there have been: • 42 operations against the PKK

Malachi Ritscher RIP

Anti-war activist Malachi Ritscher doused himself in petrol and set fire to himself in Chicago on 3 November 2006 as a protest against the war in Iraq. He was 54. His death has gone completely unreported by any major US newspaper, TV, radio or other media outlet. He was a quiet individual who enjoyed literature and played an active part in the Chicago jazz and improvised music scene. He was a consistent anti-war activist and had been arrested during protests. A sign left at the scene read 'Thou shalt not kill!'



Let his death not be in vain but an inspiration to struggle harder. 'Don't mourn, organise', as Joe Hill said.
 STEVE PALMER
 US

Fight deportation! Support Halima Aboubacar!

I am from Cameroon. My father is the chief of the Haoussa tribe in the Nkongsamba area, and had promised me in marriage to his best friend, the chief of another tribe. I found out about these plans at the age of 11 but did not want to marry his friend as he was much older than me and I did not love him.

I met Dang, the man that I wanted to marry whilst staying with my aunt in Obala, and she approved the marriage. She also asked my father for his approval but he refused and demanded that I return home. He punished me with beatings and threats of circumcision, and had me subjected to virginity tests.

I approached the police for help but they phoned my father to come and pick me up. My father again beat me severely, causing my ears to bleed and injuries on my legs. I ran away

to Obala and married Dang in secret. Soon after I became pregnant.

When I was seven months pregnant my husband was arrested, and I was forced to go back home with my father. He sent me to live with a female friend whilst I had my baby, Khadija, who was taken from me by my father when she was three months old. I have not seen her since. I believe she was sold on the black market. During this time my husband was detained and tortured for marrying me without my father's permission.

My father still wanted to marry me to his friend and forced me to go through a 'purification ceremony' lasting five months that would culminate in my circumcision before I was married. I could not take any more and with the help of my aunt, who had bribed

the guards at the prison to let my husband go, I left my father's house, and my husband and I came to Britain.

When we arrived my husband claimed asylum and I was considered his dependant. His claim was rejected and so was his subsequent appeal. I was pregnant with our second child by this time and decided to leave the UK and try to claim asylum elsewhere. However, I used a borrowed passport and was arrested, charged with using a false instrument for immigration purposes and sentenced to six months in Holloway women's prison, where I gave birth to my son. I was strip-searched while in labour. I was released from prison on bail and have put in a fresh asylum claim for me and my son. However, due to my 'criminal conviction', the Home Office said I should be

deported.

I cannot go back to Cameroon. I fear for my life and my baby's as my father is a very powerful man. In the last three months I have started to campaign for my right to stay in Britain and also the rights of all asylum seekers who are being subjected to degrading strip searches, detention, the ever-present threat of deportation and poverty that results from being an asylum seeker. Please support my campaign and the campaigns of other asylum seekers who are fighting back against Britain's racist immigration controls and who are resisting deportations.

Please support the campaign by phoning 07847 408 399 or 07779 189 794 or through NWASDG by email at fightback_05@yahoo.com

HALIMA ABOUBACAR

Fight Labour racism!

On 24 October, North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) organised to meet at 11am outside Dallas Court immigration reporting centre in Salford, to leaflet asylum seekers about the work of NWASDG and the need to politically organise themselves against the racism of the British Labour government.

When I arrived at 10.30, a demonstration by another organisation was already taking place against the deportation of a Kosovan man, Perparim Demaj, and his family. I picked up one of our placards and joined the group of 15 or so people.

Within seconds of joining the demonstration I was approached by one of the organisers, a member of Union trade union.

'I don't know about that' she said, referring to the slogan on my placard, which read 'FIGHT LABOUR RACISM, DEFEND ALL ASYLUM SEEKERS'. I said 'What do you mean?' 'Labour racism. I don't agree

with that. You can't have that placard here. We've got a Labour councillor here and Labour MPs who support the campaign.' 'Good,' I said, 'but it doesn't change the fact that it is the Labour government that is bringing in, implementing and carrying out these racist policies'. She then graciously permitted me and my placard to stay but made it clear it wasn't going in the publicity photos!

J CLARKE
 North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group

Erratum

In the article 'Iraq and Afghanistan: imperialism's crusade' in FRFI 193, the NATO commander in Afghanistan, David Richards, is a British general and not a lieutenant-general. He was promoted to full general upon taking up his appointment. JW

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Glasgow asylum seekers fight against Labour repression

At 6.30am on 4 October, Kurdish asylum seeker Cem Coban stepped out on to the balcony of his 20th floor flat in Cardonald, Glasgow. He threatened suicide as a Home Office snatch-squad moved in to kidnap his family and return them to Turkey, inducing a heart attack in his wife. Asylum seekers, local working class residents and activists gathered on the estate below to protest against the family's removal. As Cem Coban was eventually seized at 11am 'dozens of protestors... attacked around 20 police officers, jumping on the roof of a van and throwing themselves in front of vehicles... Two ambulances were called from the scene as the riot erupted. Witnesses said at least one woman had to be treated by paramedics after being knocked to the ground by police'. (*Daily Record*) The family had lived in Scotland for five years; one of their children was born here.

It is a lesson the ruling class can never learn: repression breeds resistance. The events in Cardonald were not isolated; similar scenes have erupted across Glasgow in recent weeks, and resistance to the Labour Party's vicious anti-immigrant policies will undoubtedly continue.

Two days earlier on 2 October, a brutal dawn raid had been carried out against a Congolese asylum seeker in Knightswood in the west of the city. The next day over 100 asylum seekers and working class residents from Knightswood came out onto the streets at dawn in protest. The immigration vans that arrived that morning were unable to capture their next target – the Kurdish Uzun family – who were at the protest rather than in their flat.

On 7 October, Unity, the Union of Asylum seekers in Scotland, called a demonstration. Comrades from Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! marched alongside asylum seekers from the Gorbals to the city centre, with other marches organised from Knightswood and Sighthill. Around 400 people gathered in George Square, demanding an end to dawn raids and deportations. Refugees and asylum seekers, working class people from communities affected and MSPs addressed the crowd. An RCG comrade also spoke, stressing the links between the Labour Party's imperialist warmongering abroad and racist attacks in Britain.

Liam Byrne visits Scotland

On 26 October Labour Party Immigration Minister Liam Byrne visited Glasgow. When his predecessor Tony McNulty came to Scotland, it sparked fierce protests and demonstrations. This time was no different.

In the city centre RCG comrades stood with over 100 asylum seekers and supporters to protest outside the City Chambers. Heavy-handed policing was used to try and intimidate the militant demonstration, whose participants included women with small children. As the minister's car left the City Chambers, asylum seekers spon-

taneously attempted to block the road, breaking police lines and chanting slogans. The car was chased down the street by the demonstration, followed by an escort of two police vans.

Protests continued at Brand Street Immigration Reporting Centre, where Byrne met immigration officials. An aggressive police presence greeted demonstrators; an elderly African woman was hospitalised and other asylum seekers suffered panic attacks. Protesters filming events had cameras snatched and a Turkish man suffered cuts and bruising round the throat after being 'restrained' by several police officers. He was subsequently arrested and faced the ridiculous charge of resisting arrest and 'molesting police'.

The growing militancy of the asylum seeker struggle is causing splits between the ruling Labour Party's English and Scottish organisations. The problem of dawn raids, more concentrated and frequent in Glasgow than any other city in Britain, is increasingly becoming a liability for the Scottish Labour Party, whose asylum and immigration policy is determined by Westminster. The brutality of these state kidnappings is alienating sections of the middle class, and has even forced pro-Labour trade unions and the Church of Scotland to take a stand. First Minister Jack McConnell met with Home Secretary John Reid on 7 October. According to a Scottish Executive spokeswoman, McConnell 'said he understood how difficult the issues surrounding deportations are and remain. But he expressed concerns at the impact on the children from the raids taking place in Glasgow'. Byrne reaffirmed his commitment to dawn raids, saying they would continue to be enforced where families refuse to leave 'voluntarily'.

Unity against state repression

As we have written in previous FRFIs, the very policies intended to isolate,

weaken and destroy any sustained opposition by asylum seekers and to cut them off from the mass of the working class have in fact created the conditions for increasingly organised and militant resistance and unity.

The sheer concentration of thousands of asylum seekers into the massive, crumbling tower-blocks of Glasgow has not only resulted in their becoming organised, but has also facilitated increasing unity with working class residents already living on the estates. Growing numbers are supporting the asylum seekers' early morning protests.

The very urban geography of the estates to which asylum seekers have been 'dispersed' has also proved advantageous. Flats on the top floors of high-rise blocks are being used as vantage-points for night watches and estates which only have one way in and out of them are easy to block off from inside to prevent the immigration snatch-squad vans from entering.

Privatisation of social housing and its opening up to private investment



and exploitation has been one of the capitalists' main points of attack on working class living standards in recent years. The city council hoped that housing large numbers of asylum seekers in Glasgow would incite racist divisions in working class communities and thereby prevent effective opposition to privatisation.

This divide-and-rule tactic was initially very successful and there is still deep-rooted racism in many working class communities. On 17 November two 17-year-old asylum seekers were stabbed and seriously wounded as they rushed to help an Afghan boy being 'beaten up by white youths' outside Drumchapel High School, which the victims attended. The *Evening Times* (19/11/06) reported that 'one parent in Drumchapel... said there were fights between white youths and asylum seekers every day of the week'.

However, the situation is not the same as it was in 2001 when Kurdish asylum seeker Firsat Yildiz was murdered by racists in Sighthill (see FRFI

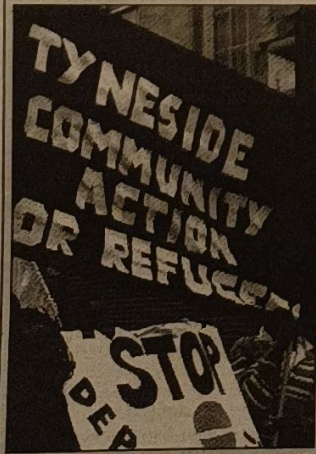
163). Many asylum seekers have now lived on Glasgow estates for over five years. During this time, the government has driven down the housing standards of both asylum seekers and of the Scottish working class, forcing both sections to begin to realise that their enemy is not one another but the British state.

Drumchapel is one of the poorest working class areas in Britain with unemployment rates of 30-40%. Drumchapel borders Knightswood, where many asylum seekers have been housed and which has seen significant displays of unity between asylum seekers and the local working class population.

The asylum seeker movement is one of the few significant working class struggles in Britain today. Events in Glasgow show it has the potential to involve all those working class masses attacked, exploited and left to rot at the bottom of British bourgeois society by the racist, anti-working class Labour government.

Joseph Eskovitch

Organising against deportations



On 13 November, Faridah Kenyini, a young lesbian asylum seeker, was deported to Uganda. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission has accused the Ugandan government of 'a documented record of torture and abuse of lesbians and gay men'. In August Ugandan tabloid *Red Pepper* published a list of names of alleged homosexuals, prompting concerns by human rights groups of a fresh crackdown.

This is of no concern to the British government, which has a cosy relationship with President Museveni. Uganda is a useful proxy-state for imperialist interests in the resource-rich region: 52% of Uganda's national budget comes from EU countries, and the US maintains a permanent military base in northern Uganda.

Faridah was snatched from North Shields Immigration Reporting Centre on 1 November. She was handcuffed, dragged out screaming through a back door and whisked away to Newcastle Central police station, then to Dungavel detention centre in Scotland

and finally to Yarl's Wood removal centre near Bedford.

A determined campaign by Tyneside Community Action for Refugees mobilised hundreds of people across the country. Although the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, there can be no doubt that it severely disrupted the Home Office and Kenya Airways, who were inundated with calls, and the first attempt at deporting Faridah did not go ahead. The story received national and local press coverage. Activists leafleted gay bars, petitioned Jim Cousins MP to ensure he would act and sent out regular press releases and calls to action via text and email. FRFI comrades contacted all our branches and supporters who rapidly spread the word.

Campaigns such as this show the government that it cannot simply 'disappear' people with no outcry or protest. However if we want to really challenge the racist Labour government, we need more organisation, more protests and more solidarity.

Annabelle Richards

Racist attacks: part of the loyalist culture in Ireland

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, segregation between the nationalist and Unionist communities in the north of Ireland has increased. This has been accompanied by increasing inter-communal violence and by violence directed at ethnic minorities. Those under attack include asylum seekers and a growing number of foreign workers in the expanding service sector. The intolerance and hatred directed at the nationalist minority for generations is now also being aimed at anyone who looks or sounds foreign.

A report published on 22 October in *The Observer* confirmed that over 90% of reported racist attacks in the Six Counties between January 2005 and September 2006 occurred in loyalist areas. The assaults range from petrol

bombings of the houses of migrant workers to the forced evictions of black women from loyalist estates. In one incident racists smeared excrement over a Catholic church in east Belfast, which has become a place of worship for Filipino nurses working at nearby Ulster Hospital. The Ulster Volunteer Force has been at the forefront of racist attacks against the Chinese community in south Belfast. On 19 November, a Lithuanian family in Bushmills, County Antrim was attacked.

Loyalism is a tradition nurtured by the British government to secure its rule over the people of the north of Ireland, and responsibility for the violent racism of the loyalist thugs rests squarely with British imperialism.

Paul Mallon