

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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FRFI supporters demonstrate for Palestinian liberation: Enough! Coalition march, 9 June – see FRFI Round-up, page 14

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BROWN TURNS THE SCREW CRIMINALISATION OF OPPOSITION TO WAR

On 29 June two cars containing petrol, gas cylinders and nails were found in central London. The following day a burning car loaded with gas cylinders was driven at the main terminal building at Glasgow's international airport. In the days that followed arrests were made in Britain and Australia. These failed or aborted attacks couldn't have happened at a better moment for new Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who on 6 July spoke to the BBC of 'the best of Britain, people coming together in the face of a terrorist threat and Britain showing to the rest of the world that we would be unyielding any time that anybody tries to do damage to our country'. He promised a propaganda battle against extremism to 'persuade people that the values we hold important are the values of all decent people in all religions and all faiths'. The British state is up to its usual tricks. **NICKI JAMESON reports.**

Defending 'our way of life'

Brown brushed aside any suggestion that attacks in Britain are in any way linked to Britain's war in the Middle East. Like Blair before him, he is desperate to ensure that these two are not connected, and that attacks by Muslim groups are depicted as senseless and arbitrary, with the British state the defender, not the aggressor.

It is the most blatant and obscene hypocrisy to talk of British 'values' and 'decency' while our government

wages brutal wars in which civilians are slaughtered and prisoners tortured, and of which the clear aims are to conquer, oppress and occupy, steal resources and make profits. And despite state and media obfuscation, this hypocrisy and the connection between Britain's wars and bomb attacks in Britain is clear to many. It is particularly clear to Muslims. The government is therefore engaged in a campaign, not just to isolate 'extremists' but to terrorise the whole Muslim

population of Britain out of showing anything other than the mildest opposition to British and US occupation of the Middle East.

To achieve this, the government simultaneously employs a wide range of tactics, including: massive prison sentences both for those convicted of involvement in actual or planned attacks and those who merely write or speak about 'jihad'; heavy surveillance and infiltration of Muslim communities; stop-and-search and general harassment of Asians and Middle Eastern people, irrespective of their religious or political affiliations. That police 'intelligence' is often wrong only adds to the fear instilled. There has been one high-profile raid on the homes of people who had done nothing, and dozens of less well-known ones. There have been hundreds of arrests, many highly publicised, after which the scared suspects, once interrogated, have been released without charge or charged with petty offences, often immigration violations. And there has already been one state murder of an entirely innocent man – Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes was gunned down by armed police on the London underground two years ago. The police immediately told lies

about it and no-one has been punished for his death.

This is all accompanied by endless press rants against women in hijabs and burkas, mosques, imams, halal meat and illegal immigration. Whilst 'incitement to terrorism' carries a heavy penalty, this sustained incitement to view Muslims as subhuman is rarely treated as criminal or linked to the inevitable racist attacks that follow.

Alongside this full frontal attack on all Muslims, or anyone who might even vaguely look like a Muslim, there is a drive by the state to work in tandem with bourgeois sections of Muslim communities, to channel dissent into ineffective, parliamentary means. Elders and leaders are encouraged to dampen down radicalism and inform on 'militants'. The angry crowds of young people mobilised by mosques to demonstrate against the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001-2 have been driven off the streets.

A benign and ineffective Stop the War movement is useful for the state as it can be co-opted against 'extremists', whilst its continued operation without overt interference helps show that the government tolerates peaceful dissent. This was clearly visible at the Scotland United Against Terrorism

rally in Glasgow on 7 July when Stop the War happily shared the platform with the Assistant Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police.

All this is classic British government strategy for dealing with opposition: It was graphically described by General Frank Kitson, Commander in Chief of the United Kingdom Land Forces in *Low Intensity Operations – Subversion, Insurgency and Peace-keeping* (1971). Kitson was involved in 'counter-insurgency' in Kenya, Malaya, Oman, Cyprus and the north of Ireland. His strategy was studied and pursued by Kenneth Newman, Chief Constable of the RUC and Commissioner of Metropolitan Police in the 1980s. All the techniques now being used against the Muslim population of Britain were employed throughout the 1970s and 1980s against the Irish community.

The basic aim is to turn any effective opposition to the British state into a criminal act. Kitson argues that it is necessary to ruthlessly stamp out 'subversion' whilst simultaneously strengthening 'moderate' elements who support the state. 'Psychological operations' are used to isolate the opposition from the people. These

continued on page 3

Welcome...

After ten long years the face of the top servant of British imperialism has changed. The chosen replacement is a tried and trusted ally of the British ruling class, Gordon Brown. Under his watch we can guarantee the same reactionary policies, both at home and abroad, as those of his predecessor Tony Blair. This is because the outlook and actions of the British state are little to do with the 'policy choices' of particular individuals or parties, but are dictated by the interests of capital and imperialism. The Labour Party has always understood this and it will always respond first and foremost to the interests of the wealthy and their imperialist designs.

For the past 27 years FRFI has consistently exposed the Labour Party as willing servants of British imperialism and in this issue we demonstrate how the parasitism of the system is personified through the new Labour leader (see p3).

The brutal occupation of Iraq will continue with Brown at the helm. As an imperialist he is fully complicit in Britain's and the US's brutal war for oil in Iraq. The recent US 'surge' has not produced the results that Bush's administration desperately needed and in both Iraq and Afghanistan the resistance is eroding the will and stamina of imperialism (see p8/9).

The war in Iraq will define the legacy of Tony Blair and it is the Middle East which continues to dominate his attentions. It is an obscene irony that Blair has been made an 'envoy for peace' in the Middle East. This multiple-warmonger and ardent Zionist is only interested in a peace that sees the Palestinians capitulate to the attacks and interests of Israel and imperialism. Imperialism is seeking to divide the Palestinian people and deliver a death blow to the Intifada (see p6).

In the wake of new terrorist attacks and plots in Glasgow and London, Brown's government has sought to exploit the terrorist threat, to terrify the



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez – building socialism

population, whip up racism and criminalise whole communities. In the name of the 'war on terror' our civil liberties are being taken away (see p1/3).

Under the veneer of impenetrable might, however, the parasitism, insecurity and vulnerability of capitalism is demonstrated most starkly in the world's most wealthy and powerful country. Cracks in US capitalism are beginning to widen with a collapse in house prices and huge quantities of fictitious wealth and insecure stock are facing meltdown (see p4).

Economic crisis is the inevitable result of contradictions in the capitalist system but it is the oppressed who feel the brunt of these crises. In Britain the first to suffer are asylum seekers and migrant labourers such as those from Bulgaria, Romania and other Eastern European countries who will be forced to leave when their labour is no longer required (see p16).

There is an alternative to this destructive cycle. Socialism is being lived, evolved and developed by Cuba. The Caribbean island is at the forefront of showing that a new world is possible, a world free from inequalities and environmental

destruction, one where production is set to meet the needs of the people, not profit (see p12). Its example is giving inspiration and foresight to other revolutionary developments, such as those in Venezuela (see p5).

We continue to expose the bankruptcy of so-called 'socialists' here in Britain still tied to the Labour Party, who seek at every opportunity to criticise and undermine the example of the Cuban revolution (see p10/11). There is a real urgency now to follow the example of Latin America and build a revolutionary movement in Britain.

A panel of acclaimed atomic scientists have warned that we only have five minutes left until a figurative midnight in which mankind will destroy itself. The prospect of nuclear Armageddon does not seem so fanciful as the imperialist powers threaten and arm in their destructive quest for global hegemony (see p7). Read this paper, educate yourself, and with that knowledge join us in action on the streets (see p14). Contact us and get involved.

Fight Racism!
Fight Imperialism!
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Health matters

Job losses and fudged figures

The Homerton hospital in East London no longer has a children's asthma clinic. The senior specialist nurse with decades of experience and who has a driving interest in the subject, the children and their families, has been pushed to resign. This follows a decision to 'disestablish' her post in a money-saving exercise presented as a *fait accompli* by senior clinicians and managers. The loss of such a nurse will go down in the column 'natural wastage'.

In April, as its conference opened, a Royal College of Nursing (RCN) study reported that a combination of redundancies, recruitment freezes and post closures had led to a reduction of 22,300 nurses over the previous 18 months. A poll of 807 specialist nurses interviewed for the study found that one in five were at risk of redundancy and half knew of cuts in their specialist area. This came just as the government announced that the NHS was to finish the financial year with a £13 million surplus, despite one in three hospitals and primary care trusts predicting deficits.

In response to the RCN, the Department of Health claimed that their figures represented the natural turnover of staff in any organisation and that the number of compulsory redundancies was 1,446 of which only 303 were doctors or nurses. Yet the latest figures from the NHS Information Centre show that 17,000 posts have been lost in the twelve months to July, and even if 'only' 1,500 are compulsory redundancies there are many who have gone through voluntary redundancy or resigned because they feel they have no other option. One expression of the large number of job losses in the NHS is the £320 million cost of redundancies and early retirements that followed the re-organisation of strategic health authorities and primary care trusts in April this year.

More redundancies

In mid-July, the North Yorkshire Trust, which runs Scarborough General and Bridlington District hospitals and which covers one of the largest geographical areas in England, announced that it will cut 600 jobs, equivalent to one third of the workforce, to make an annual saving of £10 million. Desperate and pathetic



Homerton NHS Foundation hospital in one of London's poorest areas no longer has a specialist children's asthma clinic

words from the chief executive included an unbelievable claim that such cuts would not affect the A&E department.

Meanwhile the treasury has reclaimed £2 billion of unspent NHS capital – only £4.2 billion of the £6.2 billion 2008 budget for NHS capital expenditure in England will be used. Ministers say that this money will be restored to next year's budget, but since spending plans have not been published, proving it has been carried over will be very difficult.

Unelected health minister's plan for London

'The day of the district general hospital seeking to provide all services to a high enough standard are over' says Sir Ara Darzi, professor of surgery at Imperial College London who has spent the last eight months working on a review of health provision in London and has come up with a ten year plan for reorganising it. The London Strategic Health Authority (SHA) commissioned his report last September; it is the third one of its nature in the last 15 years. As a reward for this effort, Gordon Brown appointed him to a ministerial post in the Department of Health in July.

London has 93 hospital sites, over 1,400 mental health and community facilities and almost 1,600 GP practices. The assets are worth tens of billions of pounds. Darzi's vision is to shift work from hospitals into polyclinics and urgent care centres to cater for people closer to home and to have up to 12 specialist hospitals, between eight and 16 major acute hospitals (which would serve 500,000 to one million people each) and a handful of academic health science centres created by integrating top

hospitals with universities' biomedical research centres. 150 polyclinics, with long opening hours, would provide community-based care at levels between GP practices and district general hospitals, including pharmacy, dentistry, social and mental health, x-ray and ultrasound services, blood tests and minor surgery.

The London Health Emergency pressure group predicts that there are nine major acute hospitals which will face closure or downgrading in the coming period. These include Chase Farm hospital in Enfield, Epsom and St Helier, Queen Mary's Sidcup, Central Middlesex in Park Royal, King George's in Ilford, Hammersmith Hospital, one north London hospital, possibly the Royal Free, and one west London hospital, possibly West Middlesex. Although Darzi says that his review is clinician-led, the London SHA will have a much harder-nosed approach. Hence Queen Mary's Sidcup is under threat because the NHS in outer south east London has an annual deficit of £100m, and the three adjacent hospitals (Bromley, Queen Elizabeth and Lewisham) all have very large PFI commitments which the NHS has to honour. A complex reorganisation of clinical services will see some patients being treated at two or even three different sites, and will undoubtedly require substantial job losses in order to make the necessary savings.

Whatever Darzi claims, improvement in health care provision and access for all will not come about by reducing staff numbers, by pushing out the most experienced clinicians from all areas of health care work, or by increasing the use of the private sector and further breaking up the system.

Hannah Caller

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Fund Drive: FRFI needs you!

We know that FRFI has many loyal and interested readers. But we need your financial contributions to continue to expand our work. Even a £10 donation from each of you would help us to meet and surpass our fund drive goal of £10,000. So far, through donations and fundraising we have raised £7,720 since January.

The pages of FRFI illustrate what we can achieve with few resources: working with asylum seekers and immigrants in defence of their rights and against state racism, campaigning in support of socialist Cuba, exposing the racism of the imperialist Labour Party, providing consistent opposition to the brutal occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and threats against Iran, and organising the only consistent campaign in Britain to demand freedom for Palestine. To do all this we rely on your participation and support. Please donate to our fund drive as soon as possible. FRFI needs you!

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

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Report on increasing inequality in Britain

Further graphic evidence of Labour's prosecution of the interests of the rich against the poor was revealed in a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation released on 17 June which showed how inequality had grown over the 20 years from 1980 to 2000. The proportion of 'non-poor, non-wealthy' households fell from 66.1% in 1980 to 55.7% by 1990, and to 50.4% by 2000. Those defined as either 'core' or 'breadline poor' increased from 17.1% to 21.3% in 1990 and then to 27% by 2000. Those defined as 'wealthy' increased from 16.8% to 22.6%. Between 1990 and

2000 the proportion of 'exclusively wealthy' rose from 3.5% to 5.6%. This is consistent with the fact that the wealthiest 1% increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% between 1996 and 2002, whilst that of the poorest 50% shrank from 7% to 5%. This trend has continued.

Inequality therefore has continued to grow under Labour, and although there has been a reduction in poverty over the last ten years, this has in no way restored the 1979 position before the Tories came to office. Thus the proportion of the population living in poverty had fallen from

25% in 1996/97 to 20% by 2004/05, whilst the figures for children were 33% and 27% respectively. But given that average income had risen 26% over the same period this progress is meagre especially when we remember that in 1979 13% of the population and 14% of children lived below the poverty line. Moreover recent figures suggest that poverty has begun to rise again: 100,000 more children were living in poverty in 2005/06 than in the previous year.

A future article in FRFI will look in more detail at the Rowntree Report

CRIMINALISATION OF OPPOSITION TO WAR

continued from page 1

include propaganda against the opposition cause, use of the press and media to put over the government position, government schemes to win over 'moderate' opinion, 'dirty tricks' such as fake leaflets, and eventually provocateurs and agents who masquerade as oppositionists to discredit the cause. Finally, if necessary, they will assassinate leading oppositionists.

Intelligence-gathering is an essential feature of the Kitson strategy and the method of gathering intelligence relies heavily on a 'large number of low-grade sources' – small pieces of information acquired by the police – collated to build up a total picture of the opposition. On 9 July Gordon Brown's new Minister for Security, Admiral Sir Alan West, told the *Telegraph* that the danger to Britain from 'both home-grown and foreign terrorists' was at its greatest ever level and encouraged people to provide information about any suspicious behaviour. 'Britishness does not normally involve snitching or talking about someone' he said. 'I'm afraid, in this situation, anyone who's got any information should say something because the people we are talking about are trying to destroy our entire way of life.'

Detention without charge

In November 2005 the Labour government was defeated in its attempt to increase the maximum detention period for terrorism suspects to 90 days. Instead the House of Commons voted to double the then 14-day period to 28 days. Since then government ministers and the police have continued to lobby for an increase to 90 days. Gordon Brown supported the 90-day proposal first time around and continues to be a firm supporter of lengthy detention.

Upping the stakes still further, on 5 July Lord Carlisle QC, the British government's 'independent reviewer of terror laws' told a BBC interviewer he favoured detention that was 'not one day too long, nor one day too short' for dealing with what he described as an 'international network of violent Jihadists'. Right on cue, Ken Jones, President of the Association of Chief Police Officers called for suspects to be held for 'as long as it takes'.

All this set the scene for Brown's speech on 25 July, revealing his plans for the Counter-Terrorism Bill, which will be included in the Queen's Speech in October. Proposals include a doubling of the maximum detention without charge period to 56 days, as well as:

- A review of allowing intercept evidence in court
- A new system of electronic exit controls at UK borders from 2009

- Biometric visas to be extended to all visa applicants from March 2008
- Britain's list of suspects under surveillance to be linked to the Interpol database
- £70m to help local councils and community groups with citizenship projects aimed at 'combating extremism'
- Consultation on tightening bail conditions and travel restrictions on terrorism suspects
- A BBC Arabic channel and 'an editorially independent Farsi TV channel for the people of Iran'

Savage sentences

Meanwhile, the numbers detained and imprisoned under the existing anti-terrorism laws are increasing. A minority have been convicted of perpetrating or plotting acts of serious violence, while most of the remainder are in prison for holding and disseminating unpopular and unpleasant opinions, and those most recently convicted simply chanted slogans which some find offensive.

On 19 July Umran Javed, Mizanur Rahman and Abdul Muhid, who demonstrated outside the Danish Embassy last year against cartoons satirising the prophet Muhammed were sentenced to six years' imprisonment each. Their crime was to call for British soldiers to be brought home in body bags and to chant slogans such as 'Bomb, bomb Denmark, bomb, bomb USA'. Abdul Saleem was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for the single act of shouting through a megaphone 'UK, USA, 7/7 on its way, UK you will pay, Bin Laden is on his way.'

Compare this with the four-month sentence given to David Wilson of the BNP in 2002 for inciting racial hatred against Muslims and the non-conviction of BNP leader Nick Griffin.

On 15 July prisoner Dhiren Barot, who the press claim is 'a senior Al Qaida figure', was attacked by other prisoners in Frankland prison. FRFI has been told that staff knew this was going to happen and did not attempt to prevent it.

Oppose Britain's imperialist wars in the Middle East!

FRFI opposes the British occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, as we have always opposed all British imperialist interventions and occupations, including that of the north of Ireland. We unconditionally support the resistance against those occupations and we recognise that the political, judicial and propaganda offensive being mounted by the British Labour government is not simply aimed at neutralising violent religious extremists, but at terrorising entire communities out of making common cause with the oppressed who are resisting in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. ■

Gordon Brown parasitism personified

Since Gordon Brown was appointed leader of the Labour Party on 24 June and assumed the mantle of Prime Minister, there has been the expected change of style, with some minor domestic policy concessions to heal rifts with sections of Labour's support. He has therefore set out executive powers he would consider handing back to Parliament. An early move was to offer meetings with trade union leaders who have been excluded from Downing Street for a decade under Blair's leadership. A further step was his call for the building of three million new homes by 2020: affordable housing, he declared, is 'one of the great causes of our time.' Yet there is a sting in the tail: social house building has fallen by 27% under Labour, and only 13% of all houses built in 2006/07 were for social rent. The majority of new houses will be built for sale; even those that councils build will have to be handed to Arms Length Management Organisations to administer.



On foreign policy there will be no change: Brown swiftly reiterated support for the 'special relationship' with the US. There is to be no end to military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Foreign Minister David Miliband has refused to rule out the possibility of a military strike against Iran.

Only the most glib could have imagined that Brown would change from being the absolute personification of the interests of banking capital and the City of London, the architect of successive privatisations, the principal defender of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), the person who handed the control of interest rates over to the City of London, into someone who would consider any path which did not protect those interests. The change of style and domestic policy cannot hide his unconditional support for capitalism as expressed for instance in his Business Council for

Britain which includes chief executive officers of BP, Tesco, GlaxoSmith-Kline, M&S, and the chairs of Standard Chartered Bank and HSBC. Joining them is Damon Buffini, founder of the private equity firm Permira.

To drive the point home Brown has invited former CBI chief and arch anti-trade unionist Sir Digby Jones to join his government as a trade minister. His call for a 'government of all the talents' had led him to approach the Lib Dems, and to appoint the former Met Police Commissioner Lord Stevens as his international security adviser. Although George Monbiot pointed out in *The Guardian* that none of this open embrace of capitalist interests has stimulated any opposition from the moribund trade union movement, he also says: 'there is the perpetual fear of something worse. No trade union, quite rightly, wants to let the Tories back in. But if the unions

won't use their power, the contest between the two parties will be scarcely worth fighting.' As if we had not reached that point years ago!

Brown may be tempted to go for an early general election to secure a personal mandate. The results of two recent by-elections, in Southall and Sedgefield, show that he is unlikely to be troubled too much by Tory opposition since although Labour lost votes, they went to the Lib Dems. Despite a big push in Southall, Respect polled only 1.6%, half that of the Green Party so Brown will be untroubled by the left either. A snap election is possible given rising interest rates, emerging financial problems in the US and the collapse of public-private projects with which Brown is closely associated, particularly that of Metronet, the consortium responsible for maintaining and upgrading the majority of the London underground network.

Robert Clough

Crisis of the opportunist left

Respect's pitiful share of the vote in the Southall by-election on 19 July reveals the crisis that faces the opportunist left as it fails to establish itself as an electoral force. It follows the disastrous showing of Solidarity and the Scottish Socialist Party in the May elections to the Scottish Assembly.

Turnout in the by-election was a mere 42.95%, 13.25% down on the 2005 general election. Respect failed to provide the 'real impact' or 'left alternative' that Socialist Worker claimed it would the week beforehand. Meanwhile one of Respect's 12 Tower Hamlets councillors elected in May has defected to Labour, and another resigned.

Respect has more and more openly positioned itself as an electoral organisation with the politics of 'Old Labour'. A recent leaflet argued that 'Respect supported John McDonnell in his challenge to Gordon Brown for the Labour leadership ... because John McDonnell promoted policies in favour of working class people, which are a cornerstone of Respect policies'. A leadership contest would have shown that 'an alternative socialist vision within Labour still remained'. McDonnell's failure, Respect says, 'is a devastating indictment of New Labour'.

In truth, the devastating indictment is of the bankruptcy of Old Labour, its attempted modern reincarnation in Respect and the force behind it, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).



SWP: covering up for Labour imperialism

Critical to the SWP's adaptation to what it styles as 'Old Labour' is its belief that that Labour's imperialism is not a necessity for a party committed to run the British state but a policy choice. Thus Alex Callinicos has recently argued that Blair's and Brown's 'main "innovation" in economic policy, giving the Bank of England independence to set interest rates, was a surrender to neoliberal conventional wisdom. Its effect was to remove key economic decisions from any form of democratic control... the two have continued Thatcher's policy of closely aligning the British economy to the US and mimicking its free market policies. This has meant the continued decline of manufacturing industry, and growing dependence on financial markets. The City of London has flourished under Blair and Brown.' (*Socialist Worker*, 12 May 2007)

What else were Brown and Blair to do? Once you have thrown in your lot with British imperialism, you do what

is required to defend its interests – in that sense there is no choice. Surrendering to neoliberal conventional wisdom, mimicking US free market policies, supervising the continued decline of manufacturing industry, stimulating a growing dependence on financial markets – this is what British imperialism required of Labour if it were to be allowed to govern. Callinicos and the SWP however imagine that something else could have happened had Labour remained Old Labour: indeed Callinicos later on in his article complains about 'the distance the Blair government has travelled from traditional Labourism' in its treatment of poverty.

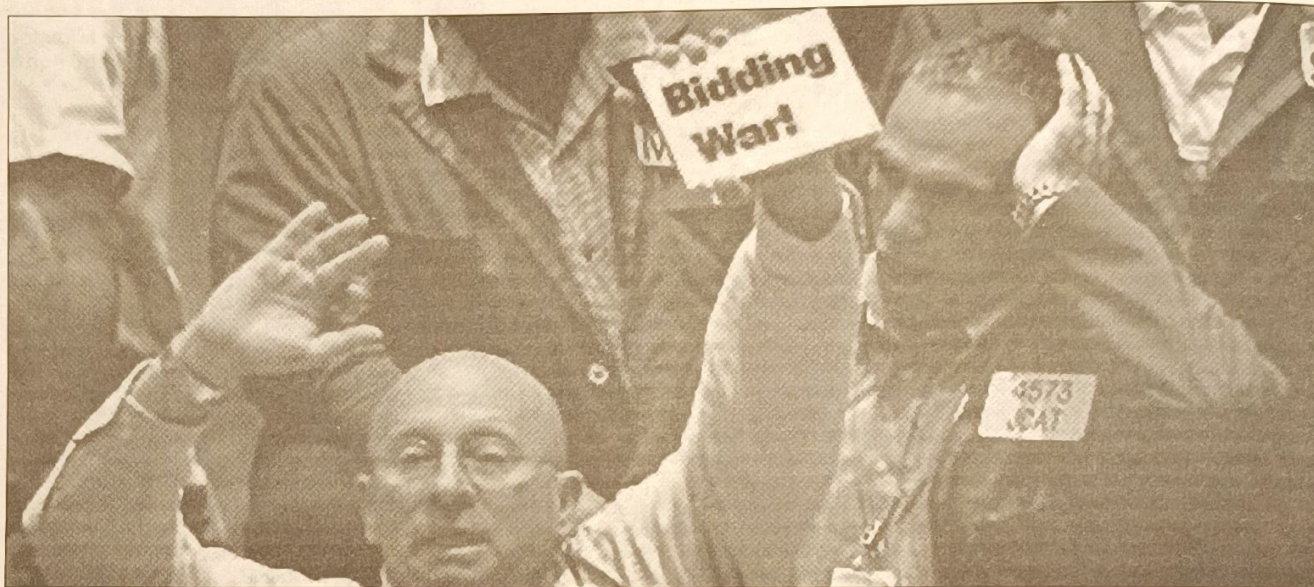
This is why the SWP supported John McDonnell's campaign to become Labour leader after Blair since it believed that a defender of 'traditional Labourism' would be able to govern British imperialism and defend working class interests at the same time. This is a pernicious myth which covers up for Labour imperialism. Socialists can have no truck with it. ■



As safe as HOUSES

In past issues of FRFI we have shown how capitalism has been staving off its inevitable crisis in part by propping itself up through a massive expansion of credit and loans. This has taken a wide variety of forms: the US state has been financing itself by borrowing from foreign lenders and US consumers have kept spending by taking out loans against their houses for example. This credit has helped sustain the expansion of US capital, despite its inherent tendency toward crisis, by financing production beyond the limits which would normally be set by profitability.

STEVE PALMER reports



Credit and speculation

This expansion of credit has sharply increased in the last two years. The US 'money supply', the sum of the most liquid forms of money: cash, checking and saving accounts, money market accounts etc, has grown by some 12.6% since January 2005, about the same rate as production. But other, slightly less liquid forms of money, such as eurodollars, 'Repos' (repurchase agreements) and large time deposits, have been growing much faster than the basic money supply: by 31.8%, 44.1% and 67.6% respectively over the same period. This is a symptom of a sharp credit expansion, largely outside the normal banking system.

An example is the New York Stock Exchange, where so-called 'margin debt' has increased by an astonishing 67% in the year to June 2006, to \$378.2bn, helping to fuel the current run up in stock prices. Margin debt is an example of 'leverage': a buyer arranges with a broker to borrow 'on the margin', enabling them to purchase up to twice as much stock as their actual cash reserves would permit. Instead of spending \$10,000 on stocks, the buyer can spend \$20,000. If the stock goes up by 10%, he'll make \$2,000 by borrowing on the margin instead of \$1,000.

This sort of leveraging is going on everywhere. Private equity funds borrow money to purchase companies which they expect to reorganize and resell – so-called 'Leveraged Buyouts' (LBOs). Hedge funds use leverage to purchase exotic financial instruments – forms of fictitious capital. While investors in these funds may gain, their managers always do.

Both types of funds grew out of the massive 'deregulation', which, beginning in the 1980s, enabled such financial organisations to emerge alongside banks to engage in lending and borrowing of all kinds. Free of the tight restrictions on the banks, they are able to provide better rates and more attractive options, usually at the expense of increased risk to both borrower and lender.

Since capitalism cannot operate in any kind of planned manner, speculation serves as a vital mechanism redistributing and concentrating capital. Yet this mechanism also helps inflate the prices of assets and fictitious capital. These leveraging activities, for the most part, simply redistribute surplus-value amongst capitalists, but do nothing to increase it. Indeed, their increase is itself a symptom of the underlying decline in profitability

which is going on. At some point these speculative activities run up against hard barriers created by the crisis of profitability. This is what is happening with the 'sub-prime' mortgage crisis.

The sub-prime mortgage crisis

There has been a massive growth in US residential mortgage lending in the last two decades. Initially this was for house purchase, then 'refinancing' developed to borrow against the remaining equity in a house. When those opportunities began to dry up mortgage lenders turned to those who normally found it impossible to get a mortgage – the poor and risky borrowers, selling them what are called 'sub-prime' mortgages. The most popular variety sets initial interest rates low to enable the borrower to buy a house. But, after a period of time (2-5 years), the loan 'resets' and a much higher rate of interest is charged. Perhaps a quarter of all mortgages in the US are sub-prime.

Another innovation has been to 'securitize' the loans. Traditionally, the lender would hold the loan until it was paid off. With securitization, as soon as the loan is made, the mortgages are packaged up and sold off to investment bankers as Mortgage Backed Securities (MBS) – some \$2bn alone last year. The lender gets its hands on a bundle of money, which it can promptly lend out again to other borrowers and repeat the process. Since the mortgages are of high and varying risk, MBS are difficult to sell on, so the investment bankers slice, dice and shuffle the MBS, sorting them into 'tranches' – slices. These are now packaged up and renamed as Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDO) with tranches of varying risk. The issue of CDOs has shot up from \$25bn in the first quarter of 2004 to \$158bn in the first quarter of 2007. The safest are called investment-grade, rated AAA. Even if there are failures, these bonds will be fully paid – in theory. So-called 'mezzanine' bonds, and equity bonds carry greater risk with far less likelihood of pay-back in the event of failure. The price changes, due to the changes in house prices, is concentrated in the equity portion of the CDO – indeed, in the event that house prices rise, the price of the bond can rise above its original purchase price. This makes them a particularly attractive asset.

The investment grade bonds are relatively easy to unload onto more conservative financial organizations. The riskiest bonds – equity and mezzanine, say 30% of the original MBS,

are cheerfully known in the industry as 'toxic waste'. The problem is: where to dump this stuff?

The investment banks go to the large public sector pension funds which got burnt during the tech boom, and offer them this high-risk, high-return tranche of the CDO. Or they may sell to or even initiate a hedge fund which buys up the toxic waste. With house prices rising, the hedge fund uses the now higher-priced equity CDO as collateral to borrow money, its total value increases, attracting money drawn by its apparently high rate of return. The pension fund manager loads up with more of this sludge. Everyone gets excited, wants to join the party, scared of 'missing the bus' (a sure fire sign that they already have). More money gets thrown to the funds, prices go up and, it seems, we have money creating money creating even more money. Pension and hedge funds have taken 7% of the investment grade CDOs, but slurped down 28% of the toxic sludge.

But, like all wild parties, sooner or later, the music and the dancing have to stop. Far away from Wall Street, across the US, borrowers' mortgages are being reset. Unable to meet the payment increases – which can be 50%, 100% or more – the borrowers default, the banks foreclose on the loan and sell off the houses. In June, 164,444 foreclosure notices were issued – up 87% over the year. Generally house prices have grown at a similar rate to general inflation, but in the decade from 1996, the consumer price index rose by 28%, while the house price index rose by 208%. This housing bubble has now popped and is in free-fall. Not only is the revenue stream on mortgages disappearing, but the underlying assets which are supposed to act as collateral are collapsing in price. The former home owners are now homeless, and still in debt.

Back on Wall Street, the CDOs, which have been flying high, are now of unknown value. This was the position that two of investment bank Bear Stearns' hedge funds found themselves in at the end of June. The bankers who supplied the leverage debt turned round and demanded their money back. When Bear Stearns couldn't come up with the money, some banks grabbed the securities as collateral. When Merrill Lynch tried to auction off the \$850m of bonds it seized, it could only unload \$100m. There is no open market for these illiquid securities, where they could be traded and 'marked to market', so nobody knows what the price should

be. Indeed, the pricing of the assets is so complicated that it took Bear Stearns' best and brightest three weeks before it could announce to investors that the 'high grade' were almost or entirely worthless.

What is significant about this is that the 'high grade' funds had invested in AAA or AA – investment grade – CDOs, not toxic waste. Remember: these are the CDOs which are supposed to return their premium no matter what. Pension and hedge funds clutching toxic waste CDOs, at the other end of the scale, are now holding 'assets' that are little better than toilet tissue. This is just the first round of financial musical chairs which is going to shake out these risky assets. The wave of foreclosures has only just begun and will continue as long as resets continue. The housing market is in near paralysis, since, with falling prices, only the desperate are ready to sell. House prices have reached nothing like the bottom we can expect to restore the parity with consumer prices in general.

Where, when and how this is going to end is impossible to predict. But we know that it is the poor and oppressed, the working class, who will be expected to bear the weight of this collapse. It has begun with the workers who have been enticed into buying homes with sub-prime mortgages. It will extend further, cutting the pensions of teachers, fire-fighters and others whose pension funds have tried to play at the capitalist poker table.

How far this will spread this time round we cannot know. It is easy to throw around comparisons with the stock market crash of 1929, the precursor to the great depression of the 1930s. But the similarities are striking: 1928-29 saw a surge in 'broker loans' (margin debt); there was a speculative real estate boom and a huge increase in agricultural credit which ended up driving farmers off the land. As with 'The New Economy', the 1920s were thought to be a 'New Economic Era' – 'We were assured that we were in a new period where the old laws of economics no longer applied'.

Like the blinded, seething Samson, contradiction-wracked capitalism is tugging at its own pillars, threatening to pull down upon itself its own edifice. The cracks have started to show and are growing wider. The working class must apply its own leverage to these cracks to ensure that the entire rotten tottering system is not only brought down, but never rises again.

'The cracks have started to show and are growing wider. The working class must apply its own leverage to these cracks to ensure that the entire rotten tottering system is not only brought down, but never rises again.'

VENEZUELA

The meaning of democracy

Ten days of demonstrations, led by wealthy students, against the Venezuelan government's refusal to renew RCTV's broadcasting licence in May, have fizzled out. The protestors rejected an opportunity to debate the issue in the National Assembly on 7 June, where they would have been mercilessly exposed as frauds. **ALVARO MICHAELS** reports.

The US government has been funding, through USAID, training seminars for student leaders with the objective of promoting 'student activism' in political life. Antonia Ledezma, now an opposition spokesperson for 'democracy', was the governor of Caracas in 1992-93. This hypocrite prohibited all student protests in the street that year. Some groups and individuals that participated in the RCTV protests had received training with US bodies such as the Albert Einstein Institute and the International Centre on Non-Violent Conflict. These were responsible for helping to promote, fund and advise the 'coloured revolutions' in Eastern Europe, the Ukraine, Serbia, Yugoslavia and Georgia. They failed in Belarus and began working in Venezuela in April 2003.

A new TV channel TEVES, or Venezuelan Social Television, has begun broadcasting in place of the RCTV drive. To meet its constitutional obligations, Public Service Radio will be introduced for the first time next year, which indicates the previous and present unhealthy dominance of private interests in the communications industry.

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)

Since last April, 5.7 million of the 7.3 million Venezuelans who voted for Chavez in December's Presidential elections have registered to be members of the new party (2.88 million men and 2.78 million women). In June a national meeting of candidates for PSUV militants took place in Caracas. President Chavez explained to 15,000

party militants that the PSUV aimed to consolidate the revolution, which could not rely on the leadership of only one man. This is the start of the second phase in the creation of the party. More than 25,000 party 'pro-

members are under 30 years old. The entry of thousands of youth under 18 years will be agreed after the President received a letter signed by thousands of teenagers asking for the right to join the new party.



Chavez hails a rally to celebrate his re-election last year: 'No one should fear socialism. Socialism is human. Socialism is love.'

motors' will create and organise over 20,000 assemblies, or 'socialist battalions', in communities across the country. These are made up of 300 candidates each and will debate and discuss the political programme of the new party. Ideas of democracy, socialism, sovereignty and anti-imperialism will be discussed. The promoters receive training on the assemblies' procedures and organisation. After three assembly meetings starting on 21 July, party members will elect representatives for the party's founding congress, which will be convened in August and last for three months. One third of party

Due to the high participation in the party, replacing 24 smaller pro-Chavez parties, the president noted that it would be 'the biggest party not only in Venezuelan history, but in all of Latin America... It will be a party of organised masses, of organised fronts, of mass movements, of big groups and of different political blocs,' he said. Proposed reforms to the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution will be debated at the National Assembly in late July, including removal of the limitation on the number of re-elections for the president of the republic.

Alvaro Michaels

COLOMBIA

Colombian civil war: Uribe's bankrupt road

ALVARO MICHAELS

President Uribe's government continues to reel as more and more details of the dirty war against the Colombian people surface. To date, 14 members of Congress have been arrested for collaboration with fascist cocaine and murder gangs, 13 of whom are Uribe allies. This has seriously embarrassed his US backers, with some Democrats in the US Congress calling for trade deals and military aid to be blocked. The government has been placed on the defensive by the exposure of wide-scale telephone tapping. Meanwhile a recent large scale assault on the FARC led to the death of 11 local politicians, which Uribe hypocritically blamed on the guerrilla movement.

All these events demonstrate the bankrupt nature of the Colombian ruling elite. Violence, corruption, deceit and falsehood are its trademark. The government has had to acknowledge the existence of 8,000 hours of illegally-taped telephone taps of journalists, current and ex-Congressional representatives and FARC prisoners. The tapes also include taps of Interior Minister Pretelt, Peace Commissioner Restrepo, and Sergio Caramagna, the OAS delegate for the trials of members of the fascist AUC and even AUC paramilitaries. The taps were made by police intelligence and the armed forces without official permission. Ten generals and the director of police have resigned, but Uribe has defended the Minister of Defence who refuses to confirm the names of those spied upon. 168 of 231 Congress members have backed him.

Uribe is hoping to get further support from Europe. However, incoming French President Sarkozy supported Brazil's Lula in asking for the release of senior FARC member Rodrigo Granda, kidnapped from Venezuela in December 2004 (see FRFI 183). Reluctantly Uribe freed him on 4 June having failed to get Granda's agreement to renounce FARC and not to return to the battlefield. On 7 June Uribe released 194 FARC prisoners who had agreed this condi-

tion and accepted probation. A further 600 FARC prisoners of war have refused, however.

Uribe's action is part of his refusal to agree that a state of civil war exists in Colombia, and that consequently he should recognise international legal obligations between the sides. For five years Uribe has rejected the demands of relatives of prisoners held by the FARC for proper negotiations. He maintains the fiction that he is faced with 'criminals' and either believes he can obtain the release of 59 mostly military prisoners held by the FARC without having to negotiate, or doesn't care.

Meanwhile Uribe has launched a new military campaign in El Valle, Cauca and Nariño in the west, along with another, the 'Plan Patriota', in the south east of the country. On 18 June, in a large scale attack on the FARC, 11 Provincial Deputies captured by the FARC in April 2002 were killed in cross fire. Uribe blocked the expected release of the deputies last October. The tragic consequence of Uribe's bloodthirsty resolve to obtain a military solution to the civil war, to 'demand and not beg' from the FARC, is now being used as a major lying propaganda campaign against the FARC for 'murdering' the deputies. These accusations aim to conceal the fact that the Colombian army and AUC gangs have killed almost 100,000 civilians, many in horrific circumstances. Doubting Uribe's claims, the UN has called for an independent enquiry.

The state continues to be guided by the hands of super exploiters. In the first three years of Uribe's government, the two biggest oligarchs in Colombia, Julio Mario Santodomingo and Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo, tripled their fortunes. Yet the Colombian workers and peasants fight on with unparalleled experience and determination in every arena. In June, the relatives of 174 Colombians murdered by AUC paramilitaries funded by US Chiquita Brands (United Fruit Company) in Urabá and Magdalena between 1997 and 2004 (see FRFI 196), started prosecution of the company for \$1bn in a US federal court.

**End all US plans for Colombia!
End EU support for Uribe!**

Fidel Castro: Transforming food into fuel is a monstrosity

SAM RAE

In a series of reflections published in the Cuban press Fidel Castro has described how the use of ethanol as an alternative to fossil fuels threatens billions of people with hunger, poverty and environmental destruction.

In a meeting with US car manufacturers in March 2007 George Bush set a target of reducing petrol consumption by 20% by 2017, to be replaced by 35 billion gallons of ethanol produced each year from agricultural products, principally maize, sugar cane and soy bean.

This amount of ethanol would require 320 million tonnes of maize. In 2005, the entire US maize crop was 280 million tonnes. According to figures from the US Development Agency (May 2007) 86 million tonnes of maize will be used in the US during 2007 for the production of ethanol, a staggering 30 million tonne increase from the record amounts used during 2006.

The US has signed a deal with Brazil, with whom it controls about 70% of world ethanol production, to promote it as an internationally traded commodity in Central America and the Caribbean – a deal which Castro has criticised. The US will maintain its tariff on ethanol imports, to protect the US ethanol industry, until at least 2009.

The European Council has set a

target for biofuels to account for 10% of EU fuel use by 2020. The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that meeting this target would require 72% of arable land in the EU. Clearly these

demand, which has risen as a result of expanding biofuel production and growing demand from India and China. The FAO has predicted that price increases will raise the cereal import bill of low-income food-deficit



Sunflowers: the European Council has set a target for biofuels to account for 10% of EU fuel use by 2020.

plans will cause a devastating increase in global crop prices, as ethanol manufacturers look abroad to meet demand.

According to the latest forecast given by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in 2007 world cereal production (which includes maize) will rise by 6.2% from 2006. Despite this, supplies will barely meet

countries by a quarter in the current season. The *Financial Times* reported in May that global food prices are headed for their biggest annual increase in as much as 30 years. In Britain annual food price inflation for the second quarter of 2007 was 5.1%, the highest in six years.

Biofuels are being promoted as en-

vironmentally friendly because the CO₂ emitted when burning them is no more than is absorbed by the plants used to make them. However, this ignores the considerable CO₂ emission associated with planting, cultivating, harvesting, transporting and processing the crop to turn it into ethanol. Furthermore, in order to meet world demand for ethanol, millions of acres of rainforest in countries like Argentina and Brazil will have to be cleared to make way for crops. Another devastating effect is due to the enormous amounts of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, whose residues are washed into rivers, lakes and seas. The Gulf of Mexico now has a dead zone bigger than Wales because fertilizer residue which drains from the US corn belt has created huge blooms of algae that suck all oxygen from the water.

As Castro pointed out: 'Transforming food into fuel is a monstrosity... regardless of official statements assuring us that this is not a choice between food and fuel, reality shows that this is exactly the alternative: either the land is used to produce food or to produce biofuels.' The idea of using food for fuel as a response to oil shortages and climate change is indicative of capitalism, which cannot accept measures that put limits on growth of consumption. As Fidel Castro said, if the world followed the example of Cuba's Energy Revolution by investing in energy efficiency, hydrocarbon reserves would last twice as long and environmental devastation would be halved.

<http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2007/reflections-of-president-fidel-castro.html>

Peru paralysed

ALVARO MICHAELS

On 11-12 July a national agrarian strike took place involving more than five million agricultural workers, small producers and craftsmen throughout Peru, demanding the rejection of a free trade treaty with the US. Whilst the action arose out of protests by teachers against new educational legislation and protests against recently-elected President Garcia's economic and political programme of handing over water, mining, and forestry resources to multinationals. The activity is without any recent precedent. 70,000 workers and students marched in Lima on 11 July, and opposition leader Ollanta Humala proposed the creation of a popular constituent assembly to agree a programme to displace Garcia. On 16 July, in Andahuaylas, 4,000 protesters clashed with police, who killed one man and injured dozens. This followed a pitched battle in Lima when 1,000 workers captured and then released nine police officers. In Puno workers overran the airport and railway station. Imperialism is facing a renewed challenge.

Abbas – imperialism's puppet



Demonstration organised by the Popular Resistance Committees against the closure of the Rafah border crossing

Yousef's use of the term 'contras' was a reference to those Fatah forces led by imperialist stooge Mohammed Dahlan, Abbas's head of security in Gaza. Yousef continued:

'The Bush administration never intended to honour the outcome of fair and transparent elections in the Occupied Territories. The embargo, designed to punish the electorate for its choice, was the first step towards crushing new democratic institutions. The second has been to find collaborators for the American agenda and to supply them with advisers, funds and weapons for their campaign of destabilisation.'

Abbas, Dahlan and their allies have proved to be willing collaborators of imperialism and Zionism. That imperialism was trying to engineer a Palestinian civil war was evident to Alvaro de Soto, former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East. In his final report before he resigned in May this year, he wrote: 'The US clearly pushed for a confrontation between Hamas and Fatah, so much so that, a week before Mecca [where the National Unity government was agreed between Hamas and Fatah] the US envoy declared twice in an envoy's meeting in Washington how much "I like this violence", referring to the near civil war that was erupting in Gaza in which civilians were being regularly killed and injured because "it means that other Palestinians are resisting Hamas".'

In FRFI 197 we reported how Dahlan's Palestinian Preventative Security Force (PSF) had been deployed in mid-May in Gaza against the Qassam Brigades (Hamas's military wing), under the guise of combating crime and disorder. Their attacks on Hamas had been supported by Israeli air strikes. A ceasefire agreed on 20 May held only to the beginning of June when the PSF again began to target members of the resistance, killing a Hamas militant in Rafah on 10 June as he was about to confront Israeli forces. The following morning there was an assassination attempt on the Hamas Minister of Youth in Gaza City. Later, shots were fired at the building where the Palestinian Authority (PA) Council of Ministers was due to meet, forcing its cancellation. Hamas reported that the same day the Israelis allowed a shipment of arms and munitions to cross into Gaza for Dahlan's contra forces. In the evening Fawzi Barhoun, a Hamas spokesperson in Gaza, said 'matters are getting more serious and we cannot any more stand idle before them as the mutineers [Dah-

lan's PSF] are systematically targeting Palestinian legitimacy through attacks on the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), the PA public institutions and now the PA Council of Ministers.'

The following day, 12 June, a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at Haniyeh's house. Hamas forces went on the offensive over the next two days. By 14 June Dahlan's contra forces had been routed and Hamas had taken control of most of Gaza. PSF commanders fled in panic to be given safe passage by Israel out of Gaza. Dahlan himself had been in Egypt receiving 'medical treatment' during this period. The rapid collapse of his forces and the relatively few casualties in the fighting confirmed that the contras had no social base in Gaza, being no more than the hirelings of a section of the Palestinian bourgeoisie whose wealth derived from crime and corruption. This stands in contrast to Hamas, whose social base is the poor and oppressed of Palestine. An article posted from Gaza in the *Christian Science Monitor* on 28 June reported, 'Residents are enjoying visiting large swathes of beachfront that had once been closed off, taken over and privatised by Fatah kingpins'.

On 24 June Haniyeh confirmed that the problem the Palestinian people faced was 'with a certain faction within Fatah which has come to control Fatah and the Palestinian Authority, a faction that used American money and arms and backing to bully and destroy the legitimate Palestinian government, all in order to serve Israeli interests'. Ridiculing Abbas's allegation that Hamas had carried out a coup, he said 'we were elected by the people, how can we revolt against ourselves?'. Indeed it was Dahlan's forces that had attempted a rebellion: 'Large arms caches were sent to Gaza, overtly and covertly, millions of dollars were provided, clandestine meetings were held all under the noses of this government in an attempt to carry out this coup'.

Abbas's coup

With Gaza isolated from the West Bank, Abbas dissolved the National Unity government and declared a state of emergency on 14 June. Events in Gaza, he declared grotesquely, 'constituted a military coup against Palestinian legitimacy'. One of his first acts was to ban the Qassam Brigades and Hamas's Executive Force in the West Bank. On 17 June he appointed a new 'emergency' government with Salam Fayyad, a former representative of the

In June Hamas in Gaza crushed those sections of Fatah which have been bought off by imperialism. It was necessary to defend not just the democratically elected Palestinian government but more importantly the continued existence of the Palestinian resistance. As Hamas spokesperson Ahmed Yousef, political adviser to Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, said:

'Hamas's actions to secure Gaza from the horrific recent violence of the Palestinian contras have been out of self-defence. The assassinations of Hamas officials and supporters, attempts on the life of the elected prime minister and kidnappings and bombings by some in President Mahmoud Abbas's paramilitary groups had to stop.'

to cease activities against Israel, and agreed to certain restrictions on where they live. The next day the Jenin Al Aqsa Brigades leader Zakaria Zubeidi announced that Al Aqsa Brigades activists had signed the pledge.

In another attempt to boost Abbas's standing, Israel released 255 prisoners on 20 July, the vast majority affiliated to Fatah. There were two conditions for their release: first, that the Zionists were satisfied that they had not been involved in any action that had resulted in the death or wounding of an Israeli, and second, that they also sign the pledge ceasing resistance. The Zionists continue to hold nearly 11,000 Palestinian prisoners, including over 300 Fatah supporters that the Zionists had seized in the two weeks leading up to 10 June.



Families of Palestinian prisoners demonstrate for their release

...as do the imperialists

On 19 June Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met President Bush in Washington. Bush declared his support for Abbas: 'Our hope is that President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad will be strengthened to the point where they can lead the Palestinians in a different direction'. Olmert agreed: 'Like you I want to strengthen the moderates'. On 1 July Israel released

backing to the new 'emergency' government. On his return to the West Bank on 26 June, Abbas banned all armed resistance groups and ordered his Fatah forces to confiscate weapons and explosives. On 27 June Israel invaded Gaza killing 12 Palestinians. Two days later Prime Minister Fayyad declared on CNN that resistance had only brought misery to the Palestinian people and that it 'has destroyed our national project completely', a statement of abject capitulation.

On 16 July President Bush repeated his support for Abbas, saying:

'The alternatives before the Palestinian people are stark. There is the vision of Hamas, which the world saw in Gaza... By following this path, the Palestinian people would guarantee chaos, and suffering, and the endless perpetuation of grievance... There's another option, and that's a hopeful option. It is the vision of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad... So in consultation with our partners in the Quartet... the United States is taking a series of steps to strengthen the forces of moderation and peace among the Palestinian people... The conflict in Gaza and the West Bank today is a struggle between extremists and moderates.'

As a reward for the 'moderates', Bush committed more than \$190 million in US assistance for the PA this year plus a programme to generate

\$228 million for Palestinian businesses. He also announced an \$80 million grant for Abbas's Palestinian security forces. 'With all of this assistance', Bush declared, 'we are showing the Palestinian people that a commitment to peace leads to the generous support of the United States.' The imperialists have the support of the Arab League: on its behalf the Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers visited Israeli leaders on 25 July to push for a settlement with Abbas.

The imperialists and their allies will now be determined to ensure that the funds and military support they give to Abbas are sufficient to buy off or crush resistance on the West Bank whilst they keep the Palestinian people in Gaza isolated and on the edge of starvation. However, senior Fatah leaders such as Farouq Qaddumi and Hani Al Hassan have signalled their opposition to Abbas's actions, specifically rejecting his order that Palestinian resistance fighters disarm while Israeli occupation continues. Hani Al Hassan, at the time the Palestinian president's senior political adviser and member of Fatah's central committee, stated on Al Jazeera TV at the end of July that the events in Gaza had been a defeat for US Major General Keith Dayton, security co-ordinator to the PA, and his Fatah followers. Following the interview Abbas sacked Al Hassan, and Fatah gunmen fired at his home; no one was injured, as Al Hassan was abroad for the interview. This is a critical moment for the Palestinian liberation struggle, and it is essential that we in Britain continue to oppose Labour's support for the Zionists.

Bob Shepherd
with additional reporting from
Jerusalem by Barnaby Mitchell



Demonstrators at the Rafah border crossing

of PA security installations during Israeli raids into Palestinian towns and the crackdown against Hamas. Israeli forces have been active in raids on Nablus and surrounding areas where Hamas has wide support.

Zionists support Abbas...

On 14 July Israel announced that in consultation with the PA it had drawn up a list of 178 wanted Fatah-affiliated fighters whom it would pardon if they handed in their weapons, pledged

\$118 million of Palestinian tax revenues it had withheld illegally since the election of Hamas. Like every Zionist action it came with a condition: that Abbas reject all contact with Hamas. The Zionists will retain the rest of an estimated \$700 million for six months to see if Abbas toes the line. None of the money will go to Gaza.

Both Abbas and Olmert attended the Sharm El Sheikh Arab League summit on 25 June which gave its full

FIVE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

Part three

Menacing manoeuvres

In May 2007 Vice President Cheney addressed the world from the deck of a US aircraft carrier in the Gulf: 'With two carrier strike groups in the Gulf, we're sending clear messages to friends and adversaries alike. We'll stand with others to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons and dominating the region.' At almost the same time Russian President Putin, celebrating the anniversary of the defeat of the Nazis, said there were 'new threats' in the world based on 'the same disregard for human life and the same pretensions to international exclusivity and diktat as in the Third Reich'. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

Those who dreamt that the Soviet Union's collapse would result in reduced war preparations must surely have awoken. World military spending in 2005 was \$1,001 billion (at 2003 prices); 3.4% up on the 2004 figure and a 34% increase on the annual average for 1996-2005. The US was responsible for 80% of the 2005 increase. In 2008 US military spending, including the costs of the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, will be \$647.2 billion; the highest level of military spending in real terms since the Second World War, higher than for the Korean and Vietnam wars. This will exceed the combined military expenditure of all other countries in the world. It is 120 times what the US spends combating global warming. Far from the Iraq war discouraging them, this is evidence of the US ruling class's determination to take advantage of the Soviet Union's collapse to enforce global hegemony. US arms companies' share prices have grown three-fold since the invasion of Iraq. Imperialism is militarism.

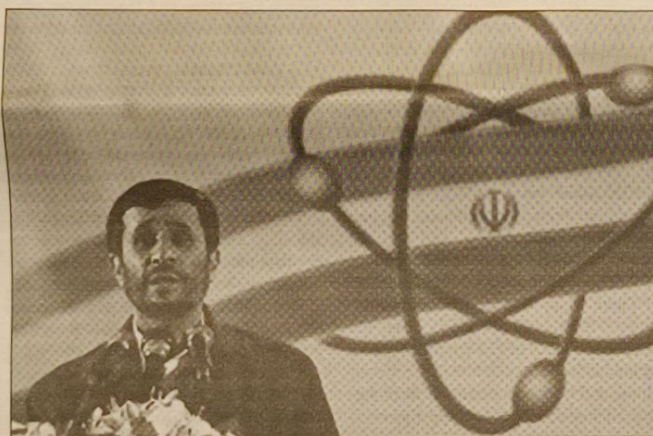
Five minutes to midnight Part one (FRFI 195) examined US and Israeli preparations for an attack on Iran, including the possibility of a nuclear attack. Part two (FRFI 196) looked at China's challenge to the prospects of US space domination and European capitalism's tensions with the US over Iran. Here we explore the US need for regional allies to ensure its global reach.

Iran

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed in April that Iran was producing nuclear fuel at its Natanz enrichment plant in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. Although the Iranian government released the 15 British sailors and marines detained in the Gulf in March, the US continues to hold five Iranian diplomats seized in northern Iraq in January. On 2 July the US military accused Iran of helping Iraqis to abduct and kill five US soldiers in January 2007. A week later Britain's new Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that Iran 'doesn't have the right to set

missile defence systems there. The US claims it intends to protect Europe and the US from a potential Iranian nuclear missile attack. Russia's Chief of General Staff said the real purpose was to create exclusive invulnerability of the US and that Russia was the real target of the missiles. In April President Putin suspended the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, a key agreement in ending the Cold War and reducing military deployments in western Russia and central Europe. Russia has now moved surface-to-air missiles into Belarus.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ridiculed Russian concerns: 'The idea that somehow ten interceptors and a few radars in Eastern Europe are going to threaten Soviet (sic) strategic return is purely ludicrous and everybody knows it.' A US anti-missile system already exists in Norway and there are plans to place similar sites in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The British Labour government has said it wants anti-ballistic missiles at Fylingdales in Yorkshire. The US anti-missile system will be linked to Alaska and California, and to planned systems in Japan, Australia, and the Philippines and sea-borne systems in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Poland has requested Patriot and high altitude



The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed in April that Iran was producing nuclear fuel at its Natanz enrichment plant

off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East' and that Britain would continue to co-operate with the US in building a missile defence shield. But it is the US and Israel that have brought nuclear weapons to the Middle East! Senior Russian general Leonid Ivashov described US intentions for Iran, 'Nuclear facilities will be secondary targets... at least 20 such facilities need to be destroyed. Combat nuclear weaponry may be used. This will result in the radioactive contamination of all Iranian territory, and beyond.' Shell, Austria's OMV and Spain's Repsol have put on hold plans to invest in Iran's oil reserves in deference to the US Iran Sanctions Act. Iran has given French oil firm Total four months to decide whether to invest \$2-4 billion in a natural gas project. Chinese and Indian interests may speed decisions along. Responding to US pressure, major Japanese banks have restricted loans to Iran and rejected an Iranian request to be paid for oil imports in currencies other than the US dollar. European importers trade increasingly with euros.

Russia, Europe and the US

Without consulting its NATO partners or the European Union (EU), the US struck bilateral agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic to station

missiles from the US and is buying F-16 fighter jets. The impression that anti-missile systems would be insufficient against the Russian or Chinese armoury is misleading:

'ABM systems have a dark secret: They are not supposed to stop all-out missile attacks, just mop up the few remaining enemy missiles that manage to survive a first strike. First strikes - called "counterpoint" attacks in the bloodless vocabulary of nuclear war - are a central component in US nuclear doctrine.' Conn Hallinan, *Counterpunch*, 12/13 May 2007

How would the US state respond to Russia or China stationing nuclear missiles in Cuba, Mexico and Canada? History tells us the answer to that one. Russia intends to quadruple production of ballistic nuclear missiles and increase its nuclear submarine fleet.

The EU is divided over US plans for Poland and the Czech Republic. Germany criticised the US for disregarding NATO in reaching bilateral deals. Estonia recently insulted Russia and its own Russian population by relocating a monument to Soviet Second World War soldiers. Over 26 and 27 April Lithuania hosted a Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) military exercise including the US Navy. The US sees these countries of 'new Europe' (Rumsfeld) as allies against



Cheney in the Gulf: 'We'll stand with others to prevent Iran gaining nuclear weapons and dominating the region'

Russia, and counter-weights to German and French ('old Europe') influence. The German ruling class has no intention of allowing the US bourgeoisie to dictate its policies towards Russia. Germany gets 40% of its gas and 35% of its oil from Russia. Russian gas is expected to rise to 60% of German usage within 20 years. Germany is Russia's biggest trading partner and German exports to Russia have grown by 20% a year for three years. Former Chancellor Schroder is now an employee of Russian state-owned gas corporation Gazprom.

The Russian state is manoeuvring to take advantage of European scepticism about US plans: at the June G8 summit in Germany and again at his July meeting with President Bush in Kennebunkport in the US, Putin proposed Azerbaijan as an alternative site to Poland and the Czech Republic for the missile shield, and that it be under joint US-Russian control with more European nations involved. The US rejected the proposal. Putin later announced that Gazprom and Italy's Eni oil company would develop a new fuel supply route from Russia to south-east Europe, providing alternative pipelines to those through Ukraine and Turkey. Eni now collaborates with Gazprom in Siberia.

Japan

The US now looks to Japan to shoulder a greater share of the military burden of the alliance to counter China. When North Korea tested missiles in July 2006 Japanese Prime Minister Abe called for a referendum allowing the constitution to be changed, enabling Japanese armed forces to move from a strictly defensive definition of their role and, said Abe, permit a pre-emptive strike on North Korea. After North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006 voices were raised in Japan calling for the development of nuclear weapons. Japanese Prime Minister Abe reassured China and the US that Japan would not produce nuclear weapons. Under the US-Japan Alliance the US stations troops in Japan and in return the US pledges to defend Japan, with nuclear weapons if necessary.

The Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force operates in the Indian Ocean in support of the US and NATO occupation of Afghanistan, refuelling US and British ships from which bombing raids are launched. This is Japan's first participation in an overseas military operation since 1945. Japanese ships use Indian ports. Japan has 47 destroyers and nine frigates; 22 more destroyers than has China. The Japanese fleet is nearly equal to the combined fleets of Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. Almost all the naval equipment is US supplied. Japanese ships are part of the US-led PSI. The PSI was announced by US President Bush at Krakow, Poland in May 2003. Members include Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Italy, Spain, Australia and Singapore. It was established by the US without reference to the UN. The PSI claimed to be targeted at preventing Al-Qaeda receiving materials for weapons of mass destruction; its real targets were

Iran and North Korea: vessels suspected of carrying such materials and missile components were to be arrested.

Japan has established a satellite reconnaissance system to spy on North Korea and says it will join the US anti-missile system. In response the *China Daily* commented, 'the deployment of a missile defence system by Japan is intended to contain China and [North Korea] and lay the basis for sharing Northeast Asian dominance with the United States'. Japan has the world's largest stockpile of weapons grade plutonium and has intercontinental missile capability. It can become a major world military power at short notice. However, China is now Japan's biggest trading partner, having surpassed the US; two-way trade exceeds \$200 billion. Japanese companies operating in China employed 1.4 million people in 2006. Economic integration and inter-dependence between the two countries is likely to weigh against Japanese militarism on behalf of the US.

US and India

India's strategic location in the centre of Asia adjacent to the sea lanes from the Middle East to East Asia makes it a potentially valuable ally to the US. In March 2005 Condoleezza Rice said the US intended to 'make India a global power'. Three months later the US and India signed a strategic and military cooperation agreement on joint peacekeeping missions in third countries. In September 2005 the Indian Navy carried out its biggest joint exercise with the US Navy, including practising interdiction of shipping on the high seas. India provides ports for US forces operating in Iraq and Afghanistan and favours giving the US use of Trincomalee, a deepwater port in the Tamil part of Sri Lanka.

On 18 December 2006 the US and India signed a nuclear co-operation pact allowing US firms to ship nuclear fuel and equipment to India. This allows India to divert resources to its nuclear weapons programme. India has never signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Pact and disputes terms of the December agreement forbidding it from testing nuclear weapons and reprocessing nuclear fuel. Israel is now India's second biggest arms supplier after Russia. The US government authorised Israel's sale of the Phalcon radar system to India, despite vetoing a similar sale to China. India supports US-led opposition to Iran's nuclear programme and has a presence on the governing board of the IAEA, presenting the case against Iran to the UN Security Council. However, India has a gas pipeline project planned with Iran that would supply a large part of India's energy demand. This project would force India to develop friendly relations with Iran and Pakistan, through which the pipeline would run. The US government discourages India from the project.

What we are witnessing is intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry as different powers struggle to re-divide the world. The spectre of wars to come attends their proceedings.

IRAQ

Resistance grows to imperialists' bloody surge

At the end of May, President Bush warned the US people to 'prepare for a bloody summer of heavy fighting and loss of life'. In the three months to mid-July 2007 331 US soldiers were killed and 2,029 wounded in Iraq, the bloodiest three months for the US since it and Britain invaded the country in March 2003. From early June to mid-July 13 British soldiers were killed in Iraq. The so-called troop 'surge' was reaping its predicted toll on US and British soldiers and taking thousands of Iraqi lives. JIM CRAVEN and TREVOR RAYNE report.



Car bombs in Baghdad

On 19 July *The Guardian* reported the formation of the Political Office for the Iraqi Resistance by seven Sunni-led, non-Ba'athist organisations. The new front said it will fight until all foreign troops leave Iraq and that it seeks to ally with other resistance organisations in preparation for negotiating US withdrawal from Iraq. The Political Office stressed the importance of working with Shia groups but rejected an alliance with the Shia militias because of their participation in imperialism established institutions and sectarian killings. The new front denounced Al Qaeda for its indiscriminate killing and contribution to sectarian strife between the Sunni and Shia peoples. A spokesperson said, 'Peaceful resistance will not end the occupation. The US made it clear it intended to stay for many decades. Now it is a common view in the resistance that they will start to withdraw within a year.' (*The Guardian*, 19 July 2007). At terrible cost to themselves, with over 660,000 people killed and two million refugees, the Iraqi people are delivering telling blows to the imperialist invaders.

The occupation armies' violence is unrelenting: on 18 June British warplanes attacked homes in Amara where people were sleeping on roofs. Sixteen people, including children, were killed. Latif Al Tamani of the Maysan Provincial Council described the attack as a 'catastrophe', saying the British fired at random. The *Los Angeles Times* reported 18 known incidents since mid-February in which occupying troops opened fire wildly or in crowded areas. At least 22 civilians were killed. US military statistics state that US soldiers killed 429 civilians in the past year for getting too close to US checkpoints and patrols or approaching them too quickly. People are routinely shot in their cars by trigger-happy occupation soldiers.

In the first few months of 2007 the imperialists dropped more bombs and launched more missiles than in the whole of 2006. Iraqi deaths from air strikes rose ten-fold: satellite-guided missiles, jet fighters and helicopter-gunships rain down death and destruction on densely populated areas. The US and British governments and the commanders of their armed forces are guilty of war crimes; they slaughter with impunity; they wear suits and ties and

are always well groomed but they are morally degenerate savages worthy of the disgust of the majority of humanity.

Since March, 30,000 extra 'surge' troops brought the total number of US soldiers deployed to 160,000. Yet a Pentagon report revealed that the surge has 'failed on most fronts' and 'failed to reduce the overall level of violence'. President Bush himself agreed in July that progress had been limited and that satisfactory progress had been made towards less than half the 'benchmarks' (targets) set for the Iraqi government. He admitted the country was suffering from war fatigue – the US, that is, not Iraq! General Petraeus, US commander in Iraq, is due to report on the success of the 'surge' in September. In June, he claimed 'astonishing signs of normalcy in two-thirds of Baghdad', for which he cited, among other things, the existence of professional football teams. Yet, at the same time, the US military was admitting they only had control of 146 out of 457 neighbourhoods in the city and even then only in the sense that 'we have our security forces there and we're denying that space to enemy forces'.

These assessments of the surge have a sense of unreality. They are made against the publicly projected purpose of a short sharp dash towards stability and security that would end in major troop reductions. Few, if any, of the imperialist warmongers seriously thought the surge would achieve this. Rather, it was an opportunity to divert growing anti-war sentiments in the US and mounting political pressures on the presidency. The benchmarks set for the puppet government indicate what the imperialists want: sufficient stability for the exploitation of Iraqi oil and establishment of major and permanent military bases in Iraq.

Oil theft

On 3 July, Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki announced that the Iraqi cabinet had unanimously approved the draft oil legislation. In fact, Sadrist ministers and those from the Sunni Iraqi Accordance Front had already withdrawn in protest at the continuing imperialist occupation, so no more than 24 out of 37 ministers could have been present. The US has been pushing to get the oil law passed before the September assessment of the surge. It is the main benchmark by which the US ruling

class will judge progress in Iraq. The legislation, formulated in the US among representatives of the oil multinationals, would permit Production Sharing Agreements enabling foreign oil companies to control 65 out of 80 undeveloped fields in Iraq with an estimated potential of six million barrels a day, giving annual revenues of \$130 billion and profits of at least 20%. The US has insisted that the new legislation should render void all previous contracts, including those with French, Russian and Chinese companies, and that the power of regional governments such as that in Kurdistan should be restricted.

There is widespread opposition among Iraqi oil workers. In May, the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions began a strike for better pay and working conditions, and for participation in formulating oil legislation. The puppet government sent troops to break the strike but the colonel in charge refused to arrest strike leaders. The government was forced to negotiate a settlement. The oil unions have pledged to fight any privatisation of their industry. The

Political Office for the Iraqi Resistance says that all decisions taken by the occupying states and their client government will be declared null and void.

US people's opposition sidelined by ruling class

A CBS/*New York Times* poll in the US found half the population thought the 'surge' was having no impact and a quarter felt it was making matters worse. 72% disapproved of Bush's handling of the war and 60% believed the US should never have gone to war in the first place. Bush's overall approval rating has slumped to 30%. A CNN poll at the end of June found two-thirds of the population wanted troop withdrawals to start immediately.

The presidential campaign of one-time Republican front-runner Senator John McCain, consistently a war supporter, is floundering. It was left to another long-time Bush backer, Republican Senator Richard Lugar to break ranks and voice the concerns of a growing section of the US ruling class. Lugar warned that, 'Our course in Iraq has lost

contact with our vital national security interests in the Middle East and beyond. Our continuing absorption with military activities in Iraq is limiting our diplomatic assertiveness there and elsewhere in the world.' He said 'the fatigue of our military' meant they were unable to respond to other national security interests, which included securing access to Gulf oil, blocking Iranian regional dominance and limiting the loss of US credibility in the region and the rest of the world. Lugar's speech was praised by Democrats, who, whilst posing as opponents of the war, voice the same ruling class concerns and propose the same alternative policy: a reduced mission in Iraq with the remaining troops withdrawn to defensible bases where they would concentrate on counter-terrorism operations, training Iraqi puppet forces and protecting US interests, including the oil fields.

In May, Defence Secretary Robert Gates said the US is looking for 'a long and enduring presence...The Korean model is one, the security relationship we have with Japan is another'. Ex-President Jimmy Carter pointed out last year that: 'The reason we went into Iraq was to establish a permanent military base in the Gulf region.' Such a base would make up for the loss of US bases in Saudi Arabia. Work on building those bases and the US embassy in Baghdad continues. From there the US plans to retain control of energy resources, especially with regard to rising competitors such as China, Russia and the EU. They will use the bases to project US power over the whole region as part of a network of bases from Central Asia to East Africa. The bases in Iraq will be valuable in confronting Iran and Syria and protecting Israel.

The US has no intention of abandoning its strategy of global domination through the use or threat of overwhelming military power. On the contrary, Lugar warned that: 'In this era the US cannot afford to be on the defensive indefinitely.' All the Republican presidential candidates have endorsed the use of nuclear weapons against Iran. Vice-President Dick Cheney, former ambassador to the UN John Bolton and their Zionist supporters demand that the US attacks Iran and Syria and targets Hizbullah. The potential for a wider conflagration is so serious that China has put Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles



Sadr City Baghdad: a father carries the body of his child killed in a US missile attack

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

(ICBM) on movable platforms and Russia has threatened to commission multi-warhead ICBMs that can penetrate any missile defence system and to target Cruise missiles at Europe unless the US stops trying to encircle Russia.

US domination weakened

For the moment, however, the US is ill-prepared for such an escalation, both militarily and diplomatically. Assistant Defence Secretary John Hamer admitted what he called 'the nation's spirit' had been transformed from 'confident and proud to paranoid and angry'. They have mounting military recruitment problems. A survey found only one in ten US youths had 'a propensity to serve' and anyhow only three in ten met basic physical, behavioural and academic requirements. The original Iraq coalition of 40 countries has dwindled to 23. Only the US, Britain, Australia and Denmark provide fighting troops.

Sections of the British ruling class have expressed similar concerns to those of Senator Lugar. In July, a cross-party Iraq Commission made recommendations to reduce troop numbers, concentrate on training and supporting Iraqi forces and make wider diplomatic efforts, engaging Iraq's neighbours through the UN. British forces in Iraq have already been reduced to 5,500. They are being withdrawn from the Basra Palace complex earlier than planned so the only remaining British base will be at Basra airport. Resistance fighters increasingly attack the base and British troops come under fire whenever they emerge. The British explain the retreat as part of the programme to hand over security to Iraqi forces, but local people regard it as an ignominious defeat for Britain. 29 British soldiers were killed in the first half of this year, as many as in the whole of 2006.

The US loss of political control of events in the region is underlined by Turkey's threat to invade Northern Iraq unless the US and Iraqi forces dislodge PKK (Kurdish guerrilla) fighters based there. There are 250,000 Turkish troops deployed close to Iraq. Any Turkish intervention could provoke an Iranian

intervention. The Turkish state views the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq with alarm, identifying it as an inspiration to Turkey's own Kurdish population to fight for independence.

Class focus for imperialist attacks

The US surge has targeted the Mehdi Army, followers of Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. Al Sadr has consistently opposed the occupation and called for unity among the Iraqi people. The Mehdi fought against the imperialist forces in 2004. When the surge began Al Sadr ordered the Mehdi not to confront the US forces in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed for the people. Al Sadr himself went underground. At the end of May, however, Al Sadr addressed a huge crowd in Kufa, demanding an end to the occupation and reconciliation and co-operation with Sunnis 'on all issues'. He rejected talks with the US saying, 'The Americans are occupiers and thieves. We must know they are leaving the country and we must know when. If the occupation and oppression continues we will fight. Hizbullah and the Mehdi Army are two sides of the same coin. We are together in the same trench against the forces of evil.' Both the Sadrist and Hizbullah in Lebanon, like Hamas in Palestine, have a class base among the poor, which is why they are primary targets for the imperialists.

On 25 May, British forces assassinated Wassam Abu Qadar, a leading member of the Mehdi Army. In retaliation the Mehdi kidnapped five Britons (an economist working on oil legislation and four mercenary security contractors) from the Iraqi Finance Ministry. The manner by which they did so highlighted imperialism's problems in developing a puppet security force: the kidnappers gained access to the ministry by posing as police officers, members of the integrity commission investigating the infiltration of Iraqi security forces by the militias. In fact, they probably were! Subsequently, British soldiers raided houses in Sadr City, destroying homes and beating the residents, in search of those kidnapped.

Torture and misery

Major-General Antonio Maguba, who led the first inquiry into torture at Abu Ghraib prison, recently stated that there was far more evidence available than was ever made public, including further videos of sexual humiliation and abuse. He insisted that President Bush and former Defence Secretary Rumsfeld must have known about what was going on. General Maguba was himself taunted and humiliated by Rumsfeld because of his revelations and forced to retire early. Former US Air Force Captain Dorothy Mackey claimed there is widespread rape and sexual abuse at all levels both within the US armed forces and against civilians, which is routinely ignored, with the victims often being the ones to be punished. She said, 'It is my belief the US military and government has an unwritten policy of rape, torture and criminal misconduct that is used to further US global interests.'

In Britain it was revealed that former Labour Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith had advised the British Army that Iraqi detainees were not protected by the Human Rights Act and that senior officers had been told that 'hooding and stressing' was lawful. Goldsmith was overruled by the Law Lords in June (see below). More than 60 civil cases against the British Army are now being prepared, including that of hotel receptionist Baha Mousa who was beaten to death in September 2003. Baha suffered 93 separate injuries.

The UN says that nearly half the 2.2 million Iraqis forced from their homes within the country do not have access to state rations. Another two million have fled abroad, including, according to the Brookings Institute, 40% of the country's professionals. It is estimated that 50,000 refugees have been forced into prostitution in order to survive. UNICEF needs \$42 million over six months for emergency relief for Iraqi refugees and children. The US spends this amount on the war every three hours. Baghdad often has only one hour of electricity a day. Oil production has fallen by over 30% and production generally by 80% since the invasion. Unemployment is estimated at 60%.



In January an international delegation marched to Guantanamo Bay calling for the closure of the US torture camp

Nine million Iraqis live below the poverty line. Dr Abdul Al Obaidi of the Iraqi Association for Child Mental Health has warned of a desperate situation with children suffering unbearable traumas leading to delinquency, emotional damage and spiralling violence in the future. Barely 30% of primary

school children attend classes. Only 35% are fully immunised. Over 20% of Iraqi children are severely or moderately stunted due to malnutrition. In May, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was flown to the Mayer Clinic in the US to be treated for obesity.

AFGHANISTAN death toll rises

The imperialists are resorting to ever more brutal tactics to suppress resistance, in particular the indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets. On 18 June seven children were killed in an attack on a religious compound in Paktika. Four days later US warplanes massacred 25 civilians in Kunjakak, including three children. At least 107 people were killed on 29 June in Hyderabad in Helmand province. Mayor Dur Ali Shah said 45 of them were civilians. Earlier a joint patrol convoy of US and Afghan puppet forces had come under fire and the resistance fighters then retreated to Hyderabad. That evening, without warning, US aircraft attacked the whole village, destroying homes, businesses and livestock. Such collective punishment is proscribed by the Geneva Convention. Its purpose was to terrorise and intimidate the Afghan people.

In the first five months of 2007 the imperialists launched over 1,000 air strikes, four times the number carried out in Iraq. A report by the International Committee of the Red Cross highlighted the 'growing number of civilian casualties'. The number of civilians killed by the occupying forces far outnumbered those killed in operations by resistance fighters. Even puppet President Hamid Karzai said he was 'disappointed and angry' at the level of civilian casualties and a NATO spokesman conceded he was right to be.

The imperialists frequently claim successes in Afghanistan. Former Soviet General Victor Yermakov said he was 'very impressed by the Americans. Gaining control of Tora Bora is a great accomplishment. I should know. I did it three times. Unfortunately, the second I turned my back on the place, I needed to conquer it again. It is the same now. It will never change.' A Rand Corporation study suggested that the occupying forces would require 20 troops for every 1,000 inhabitants in order to retain control of captured areas. That would mean a total force of 500,000, ten times the number presently in the country. The latest UN security accessibility maps published in May show a big increase in areas considered extreme risk/hostile environment, in other words areas where the resistance is active. They

include the whole of Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces, together with large sections of the eastern border with Pakistan and areas encroaching on Kabul province.

Imperialist unity under pressure

The imperialists intend to establish a permanent military presence in Afghanistan as part of the US string of bases in the region and to control a proposed oil pipeline from the Caspian oil fields through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean. British diplomat Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles said it could take decades to establish effective government in Afghanistan and that the campaign was 'a marathon rather than a sprint'.

However, there are signs of differences and divisions within the occupying coalition. General Dan McNeil, US commander of ISAF, said in May, 'In some respects there is no complete agreement among the 26 NATO countries as to what exists here.' Most NATO countries have refused US and British demands to increase numbers of their combat troops. In Germany, the opposition SPD has called for German troops to be withdrawn from the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said Germany would pay 'a high price' if it did so, suggesting there would be US retaliation. This demonstrates the delicate political balance that other imperialist countries must achieve with regard to the US: on the one hand pursuing their own interests as imperialist rivals and on the other recognising the US as, for the foreseeable future, the hegemonic economic and military power.

101 members of the occupying forces were killed in the first half of this year. British troops are under such strain that only one regiment has managed the recommended 24 months' break between six month tours of duty. In July the head of the British army, General Sir Richard Dannatt, wrote to other British military chiefs saying, 'We now have almost no capability to deal with the unexpected.' Military budgets will rise to pay for the succession of wars and the death toll will mount until imperialism is defeated.

Out of the shadows imperialists exposed over human rights

The US and its allies are being forced onto the defensive as organisations, campaigners and even the law courts make a stand against the 'disappearances', indefinite detention, torture and murder that are the characteristics of the so-called 'war on terror'.

Rendition to secret torture camps

On 8 June, the Council of Europe published its 19-month investigation into European complicity in the illegal rendition of terrorist suspects by the United States. It claimed that within weeks of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, NATO signed an agreement with the US allowing the CIA to move such suspects across member states' airspace 'to countries where they have been persecuted and where... torture is common practice'. The report offered proof that secret camps were run and operated in, among other places, Poland, Romania and the British-owned island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Detainees were denied access to lawyers or the Red Cross and many were subjected to torture.

British civilian and military airports have been used hundreds of times by CIA flights. Despite British denials, Dick Marty, President of the Council of Europe, makes clear: 'We have sufficient grounds to declare that the highest state authorities were aware of the CIA's illegal activities on their territories.' According to British organisation

Reprieve, US military officers cited the use of Diego Garcia as early as 2004. Reprieve's director, Clive Stafford Smith, commented: 'What has the British government done? Behaved like an ostrich with its head in the sand... The UK government has deliberately ignored clear proof that British territory has been used to support this illegal, repugnant system of kidnap and torture.'

Ghost prisoners

Despite claiming in September 2006 that its secret camps were no longer in operation, the US government admits holding as many as 14,000 detainees across the world without charge and without access to lawyers. On 21 June, six human rights organisations, including Reprieve, published *Off the Record*, said to be the most comprehensive list so far of 'ghost detainees', those who have simply 'disappeared' into the US's sinister matrix of secret camps. It calls for the US to reveal the location of 39 named people, to end the CIA's secret interrogation programme and to disclose the identities, fate and whereabouts of all detainees. The report claims that, contrary to all human rights legislation, in some cases the families of suspected terrorists are also being detained, including children - one aged seven (*Counterpunch*, 21 June 2007, 'The Ghost Prisoners'). A lawsuit has been filed in the US under the Freedom of Information Act seeking disclosure of information concerning 'disappeared prisoners'.

Legal victories: torture and detention

On 13 June, the House of Lords ruled 4-1 against the former Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, that Britain's obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights apply to the conduct of British troops in Iraq and that the government must conduct an independent investigation into the death of Baha Mousa, an Iraqi civilian brutally murdered in British detention. The beating, hooding, stress positions and sleep deprivation used on all those detained with Mousa has been outlawed since 1972. Yet in emails exchanged with British military headquarters in Iraq at the beginning of the occupation, Goldsmith argued for a 'pragmatic' approach to dealing with prisoners and made it clear the 'higher standards' of the Human Rights Act need not apply.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the Supreme Court has ruled that Guantanamo detainees will be able to appeal to federal courts against their continuing detention, rather than the kangaroo 'military tribunals' set up by Bush. Over 350 detainees remain incarcerated in Guantanamo. Many have now been there for six years. Only ten have ever faced trial by the military tribunals.

On 20 July, in the face of increasing concern about reports of CIA torture, Bush was forced publicly to order CIA interrogators to comply with the Geneva Conventions against torture.

While history teaches us that imperialism will continue to torture, kidnap, terrorise and kill behind the scenes as long as it has the power to do so, it is significant that the ability of the US and its allies to arrogantly parade their brutal policies on the world stage is beginning to be challenged.

Cat Wiener

Samuel Farber – *false friend of the Cuban workers*

The origins of the Cuban Revolution reconsidered

Samuel Farber, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2006, pp214, £12.95

This book is Samuel Farber's pre-emptive strike at saying something new in anticipation of 'transition' following Fidel Castro's death and the end of the Cuban Revolution. In fact, he fails to say anything novel, merely demonstrating his credentials as a 'Cubanologist' and rehashing the tired old lies of Cuba's 'socialist' critics. Despite following scholarly norms, Farber has a clear political agenda – articulated in articles and interviews with the US 'Trotskyist' press. Characterising the Revolution as nationalist, Fidel as populist and dictatorial, and the Cuban masses as passive, scared and manipulated, Farber implies that the Revolution, which, according to him was never socialist, will die with Fidel.

Farber plays an indispensable role for the anti-Cuban western left, providing historical substance to justify their reactionary position on Cuba, and it is for this reason that his book merits attention in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* In Britain, the left is uniquely reactionary, parroting Farber's lies and distortions (see below). Farber's credentials seem to be authentic; he was born and grew up in Cuba and he calls himself a 'socialist' to distance himself from the unpalatable right-wing extremism of the Cuban exile community, whose views he actually shares. This leads to an awkward and untenable political position which rubbishes the Revolution whilst claiming to uphold the interests of Cuban workers. To sustain this paradox, 'socialist critics' substitute meaningless phrases for real analysis. Farber describes Cuba as 'bureaucratic collectivism', the British Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) uses 'state capitalism', whilst most Trotskyists say it is either a 'deformed' or 'degenerated' workers' state. But these 'socialist' critics – false friends of the Cuban workers – are incapable of explaining the longevity and vitality of Cuban socialism.

Ignoring or dismissing the remarkable gains the Revolution brought rapidly to the Cuban people in education, healthcare, housing, sport, culture, science and economic and social justice, reversing years of racism, sexism and class oppression, the left exposes its class interests. Only the privileged could so grossly underestimate the achievement of universal social provision in a small undeveloped country, after 500 years of colonialism and imperialism, still largely isolated, blockaded and under attack by imperialism. Left critics are forced to attack the Cuban road to socialism because it exposes the bankruptcy of their own political strategies based on pro-capitalist trade unions and engagement with liberal parliamentarianism. They refuse to recognise other social forces as the agents of revolutionary social change, including workers outside trade unions, and they regularly denounce the violence of the oppressed.

In *The origins of the Cuban Rev-*

olution reconsidered, Farber claims to challenge two existing interpretations of how the Cuban Revolution developed from 'antidictatorial, multiclass political revolution to communism' (p6): 1) that the US administration pushed the Revolution towards the Soviet bloc or, 2) that the adoption of communism was the inevitable response by conscious revolutionaries to objective conditions. Farber finds a third way: 'I emphasize the agency of the revolutionary leaders' (p169), who were 'greatly influenced by their own political predispositions and ideological inclinations' (p112). Farber's real endeavour is to assert that Fidel Castro's 'predisposition' was an obsession with power.

'Cubanology' – a special niche for 'dissidents'

In western academic institutions, Cuba Studies is dominated by 'Cubanology' a politically motivated school of interpretation which plays a central role in the ideological battle mounted against Cuban socialism. Cubanology's roots lie in Cuba's April 1961 defeat of the US-government sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion, which demonstrated that the Revolution was here to stay. In response, US government and corporate business interests set up study centres and sponsored research on Cuba, to better understand their enemy. In 1961 alone two academic investigations were commissioned by the Pentagon and similar studies organised by the Special Operations Research Office of the American University. By the mid-1960s, a centre for Cuban studies was effectively formed by the CIA. The Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, founded in 1964 under the National Defense Education Act, came to dominate Cuba Studies. Its objectives were to compile information for planning future actions against the Revolution and to depict the Revolution negatively for a global audience. This meant denying all positive achievements of the Revolution, deriding official Cuban sources of information and disseminating misinformation about life in Cuba.

The school labelled itself 'Cubanology' from April 1970, following



Young people lead celebrations for May Day 2007. Farber insults the Cuban people, who he says are manipulated: 'The mass rally, in which leaders control the podium and speak and spell out policies while the masses applaud, not daring to amend or object, became emblematic of the regime'. (p133)

a conference organised by the US Library of Congress which resolved to write more sophisticated and supposedly 'impartial' material on Cuba. Some academics promote strategies to destroy the Revolution by incorporating Cuba into the capitalist world market, while others advocate counter-revolution from within or outside the island. 'Academic' events anticipating 'transition' are given legitimacy by the participation of Cubanologists. A key sponsor of Cubanology is the extreme right-wing Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), whose Bureau of Conferences has included respected academics, such as Hugh Thomas and Irving Horowitz.

The key tenets of Cubanology are: the Revolution of 1959 presents a rupture in Cuban history; Fidel Castro is synonymous with the Revolution, personally dominating domestic developments and foreign policy; there is no democracy and civil society is repressed; Cuban economic growth since 1959 has been negligible; pre-1959 dependency on the US was replaced by dependency on the USSR.

Farber upholds these tenets, and having been raised in Cuba, he shares the privileged position of exiles, or 'dissidents', within Cubanology. Individuals who previously worked as officials or intellectuals within the revolutionary regime enjoy a special status in anti-communist US institutions if they renounce political commitment to the Cuban Revolution and sign up to undermine its moral or economic viability: 'Overnight, they become independent intellectuals with the keys to credibility in their pocket.' (Rafael Hernandez, *Boundary* 2, 29:3, 2002, p125) It is not clear when or why Farber left Cuba, but by the early 1960s, he was in the US and a member of the International Socialist Club, which advocated a third camp position

– neither Washington nor Havana. Renowned for his hostility to the Revolution, he denied any post-1959 achievements of Cuban socialism. He has lectured at Brooklyn College since 1978, writing on Cuba and the USSR. Farber's work is heavily dependent on 'dissidents', relying on the accounts of embittered individuals who had prominent roles in the 26th July Movement (M26J) led by Fidel Castro, but who rejected the Revolution's alliance with communists and the adoption of a socialist path. For example, through these counter-revolutionaries he describes divisions between Fidel and Raul Castro and Che Guevara, without independent or documentary evidence (pp60-1).

While the hearsay of 'dissidents' is accepted as fact, material produced within Cuba is dismissed as 'ideological' or 'unreliable', as if intellectuals on the island lack the capacity for reflective thought. They are portrayed as mere bureaucrats repeating official discourse. Cuban historian Rafael Hernandez complains this is based on the myth that in capitalist societies 'intellectuals' act as society's critical conscience: 'equidistant from all political positions, a vestal virgin of some sterilized objectivity' (*Boundary*, p130-1). Of course, 'objectivity' is a myth in a world divided into oppressed and oppressor classes, and in Cuba, intellectuals, particularly historians, have always been central to social and political movements.

Samuel Farber – false friend of the Cuban workers

Farber's lies are easily refuted by the most fleeting examination of Cuban history:

1) Lie One: The Revolution is synonymous with Fidel Castro: 'Fidel

SAMUEL FARBER

THE ORIGINS OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION RECONSIDERED

Castro's notion of stages was guided in part by his determination to keep as much personal political control as possible.' (p66)

Bent on all-out war against both Fidel and history, Farber is forced to concoct a pseudo-analysis to explain Fidel's undisputed leadership for half a century. Spitting out the words 'populist', 'bonapartist' and 'caudillo' on every page, his argument is circular and repeatedly trips him up. Farber's Fidel is a 'declassified' (p138, p168) 'bonapartist' (p116) 'caudillo' (p49, p63, p67-8), both from and transcending the politically militant populist tradition (p41, p58), who managed class struggle from the top (p121), using 'salami' tactics to defeat his enemies (p124, p127), had affinity with the Soviets (p67) but led Cuba to 'communism' as a result of a conjunctural choice in order to maintain control (p63, p66, p68, p170). Sound ridiculous? It is.

Farber's story is that during the revolutionary struggle, Castro kept his political programme deliberately vague (p111, p157, p168), whilst dividing and conquering opponents (p67) and moulding declassified individuals (p138): 'into faithful followers of his caudillo leadership' (p44). He was not fussy which political direction his radical revolution took as long as: 'he would remain in control' (p63). Farber strips Castro of all politics, principles, ideology and ethics, without even suggesting that he is motivated by the material benefits of power. Castro appears irrational. Cuban-American sociologist Nelson Valdes calls this the poverty of subjectivism, the idea that Castro's charisma, ego or psychological state have been more important than, for example, the concrete impact of US aggression in determining developments in Cuba. Cubanologists never tell us how they are privy to Castro's subjective urges and psychological drives. Refusing to recognise the revolutionary process, Farber censors a rich history of internal debate, conflict and consensus, insisting that Fidel is synonymous with the Revolution.

The dilemma which trips Farber up – how a multiclass struggle against dictatorship turns to socialism and class war – is easily understood in the context of a revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle. What Farber dismisses as 'populism' are the alliances which Lenin highlighted as characteristic of national liberation movements: between the working class, peasantry

and progressive sections of the bourgeoisie. The Revolution began as a popular movement, but structural contradictions with imperialism and national oligarchies, along with a commitment to social justice, propelled it towards socialism.

Farber spits about Fidel's 'unquestionable tactical genius' (p40) in reference to his calls for unity. For Fidel unity has always meant uniting behind a programme of social and economic justice. If the Revolution were to adhere to Castro's statements in his *History Will Absolve Me* speech and the Moncada Programme of the M26J, it would have to confront US imperialism, and that meant confronting the dependent domestic capitalist class – the struggle inevitably took on an anti-capitalist character. As social scientist Ernesto Laclau argued in the 1970s, the highest form of populism is socialism. The strategy encouraged many members of the petit-bourgeoisie – in the biographical works of Angel Arcos, colleague of Che Guevara – to 'commit class suicide', sacrificing their material interests to throw in their lot with the workers' revolution.

2) Lie Two: The Cuban Revolution is not a workers' revolution. After January 1959, trade unions became: 'mere policy tools in the hands of the Soviet Union and the Cuban communists.' (p123)

In Trotskyist dogma, trade unions are a critical form of organisation for the politically advanced sections of the working class. The 'original sin' of the Cuban Revolution is that it was not led by the trade unions, and did not, therefore, constitute the self-emancipation of the working class. It could never be socialist. Farber censors and distorts history to justify his Trotskyist analysis.

Farber skips over the revolutionary upheaval of the late 1920s, when rural workers set up soviets in sugar mills across the country, and the Revolution of 1933 against the Machado dictatorship in which workers and students formed a radical new government. Robbing Cuban workers of their history of militancy, he avoids explaining how the trade unions had abated into 'economism' – prioritising individual interests over the class conscious struggle for socialism – and co-opted, by the mid-1940s under the Auténtico government. The repression and murder of communists and other radical trade union leaders and their replacement by pro-government puppets and gangsters is airily referred to as: 'competition between Communist labor leaders, who had just been forcefully expelled from many of their union positions...and the Auténtico labor factions who had just been installed in office by party members controlling the national government' (p25).

New leaders co-opted the unions into the system; their workers' benefited from improved salaries, conditions, and even state intervention, which entrenched economic tendencies among unionised workers. Farber cites that 50% of Cuban workers were in trade unions in the 1950s (p22), but says: 'the popular majorities did not necessarily possess such radical, let alone "socialist" political consciousness' (p33) in January 1959. Farber refuses to explain this paradox, a significant unionised working class, which won concessions to improve sectoral conditions, but lacked a socialist consciousness. This process of co-optation was part of broader phenomena of obscene and institutionalised use of graft, corruption and patronage in the 1940s-1950s, not mentioned until much later by Farber.

Eusebio Mujal, head of the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC), responded to Batista's coup in March 1952 with co-operation and complicity. Farber states that Batista created: 'an attractive climate for investment through such means as suppressing

the union movement's autonomy, repressing strikes, and government giveaways' (p32). Trotskyist dogma prevents Farber from acknowledging a differentiated working class or the possibility of revolutionary leadership outside the trade union movement, so he fails to understand the dialectic of the Cuban struggle. For example, while conceding that many of the participants in the *Granma* expedition, led by Fidel in 1956 'seem to have been workers by origin or occupation', he denies their legitimacy because: 'very few had been active or even involved in trade union or working-class political organizations.' (pp49-50). As if not participating in co-opted, economic, corrupt trade unions prevented them from being representatives of the working class.

Unable to organise against the dictatorship through the official trade union apparatus, workers built up alternative labour organisations culminating in the launch in late 1958 of the National Workers Confederation, a class conscious, revolutionary trade union apparatus uniting the M26J, the Revolutionary Directorate (DR) and the Cuban Communist Party (PSP). This was in addition to their civil and armed mobilisation in the mountains and the cities. The general strike called by Fidel Castro on 3 and 4 January 1959 paralysed the country.

In January 1959, the old trade unions still had to be won over to a programme of revolutionary social change, in the interests of the whole working class, instead of just promoting sectoral interests from the margins. Fidel told the trade unions not to struggle for crumbs, but to take power. Following two decades of economism what would have been the political expression of trade union autonomy in the context of revolution, counter-revolution, class war and imperialist attack? In the initial post-1959 period, some trade unions failed to identify their class interests with the revolution. In 1963 Faure Chomón Mediavilla, leader of the DR, was responsible for reorganising the trade union movement. He explained the problem:



'There was a negative tendency in trade unions led by old union leaders who, at the triumph of the Revolution, used the fact that this was a Revolution of the workers to obtain in a disorganised and even ruthless way, big salaries that did not correspond with the economy of the country. These economic tendencies infiltrated the workers' ranks so the Revolution was seen only in terms of how much they earn and how much more they want to earn, without analysing how the Revolution should be made and how much it costs; ruining consciousness by taking a syndicalist position as if the state were just a foolish big boss from whom they had to get the most out that they could.' (Interview, February 2005)

The election of new trade union leaders was directed by the revolu-

tionary government, in the context of forging a new state: dismantling old institutions, creating a new apparatus with new social relations, new alliances, new political priorities and new battles. Changes were discussed in Production Assemblies in every workplace, and workers' activism in these developments was not limited to membership of trade unions. They also joined technical advisory committees, local militia, street committees, organisations of the masses, revolutionary organisations, the women's federation and so on.

Today there are 19 major industrial trade unions in Cuba, two of them set up in the 1990s, alongside the Commissions for Labour Justice, where elected workers and administrators co-operate in resolving conflicts. In addition, the working class controls all the apparatus of the state and directs it in its class interest.

3) Lie Three: There is no democracy and no civil society in Cuba: 'the Cuban masses have remained the objects rather than the subjects of history' (p68).

Parliamentary liberalism has monopolised the term 'democracy' when referring to the form of political organisation preferred by advanced capitalist countries; power sharing between elites who serve the interests of capital accumulation. The Cuban Revolution has developed a different form of democracy, one that means direct participation by all citizens in policy formulation and equal access to social and economic welfare. Despite his socialist label, like all Cubanologists, Farber's work is premised on the liberal bourgeois concept of democracy. Farber dismisses Cuban elections and the National Assembly of People's Power as a 'pseudo-parliament', because 'there is only one legal political party, the Cuban Communist Party, which is also an integral part of the state. It is a one party state.' (*New Politics*, summer 2003).

In fact, the Communist Party does not stand in elections. It is the ideo-

Fidel Castro is subject to the electoral process. It would be undemocratic to demand that he be replaced against the will of the majority. Key tenets of participatory democracy, whose origins lie in the Paris Commune of 1871, are the right of recall and a workers' salary, which prevents the emergence of a professional political class. These are embedded and implemented in the Cuban system, under which delegates report back to their electors every six months.

Farber struggles to account for the Cuban people's enduring commitment



to the Revolution and its leaders in the absence of multi-party liberalism. He concludes that 1959 was a revolution from above in which the population participated, but did not control or direct (p168). Whilst detailing: 'the

tripod on which Castro consolidated his power: popular support, manipulation of that support, and repression' (p133), Farber censors the impact of sabotage, terrorism and the US blockade, and the benefits the Revolution has brought to the vast majority of Cubans. He insults the entire population, portraying a society which has no independent existence beyond the Party, the government and the alleged 'elite'.

Farber predicts that following Fidel Castro's death: 'A capitalist transition is likely to be led, as in the Soviet Union and China, by Cuban Communists and would restore, although not necessarily in the same form, much of the power that the United States lost in Cuba almost fifty years ago' (p172). Farber's pretensions are that: 'my book might be useful to people who will try to build a revolutionary and democratic alternative... [which]... would mean organizing people from below in Cuba' (*IV Online Magazine*, February 2007).

In anticipating 'transition', Farber urges revolutionaries and democrats to organise outside the institutions of the Revolution, and that means against it. In his frustration, this Trojan horse of US imperialism is forced to admit that the only 'dissidents' in Cuba are pro-capitalist and pro-US. They are also mainly rich and white. The working class, and all those sections who suffered capitalist oppression before the Revolution, are shoulder to shoulder with Fidel and Raul, marching forward to socialism.

Helen Yaffe

Farber, Harman and the SWP

'For 3rd camp tendencies such as the British SWP, the American ISO and the Journal New Politics, Farber is an indispensable expert – especially necessary in light of their general lack of knowledge and first-hand experience with the island.' (Louis Project, *The Unrepentant Marxist*, <http://louis-project.wordpress.com/tag/cuba/>)

Chris Harman, Central Committee member of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) used the opportunity of reviewing Farber's book to attack Cuban socialism ('Cuba: Behind the myths', *International Socialism* 111 Summer 2006). He celebrates Farber's credentials as 'a revolutionary socialist Cuban exile', critical of Cuba and struggling against US capitalism, and repeats verbatim the same lies and distortions. Farber was a colleague of SWP founder Tony Cliff.

Harman favourably quotes Rene Dumont, a French agronomist who was in Cuba in August 1960. As private land and industry were beginning to be expropriated and nationalised, Dumont urged the Cuban government to adopt the 'free' market mechanisms – material incentives, profit and market pricing – to allocate production and consumption. Dumont promoted capitalism, just as the Revolution took its first steps towards socialisation. Despite his published criticisms and opposition to the newly established 'peoples' farms', Dumont was invited back to Cuba for further investigations and to discuss his criticisms. Che Guevara, who battled against market socialism as the road to capitalist restoration, regarded Dumont as an enemy.

Harman also leans on Cubanologist Carmelo Mesa-Lago, director of the Centre for Latin American studies (see above) set up to oppose the Revolution. Harman and the SWP are located within the right-wing of Cubanology. Taking their lead from extremists in the Miami exile community, the SWP's lies over the years have included:

- The working class played no role in the Revolution, has hardly benefited and is exploited by the Cuban government.
- Che Guevara knew nothing about

Marxism and left Cuba because Fidel kicked him out.

- Cuba acted as a stooge of 'Soviet imperialism' in sending troops to Angola to fight apartheid South Africa's occupation.
- Homosexuals and those with HIV/AIDS are persecuted and/or imprisoned in Cuba.
- The army controls prostitution in Cuba.
- Cuba's health and education achievements are merely the product of Soviet aid.

In July 2002, an SWP hack even recommended the website of terrorist Jorge Mas Canosa and the Cuban American National Foundation (see FRFI 168).

Progressive movements on the rise in Latin America benefit from the example and support of Cuban socialism. Cuba has sent 16,000 doctors and thousands of educators to the slums of Venezuela. Others are in Bolivia, 30,000 doctors are posted throughout the oppressed world. This inspiring example of proletarian internationalism is condemned by the SWP who fear that the Cuban Revolution will be used as a model. Turning reality upside down, Harman says: 'There are attempts to use Cuban prestige to hold the mass movements in Venezuela back from moves against local capitalism and any serious breaks with the multinationals... Dressing up the commercial exchange of Cuban doctors for Venezuelan oil as an act of "socialist solidarity" is then used to attempt to derail revolutionary possibilities' (IS 111). Thanking Harman for his positive book review, Farber says: 'I wholeheartedly endorse the sentiments expressed by Chris in his concluding remarks that "support for Cuba against US imperialism, its threats and its embargo must not turn into support for a Cuban model that offers nothing to the new revolutionary movements"' (IS 112).

Farber, Harman and the SWP side with imperialism in opposing the growing revolutionary unity within Latin America, which gives the first hope in decades of defeating vicious neo-liberal policies.

Helen Yaffe

Vilma Espin

7 April 1930-18 June 2007

Vilma Espin Guillois de Castro, revolutionary fighter, communist and champion of women's equality, died on 18 June 2007. Her history is inextricably tied up with that of the Cuban revolution.



Born in Santiago in eastern Cuba in 1930, Vilma Espin studied industrial chemical engineering, an almost unheard-of choice for a woman in pre-revolutionary Cuba. After the failed attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago on 26 July 1953, she offered refuge to the young revolutionaries fleeing Batista's bloody reprisals. After completing a further degree at Massachusetts Institute of Technology she joined the small group of rebels in Mexico led by Fidel and Raul Castro and Che Guevara, who were planning to sail to Cuba to spark an insurrection. Espin worked as a courier between the group and revolutionaries in Cuba itself before going underground in Santiago to work alongside Frank Pais, the internal leader of the revolutionary forces, and prepare a diversionary uprising when Castro's group of 82 guerrillas landed on the eastern coast of Cuba. After Frank Pais was killed in 1957, Espin led the civilian resistance in Santiago until she was forced to flee to join the rebels in the Sierra Maestra. She acted as interpreter in the historic interview of Fidel Castro by the *New York Times* in 1957, which countered Batista's claim that Castro had been killed and gave fresh impetus and hope to the revolutionary movement.

In 1958, Vilma Espin, alongside Raul Castro, was part of opening up the Second Eastern Front, liberating swathes of Cuban territory and setting up hospitals, schools and soviet-type democracy. In Fidel Castro's words 'Vilma did not shrink from any danger'. Vilma Espin married Raul Castro a few weeks after the triumph of the Revolution.



For Espin, the real work was just beginning. Before the Revolution, working class women in Cuba had been condemned to lives of illiteracy, ignorance and servitude, as rural labourers, domestic workers or prostitutes. Vilma Espin was a leading force in the setting up of schools for women; she was a member of the National Literacy Commission, touring the country to ensure young people were incorporated into defence tasks and in particular emphasising military training for women. Today women are represented in every area of work in Cuba, making up 66% of technical and professional workers.

In 1975, the Family Code enshrined equality between men and women in law and included a legal obligation for men to take on their share of the housework and childcare so that women could play a full role in the economy and the political tasks of the Revolution.

But Vilma Espin was no bourgeois feminist and despised those who sought to separate the struggle for women's rights from their social conditions. Always a committed communist – Espin was the first woman in the political bureau of the Cuban Communist Party and the council of state – she said in an interview in 1980:

'I believe in those feminist groups who tie the solution to the oppression of women, of the liberation of women, to the liberation of all the exploited, the oppressed, the discriminated against, which also means taking into consideration social, political and ideological, as well as economic prob-

lems, from the perspective of a class, sex and race analysis.

'The problems women face cannot be seen in isolation from other social problems nor analysed outside of their economic context. Nor should they be considered as side issues within a particular social, historical situation...

'It is ridiculous, for example, to think that in an imperialist country a businesswoman and a woman worker can be equal...in today's world the fight for sexual equality in many places is simultaneous with the struggle for revolutionary change.'

In 1960, the formation of the Federation of Cuban Women, of which she became lifelong president, allowed women, in Espin's words '[to support] the Revolution, by participating in the battle for development and revolutionary advances which can build the economic, legal, political, social, cultural and ideological foundations that can guarantee the full exercise of women's equality, which has been proclaimed by the Revolution as one of its principles' and to 'help them understand the role socialism guarantees women as free and equal human beings'.

The socialist Revolution that offers all Cuban women greater possibilities for freedom, equality and fulfilment than any other country in the world is in no small part a legacy of Vilma Espin's struggle. FRFI salutes a great revolutionary and extends sympathy to her family and comrades.

Cat Wiener

Cuba: towards a more efficient socialism

As the Cuban economy grows – by 12.6% in 2006 – and living standards rise, this period of relative stability is allowing the revolution to boost energy efficiency and raise productivity within a socialist state.

Raising food production

Between 1989-93, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the Cuban economy shrank by 35% and living standards dropped. In the period 1990-1994, agricultural production halved. Although strict rationing of essential food items ensured that no-one starved – and life expectancy continued to rise and infant mortality to fall – life was not easy as average calorie intake per person fell from 3,130 a day in 1988-1990 to 1,863 in 1993. In its battle to maintain the socialist consciousness of the people, the Cuban Communist Party recognised an essential reality when in 1994, following a series of boat hijackings as some Cubans, seduced by CIA propaganda, sought a 'better' life in the US, Raul Castro stated that 'right now, beans are more important than guns'. He called for farmers' markets and organised Youth Army groups to produce and sell vegetables at low prices to the people, arguing that Cuba should become self-sufficient in food production. Other measures included setting up workers' agricultural co-operatives throughout Cuba as well as a system of city allotments and by 2005 average calorie consumption had risen to 3,300 calories a day. However, Cuba still relies on millions of dollars worth of food imports – 7.8 million tons in 2006 – to achieve this.

Significant problems remain in the agricultural sector. While industrial production grew by 11.8% last year, there was a 7% drop in food production. Vice President Carlos Lage described food production as 'insufficient' and its distribution as 'deficient'. This is partly accounted for by several years of drought and severe hurricanes, and abnormal temperatures and humidity this year which have all affected harvests. However, according to *Granma*, poor organisation, weak incentives, bad irrigation and a lack of agricultural inputs are also to blame. Of 800,000 hectares of land earmarked to be converted from sugar production to domestic agriculture, only 60% is being used.



Farmers at the Organopónico de Alamar, a neighbourhood agriculture project in Havana

In December 2006 the National Assembly identified delayed payments to farmers by state distributors as a major disincentive to production and delivery. Orlando Lugo, president of the National Association of Small Farmers, said that more tractors, farm equipment and fuel are needed: 'There are co-operatives around Havana with the potential to double and even triple their production'. The Ministry of Finance is working to improve the situation. The harvest is expected to be up by a third at the end of 2007. More than a \$100m over the 2006 level has been allocated to subsidise basic groceries for Cuban families.

Energy Revolution

The drive for greater efficiency goes hand in hand with the Energy Revolution, introduced in 2005 to find ways of making electricity more efficient, helping Cuba's economy and environment. It aims to reduce reliance on hydrocarbons and has included conversion to more energy efficient technologies in transport, industry and domestic appliances, and intensive research into alternative energy sources, especially wind and solar power.

Blackouts have become a thing of the past. Cubans are feeling added benefits at home. Ten million inefficient light bulbs and appliances have been replaced by energy saving models. More than 223,000 efficient water pumps have been installed. The distribution of three million electric rice cookers (one for every household) and 2.5 million electric ovens has almost eliminated the need for any family to rely on gas, wood or harmful traditional fuels like kerosene. Work is also being done in the mass organisations to inform and educate the population in energy saving techniques.

Louis Brehony

RATB ROUNDUP

Solidarity with Cuba!

Following the success of our brigade to Cuba in April/May, Rock around the Blockade in London held its second reportback event in on 7 June at Movimientos, a monthly night of Latin American music, culture and politics in Islington. The audience particularly appreciated video footage from the brigade, for example of Cuban students talking about their role in the Revolution. At Govanhill Community Centre in South Glasgow, comrades held a special reportback meeting on 26 July, the anniversary of the 1953 attack on Moncada barracks. There was a high level of participation from local people in the discussion as ideas came up for future events and how to build the day of action for the Cuban Five on 22 September.

Fundraising continues ahead of the speaking tour in 2008 (see box). RATB volunteers worked for the Workers' Beer Company at Glaston-

bury Festival and Rise Festival, earning over £1,000. We still have volunteer places at Reading Festival, 24-26 August, so get in touch.

'Marxism 2007', the annual public conference organised by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), took place from 6-9 July. RATB London members set up a stall outside the event and intervened in meetings, to alert people to the SWP's lies about the Cuban revolution (see pp10/11). RATB organised a meeting the following week to counter the SWP's false analysis of the Cuban Revolution.

On 1-3 June, comrades in Manchester organised a weekend of action in solidarity with the Cuban revolution. This was kickstarted with a Friday night RATB fundraising gig in Fallowfield, featuring revolutionary musicians from Wythenshawe, Mossley and Congo. A Cuban comrade got a great response from the audience after speaking about the importance of international solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. The following day saw lively protests in Piccadilly Gardens for the release of

the Cuban Five, for the extradition of Posada Carriles and for support for Cuban socialism. On the Sunday, at a public reportback meeting about the recent brigade, Comrade Kyle summed up the feelings of all who went by saying that we witnessed 'not only the practical social and economic gains of socialism, but its life-affirming impact on social relations between human beings'.

Regular stalls have taken place in Newcastle city centre demanding the release of the Cuban Five. On 16 June RATB and FRFI activists used colourful street theatre to contrast the illegal US detention of hundreds of men at occupied Guantanamo Bay under the guise of 'fighting terrorism', while locking up five men whose only 'crime' was to work to expose terrorists based in Miami. On 21 June at a Tyneside Socialist Forum meeting on 'What is socialism?' comrades raised the example of Cuba. RATB activists also took their message to the 14 July Durham Miners' Gala. On 28 July, the second Celebration of Resistance was held on Tyneside, celebrating the 54th

anniversary of the attack on Moncada. The colourful event, with live rock music, DJs, banners and speeches faced harassment from police who demanded details of the organisers. When police tried to seize our collecting tin they were informed that their action was unlawful by a comrade who had sort prior legal advice. He was then arrested for obstruction. A picket was set up outside the police station, with support from members of the public and Tyneside Stop the War, until he was released and bailed without charge until 3 September.

We will not submit to police harassment. We will return to the streets to continue campaigning. We are organising solidarity protests across Britain in September as part of the international month of action to free the Cuban Five. Check our events listings website (see page 14) for up-to-date details, and if there's not an event happening in your area then contact us and we'll help you organise one. Get active! The Cubans are marching forward with socialism, it's time we did the same!

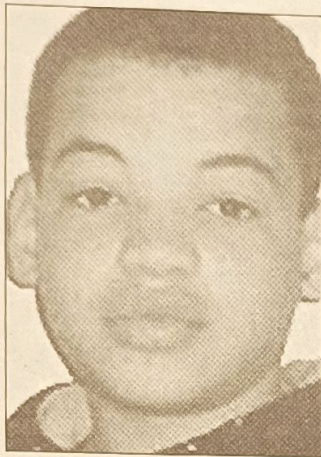
Cuba: socialism into the 21st century Speaking tour 2008

In February-March next year we are bringing two Cuban revolutionaries to Britain for a two-week speaking tour of London, Nottingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Durham, Newcastle, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Portsmouth. The two Cubans are highly regarded comrades, Rogelio Polanco, editor of the Union of Young Communists' (UJC) national newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*, and Orlando Borrego, a close collaborator of Che Guevara. There is also the possibility of bringing a young woman from the UJC, if we can raise enough funds. Want to hold a meeting in your community centre, college, university of workplace? Then get in touch. Help us take the message to as many people as possible: the Cubans are coming to Britain and they are bringing a little bit of revolution with them! Join us and help make this happen. Tel: 020 7837 1688 for details.

State tortures and murders working class children with legal impunity

In September 2004, the government launched a programme called Every Child Matters, designed to portray its 'vision for enhancement of the way in which professionals work together to provide children's care and to place better outcomes for children firmly at the centre of all their policies and approaches'.

In April that year, at Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre (STC) in Northamptonshire, 15-year-old Gareth Myatt died while being 'restrained' by three adult males. His 'offence'? He had refused to clean a sandwich toaster. The staff used a technique known as a 'double-seated embrace' which involved securing the youngster in a hold while seated on a chair or bed. During the struggle, Gareth lost consciousness and died of positional asphyxia. An inquest later heard that the teenager had tried to tell staff that he could not breathe. One of his assailants shouted 'If you can shout, you can breathe'. Gareth then said that he was going to shit himself and somebody replied 'Well, you are going to have to shit yourself, because we can't let you go while you are like this'. The boy duly shat himself, but it did not stop the restraint and Gareth died choking on his own vomit. He was 4'10" tall and weighed under seven



Gareth Myatt, killed in 'Training Centre'

stone. His assailants collectively weighed in at over 50 stone.

Some three months after Gareth's death, 14-year-old Adam Rickwood became the youngest child to die in custody in modern times. He too was in an STC, Hassockfield, Co Durham. He too had been restrained for failing to comply with an order – in his case, refusing to go to his room. As well as being restrained, Adam was assaulted by staff using a method known as a

'nose distraction technique'. This is linguistic juggling, masking the fact that the 'technique' is the equivalent of a punch on the nose. A few hours later, Adam hanged himself. Before he died, he wrote a letter of complaint to the authorities asking, 'What gives them the right to hit a child on the nose?'

Secure Training Centres were the brainchild of Tory Home Secretary Michael Howard, supposedly a cheaper and more professional alternative to secure local authority children's homes. In 1994, when STCs were discussed in Parliament, Tony Blair said: 'To weaken the provisions in local communities and claim that building the new STCs will help to prevent juvenile crime is a sham'. The first STC, Medway, was opened in 1998 under the Labour government and there are now four spread around the country.

The centres are privately run and are authorised and monitored by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). An answer to a parliamentary question in 2007 revealed that they cost £42.7 million, for 274 places. This represents a cost of £172,000 per child per year, seven times the cost of the most expensive public school. Despite the fact that STCs stress their dedication to education and rehabilitation, these places are kids' prisons. In March 2006 a peer

told the House of Lords: 'I recently visited a Secure Training Centre and was more thoroughly searched than I have ever been in a lifetime of visiting prisons, including the Maze.'

At Adam Rickwood's inquest it was clear that those witnesses responsible for dealing with children went to great pains to avoid calling them just that. Staff from the centre, social services and youth offending teams constantly referred to Adam as a 'young man'. Similarly, cells became 'bedrooms', while 'single separation' is the euphemism for solitary confinement.

At the time of the boys' deaths, under STC rules, the use of restraint was only permitted in order to prevent escape, assault or damage to property. The rules clearly stated that restraint could not be used for non-compliance. Yet Gareth and Adam were manhandled for not doing as they were told and, in the year before Adam died, restraint was used no less than 972 times, in an establishment that held around 40 children. At Gareth's inquest, the jury were told that the YJB had been warned about the excessive use of force at Rainsbrook but had failed to take action. The narrative verdict, delivered at the end of June, declared that the YJB's failure to respond to the warnings contributed to the boy's death.

What was the response of the Youth Justice Board to the two deaths, which were clearly related to breaches of rules by STC staff? Shockingly, it has moved to increase the use of restraint in STCs. In concert with the Ministry of Justice, it has agreed to a Statutory Instrument which legalises the use of restraint for non-compliance. The use of Statutory Instruments is widely regarded as a back-door method of getting legislation carried without debate or consultation.

Staff have broken the rules; two boys have died as a direct result, so the authorities now intend to allow them to stay within the law when they assault children.

Secure Training Centres hold children between the ages of 12 and 16; many of them terribly damaged and vulnerable. So-called 'normal kids' of those ages will behave badly; they may refuse to be quiet, or go to bed, or disobey any number of requests/orders from their parents. 'Normal' parents, including those who work for the YJB and the Ministry of Justice, would not resort to violence every time their child refused to comply. How dare they allow those in loco parentis over these already fractured children to get away with abusing them?

Remember the slogan 'Every Child Matters', designed to produce 'better outcomes for children'? It is impossible to imagine a worse outcome than one which sees one child fashioning a noose and hanging himself, rather than face another day in the care of the state; while another, also in care, dies in his own shit and vomit. Every child does indeed matter, but in the eyes of the Labour government, some kids clearly matter less than others.

Eric Allison

REVIEW

The Alastair Campbell diaries: the Blair years

'Let Hercules himself do what he may, The cat will mew and dog will have his day.'

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

As Brian, an occupant of the *Big Brother* house and therefore expert on celebrity in 21st century Britain, pointed out, 'Politics is fame for ugly people'. Substitute 'unpleasant' for 'ugly' and Alastair Campbell and his diaries, or rather extracts from diaries, fit the bill. The 'extracts' are not political, they are at a rather low level. There is precious little attempt to express or analyse the political standpoint that gave birth to New Labour or drove it forward for the nine years that the diaries cover (1994-2003). In 1994 Blair announced to the Labour Party that principles without power were useless. Campbell treats us to an unedifying account of how he helped Blair and New Labour to shed all principles in favour of power.

'By now, he had also let me know, and sworn me to secrecy, that he was minded to have a review of the constitution and scrap Clause 4. I have never felt any great ideological attachment to Clause 4 one way or the other... Here was a new leader telling me he was thinking of doing it in his first conference speech as a leader. I said I hope you do, because it's bold.' (On Blair's proposal to drop Clause 4 commitment to common ownership from Labour's constitution.)

'Again we were getting credit for being big and bold and ballsy.' (On Northern Ireland, May 1997.)

Throughout Campbell is concerned only with appearance. The question



for each day and each issue is 'How can we get away with this?' From the start Blair had surrounded himself with people of his own ilk (including Philip Gould and Alastair Campbell as media advisers). They were all middle-class professionals keen to re-frame Labour politics to serve their own interests: they equated the needs of what they called middle class 'hard-working' families with the needs of the working class 'hard-working' families. Inevitably the working class was ditched. One of Blair's first projects was to rid the Labour leadership of the influence of the trade union movement. Having announced that the employers would in future have as much influence on Labour as the unions, Blair flew off to visit Murdoch in Australia and the union leaders found themselves out in the cold.

"These people are stupid and they are malevolent... I have no option but to go up there and blow them out of the water". "I'm finished with these people", he said, "absolutely finished with them". (Blair on Transport &

General Workers Union Conference, Blackpool, July 1995.)

Campbell was not at all perturbed by any of this, except for the need to keep John Prescott on board in Blair's inner circle to smoothe relations with the party's membership and any rump of the trade union movement deemed important enough (very few). Constantly in the background of every event over the next nine years are the quarrels, tensions, agreements, exchanges of abuse, fisticuffs and covering-up of corruption amongst Blair's inner circle: Gordon Brown, John Prescott, Robin Cook, Peter Mandelson, Geoffrey Robinson *et al.*

The only issue which bites into Campbell's consciousness is education. From the start he is beset by a succession of ministers, not least the Blairs themselves, sending their children off to selective, grammar or private schools. One suspects this is a sensitive point for even a man with no principles like Campbell because his wife (Fiona Millar) promotes the need for good state education for all. His

various attempts to dissuade the Blairs and Harriet Harman from private education or its equivalent come to nothing. He signs off on the subject by quoting Blair: *'He said whatever you do, make sure Rory and Calum [Campbell's sons] get a good senior school, because if bright kids are not stretched they go off the rails.'* What Blair thinks should happen to working class children, bright or otherwise, who cannot afford the 'good schools' is not a consideration.

Throughout the Diaries a special level of abuse is reserved for the women Campbell and his fellow lads loathe:

'Philip [Gould] called from a focus group in Edgware to say "Shagger Cook is a hero and they think she (wife) is fucking ghastly".' January 1999

'Milburn took me aside at the end of Cabinet, said people were getting really fed up with TB [Blair's tolerance of Clare Short] in Cabinet. He said it was like having a bag lady in there just speaking out on everything.' January 2003

'She [Clare Short] was a totally ridiculous figure. Today had been like listening to someone on a bus...'

'Queen's Speech day, and Ken fucking Livingstone was leading the news. I think what I hated as much as anything was that we looked so incompetent. It was like something out of the eighties. Cherie's clothes was still running as a problem.' November 1999

There is page upon page of this outpouring of contempt for anyone considered on the left-wing of the party. Yet blatant corruption by Mandelson, Robertson and others is covered up, and the 'foibles' of a succession of Tory ex-ministers who are Campbell's friends are recounted with affection. Campbell is especially alarmed by real opposition, as any middle-class 'hard worker' would be:

'The news was totally dominated by the so called "anti-capitalist" riots in

SW1. Both Churchill's statue and the Cenotaph were defaced. I put out strong words from TB, but was alarmed later watching the softly-softly policing in the street where people were tearing up the lawns and wrecking anything they could find. It was unbelievably depressing.'

Perhaps any prospective reader of the Diaries would expect the high point of Campbell's account to concern the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, and especially the production of dodgy dossiers on weapons of mass destruction and the death of Dr David Kelly, in which Campbell was centrally involved. You will be disappointed. There are shockingly few moments of revelation. First, an indication of the lines of government thinking: *'It was also clear that there were likely to be would-be terrorists here as asylum seekers'* (September 2001, full intelligence report following the attack on the World Trade Centre). Second the only mention of torture camps and rendition: *'Guanatanamo was running big and bad, and we were not in shape to deal with it'* (January 2002).

There is supreme irony in one of his few moments of introspection:

'As during Kosovo, I was getting annoyed at the sense of moral equivalence between what we said, in systems of democracy founded on the duty of politicians to tell the truth, and regimes like Milosevic and the Taliban who felt no such obligations, and yet whose word, even when proven to be false, was often given exactly the same weight.'

Campbell has no insight into his own position as hired liar to the British Prime Minister. This book isn't worth much.

Carol Brickley

■ *The Blair years. Extracts from the Alastair Campbell Diaries*, Edited by Alastair Campbell and Richard Stott, Hutchinson, 794pp, £25.

FRFI ROUNDUP

'Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful.' *Paulo Freire*

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is not just a newspaper that seeks to understand the world but is written with the intent of changing it as well. Roundup recalls the work we have carried out in support of the oppressed and the work that we have planned for the future. If you agree with what you have read then it is time to put that knowledge into action. To know and not to act is to ultimately side with the oppressor.

FIGHTING RACISM

In Manchester the North West Asylum Seekers' Defence Group (NWASDG) is continuing to support Halima Aboubacar in her struggle to stay in Britain with her children. Halima's appeal was recently rejected and she faces deportation to Cameroon, with her one-year-old son Bailey Jr and her new baby daughter Farida (both born in Britain).

NWASDG has also attended protests organised by Congo Support Project (CSP), including the Congo Independence Day march on 30 June and demonstrations outside Dallas Court reporting centre in Salford. NWASDG held a picket of Dallas Court on 18 June, which was supported by the International Organisation of Iranian Refugees.

NWASDG was invited to speak about fighting third world poverty at a Tameside African Refugee Association conference in Gorton on 23 June. A NWASDG/FRFI speaker described imperialism as the biggest cause of human suffering. FRFI comrades in Glasgow attended UNITY (an organisation supporting asylum seekers) activities against deportations and criminalisation during Refugee Week, as well as dawn vigils in Red Road following a raid on a Pakistani family in June.

In Newcastle FRFI activists have continued to play an active role in Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR), working hard to strengthen democracy and accountability against repeated attempts both to censor FRFI and other publications and to prevent organisations, as opposed to individuals, affiliating to TCAR. Comrades' efforts paid off in July with the election of a new, larger committee.

On 23 June TCAR members and supporters held a protest in the centre of Newcastle demanding the right to work, and on 28 June they supported a sleep-out against asylum destitution called by Tyneside People's Working Committee on Zimbabwe.

FRFI has been organising regular stalls and street meetings in the Arthurs Hill area of Newcastle. On 5 July a broad cross section of the local community attended our forum on 'Seeking asylum - fleeing imperialism'. There was discussion on imperialism's role in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its relationship to the treatment of asylum seekers in Britain.

In London FRFI continues to hold a monthly picket at Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre. People who report and sign on while we are there have told us that the demos have become well known and that there is a positive effect on their treatment while we are outside. On 2 and 13 July, comrades attended the demonstrations organised by the Congo Support Project to highlight the Country Guidance Tribunal related to deportations to the DRC.

SUPPORT PRISONERS!

On 13 June and 9 July FRFI supporters in Manchester and London joined dem-



Demonstration outside Parliament protesting against deportations to DR Congo

onstrations outside Styal and Holloway prisons organised by Pauline Campbell. Since 2004 Pauline, whose daughter Sarah died in Styal, has mounted a relentless campaign to expose the inhumanity of the system.

On 25 May, 8 June and 13 July comrades in London and Scotland supported the Friends of John Bowden campaign demonstrations outside the Parole Board and Scottish Prison Service. For further information contact: handsoffjohn@reborn.com <www.myspace.com/friendsofjohnbowden>

STOP THE WAR!

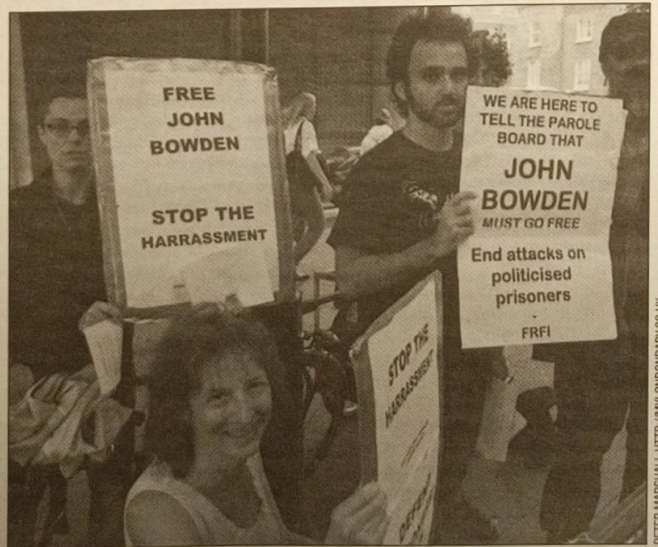
On 3 June when Gordon Brown visited Newcastle for the Labour leadership hustings, FRFI activists joined the demonstration called by Tyneside Stop the War. The Socialist Workers Party organiser openly attempted to prevent any chants critical of the Labour Party and initially claimed that he had signed away the protest's right to even use a megaphone outside the hustings venue. However, on checking with the police FRFI activists discovered this was in fact a restriction imposed by the organiser alone, which went beyond anything demanded by the police. As FRFI activists were about to speak on the megaphone the SWP organisers declared the demonstration over and led people away, leaving even their own Stop the War stalls and banners behind to be packed up by FRFI comrades and a couple of more reasonable STWC activists.

On 24 June FRFI joined the Stop the War Coalition's demonstration in Manchester on the day of Gordon Brown's

coronation as Prime Minister. We formed a small but noisy contingent on the march and were joined by the CPGB(ML) and others in chanting slogans in solidarity with the Iraqi resistance. The demonstration's organisers, using the slogan 'Change the policy, not just the leader', kept opposition to the Labour Party off their platform. STWC's pre-demo statement, signed by Lindsey German and Andrew Murray, claimed that 'this view is shared by many people in the Labour Party itself', and called on 'the British government to break from George Bush's wars'. Excusing the parasitic role of British imperialism in the world explains how the anti-war movement has demobilised to a turnout of just 3,000 people for a national demonstration.

VICTORY TO THE INTIFADA!

FRFI members and supporters around the country have continued to be active in support of the Palestinian struggle through the Victory to the Intifada group. VTI is continuing its demonstrations at Marks and Spencer - Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel and held a meeting at the London School of Economics regarding the occupation. We also had a large and vibrant contingent on the Enough! demonstration for Palestine on 9 June. As the brutal occupation of Palestine intensifies and the imperialists attempt to destroy the struggle of the Palestinians once and for all it is imperative that we go out onto the streets and make our voices heard. Look at our events below and join us in supporting the side of the oppressed.



Demonstration at Parole Board offices calling for support for John Bowden, see letters p15

EVENTS

NEWCASTLE

Thursday 16 August 5-7pm
Stall and street meeting
against racism
Stanhope Street (outside Iceland),
Arthurs Hill

Thursday 30 August 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada picket of
Marks & Spencer
Northumberland Street

Every Saturday 3pm
Weekly meeting of Tyneside
Community Action for Refugees
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop,
bottom of Westgate Road
email tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk

Street actions every Saturday 12-2pm
For details call 07857 323 523
Or email at:
frfinortheast@googlemail.com
Website: www.frfinortheast.co.uk

MANCHESTER

Saturday 4 August 12 noon
North West Asylum Seekers Defence
Group (NWASDG) street stall
Market Street

Saturday 11 August 12 noon
Asylum Rights March
NWASDG, Sukula Family Must Stay
Campaign, No One is Illegal, Samina Altaf
Will Stay Campaign, International
Organisation of Iranian Refugees,
Ethiopia Support Project and Bolton NUT.
Assemble at Platt Fields, Rusholme

Sunday 2 September 2pm
Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
Public forum
Cross Street chapel, off Market Street
Donation on the door, wheelchair access
available

Saturday 22 September 12 noon
Protest: Hands off socialist Cuba!
Free the Cuban 5!
Part of the international month of action
Piccadilly Gardens

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

LEEDS

RCG/FRFI in Leeds are currently
planning new activities in the area.
To get involved contact 07899 983 131,
frfi_leeds@yahoo.co.uk

GLASGOW

Saturday 18 August 3-5pm
Street meeting: Hands Off Cuba,
Venezuela and Bolivia!
Top of Buchanan Street

Thursday 23 August 7-9.30pm
Film showing: The Revolution will not
be televised
Govanhill Neighbourhood Centre,
Daisy Street

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! will
have stalls during Freshers' Week at
Glasgow University and Strathclyde
University. For details email
frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

For information on more activities in
Scotland check out the Scotland page on
www.revolutionarycommunist.org

LONDON

Tuesdays 7 August and 4 September
1-2pm
Defend asylum seekers!
Stop deportations!
Monthly demonstration
Outside Communications House
210 Old Street roundabout, EC1
(Nearest tube Old Street)

Wednesday 12 September,
7.30-9.30pm
Public meeting
Health and education after ten years
of hard Labour
Upstairs at the Yorkshire Grey pub
Corner of Theobald's Road and
Grays Inn Road, WC1
(Nearest tube Chancery Lane/
Holborn)

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada picket
of Marks & Spencer
Oxford Street (Marble Arch end)

For further details call 020 7837 1688
Email eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com or
northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com

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the Blockade**



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- ☐ I would like a copy of the pamphlet 'Revolutionary Cuba' (£2.95 + 80p p&p)

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Address

Tel E-mail

Donation

* I enclose a cheque/PO payable to Rock around the Blockade for £10 waged/£4 low waged/£2 unwaged (please delete).

Please return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

Visit our website: www.ratb.org.uk

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Labour democracy

As a member of a trade union that is affiliated to Labour (BETU), I was eligible to vote in the Deputy Leadership election. Imagine my excitement!

After carefully reading the candidates' addresses, I added 'Labour Party – War Party' to my ballot paper with a big red marker pen.

Even if I had voted, it would have counted for nothing because for your vote to be counted you had to tick a 'loyalty pledge' to the party.

I've got a feeling I may be opting out of the union's political fund in the future.

JON KEMPSTER
London

LETTERS

FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX email: editorial@rcgfrfi.plus.com
website: www.revolutionarycommunist.org

Free all Palestinian prisoners

I recently returned from Beit Ummar in occupied Palestine, where I was lucky enough to join a family I know in welcoming their son home after his release from an Israeli military prison. My friend M, who worked as an accountant at a local charity, had been imprisoned in the Ketzioz detention camp in the Negev for a year and a half after being charged with 'association with a terrorist group' and sentenced in an Israeli military court. Under international law, people have the right to resist military occupation, but Israel has not only criminalised Palestinian resistance, but many aspects of daily survival. It is virtually impossible for Palestinian prisoners or their lawyers to contest the charges against them in Israel's kangaroo courts, even when the charges or supposed evidence are public.

M was 'only' sentenced to 18 months; his two elder brothers, numerous cousins, and others from the village (including its mayor) were not so lucky. They received longer sentences and are still imprisoned, some of them in administrative detention (renewable detention orders without charge or trial). When he finally arrived home, we all breathed a sigh of relief that the Israeli authorities hadn't decided to

issue M with an administrative detention order even though his sentence was over. We all know that he could be re-arrested at any time, detained without charges, tortured again and sent back to the same kangaroo courts for no reason. The nightmare of the Israeli military detention system could descend again at any moment.



Palestinians demonstrate for the release of prisoners

I thought of M and his family when I read the news reports about Israel's 'generous' release of 256 Palestinian prisoners on 20 July 2007. While I was happy for the few who were released, 256

prisoners released pales next to the 11,229 Palestinians who continue to be detained, according to the most recent statistics from the Mandela Institute for Human Rights and Political Prisoners in Ramallah. It seems even more insignificant when you consider that Israeli forces continue to arrest people every day, and every month arrest more Palestinians than were

released in this much-lauded 'goodwill gesture' that took weeks of 'negotiation'. Finally, as all Palestinians know but the Western media consistently fails to report, many of those Israel frees in these

high-profile releases have almost finished their sentences anyway. Administrative detainees, who are held illegally and indefinitely, are never released in such Israeli 'gestures'. There are tens of people from M's village of Beit Ummar currently detained, but the only one released was a young woman days away from finishing her sentence.

But there is an even more sinister element to this latest prisoner release: almost all those released were members of Fatah, and Israel explicitly saw the release as a way to bolster the imposed (and illegal) government of Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. This means that none of M's relatives, or the majority of Palestinian political prisoners, were even considered for release, since they are associated with other factions. Israel, backed by the US and UK, is betting that its carefully staged 'gestures' will strengthen Abbas, weaken Hamas, and further divide the Palestinian people. We can only hope that Palestinians see through this ruse, and refuse to allow Israel or the Palestinian Authority under Abbas to play politics with the prisoner issue. Here in the UK, we must redouble our efforts to free all Palestinian prisoners, and to end Israel's illegal military occupation and the daily arrests of Palestinians that help maintain it.

DEBORAH HYAMS
London

More Prison Service corruption

I was cited to appear at a coroner's court for the inquest into the death of Stephen Lloyd, who died in Frankland prison in 2004. This is the second inquest as at the first they tried to sweep everything under the carpet. The inquest was in Durham; I was in Rye Hill. The day before the inquest, no transport had been sorted out. All of a sudden at about 9.30am the whole gaoi was shut down and my door was crashed by the riot squad and I was shanghaied off to Long Lartin. When I got there, I was sent straight back on the pretext of refusing normal location. If I had stayed there, that would have been the system's excuse for not producing me at the inquest by saying I'd been moved on a discipline move and could not be produced. However, I was taken to the inquest the day after I should have been – straight there and back in a day. What a waste of money, spent just to cover up because someone forgot to order transport to get me there at the right time! I'd like to give my condolences to Stephen Lloyd's parents and hope that the little I could do was of some help.

ALAN PORTER NF1580
HMP Rye Hill

'Peace envoy' role for warmonger Blair

On 27 June, the same day he stepped down as prime minister, Blair was appointed Middle East peace envoy for the Middle East Quartet of the US, EU, UN and Russia. As if he hasn't done enough harm already.

Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov believes that Blair is too close to Bush not to simply act in the interest of the US. 'I do not think that Tony Blair will become the Quartet's conductor. His role will consist of following the US line'. The foreign minister of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, is also unhappy about the decision. Outside the Quartet Hamas has also been critical. Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad said, 'According to our experience at the time he was prime minister of Britain... he was not honest and was not helpful in solving the conflict in the Middle East' – an understatement, to say the least. Blair, along with the US, has vetoed UN resolutions critical of



Israel, has been involved in the EU withdrawal of aid for Palestine after the election of Hamas, has failed to follow up on many promises to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, shamefully refused to call for an immediate ceasefire during the war in Lebanon in 2006 and constantly adopts the US and Israeli position.

Britain's role in the invasion of Iraq hardly enhances his standing in the Middle East, either. The Iraqis are not much impressed with the appointment – foreign

ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini criticised Blair's reputation in the region and commented: 'I doubt that this appointment would... have a positive impact on the developments of the Middle East region.' Iran has faced isolation from the West, led by Blair's Britain, over its nuclear programme. In short, Blair is probably the second-most hated man in the Middle East.

So who does want him? The US, obviously, who forced the appointment through. And the move has found considerable backing among the Israelis – no surprises there, then – as well as with compromised Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Far from being an envoy for peace, racist warmonger Blair goes forth to continue to do imperialism's dirty work.

MARK
Newcastle

Institutionalised torture

I would like to add some information to Cat Wiener's article about war crimes in FRFI 196 (April/May 2007).

There is no evidence that British troops mistreated POWs in the Malvinas/Falklands war. On the contrary, prisoners were only required to put their hands on their heads. This is a requirement of the Hague Convention of 1907 to indicate to other troops that they are *hors de combat*, and it is to protect them. Also in Borneo, between 1962 and 1966, Indonesian regular army prisoners were treated fairly.

But I know for a fact that in British Guyana, Aden and Ireland prisoners were abused in ways similar to that described by Cat. In 1972, Edward Heath told parliament that hooding prisoners must cease in Ireland. He must have forgotten to tell the army, as many an Irish prisoner can vouch. In 2004 the MoD made a similar announcement about Iraq. Yet we still see hooded and blindfolded Iraqis on our TV screens.

From experience I know these crimes are not the acts of 'a few bad apples'. It is routine and a part of army training and originates from the top. In the 1960s, on an exercise at Otterburn, I was captured by another infantry regiment. I was hooded and beaten and made to stand naked in a cattle trough when it was snowing. It went on

for hours until an umpire intervened. An Iraqi doesn't have that comfort.

In 1971 on a NATO exercise in Belgium involving UK, US, Belgian and Dutch troops, a group of young Belgian soldiers was tortured in a barn by Belgian commandos being trained by British troops. They were beaten, given electric shocks and hanged from the rafters whilst naked for two days in sub-zero temperatures. This was reported in the press after the victims complained.

Colonel Mike Dewar, former CO of 3 Royal Green Jackets, speaking about Iraq to *Officer* magazine, said: 'Hooding is a perfectly standard procedure to disorientate people when they are arrested. Every single person who is arrested is hooded' (quoted in *Independent* 8 May 2004). Colonel is a staff rank. Therefore the General Staff know about, approve of and encourage the mistreatment of prisoners. Court martialing common soldiery alone lets the real culprits off the hook.

Riot shields, baton rounds, tear gas all started in the colonies. We have them in the UK now. How long before what is routine in Iraq becomes the norm in Britain?

THOMAS ATKINS
London

Strength in solidarity

I read Nicki Jameson's article regarding my situation in FRFI 197 (June/July 2007) and just wanted to say thanks for an excellent piece of writing. Thank you also for your work in organising the demonstration on my behalf on 8 June – your support and solidarity is deeply appreciated.

Unfortunately the reaction of the Scottish prison authorities to the

protests on my behalf has so far been vicious. I was supposed to be returning to an open prison this month, or so I was led to believe, but a recent 'case conference' held here, chaired by the Deputy Governor of Castle Huntley Prison, instead recommended that I be transferred to Perth Maximum Security Prison, ostensibly to be 'risk assessed' for behaviour

modification courses. Significantly, I shall now be in 'closed conditions' when my parole board sits in August, which of course means that my application for release will be automatically rejected.

Anyway, thanks again for your support – it gives me great strength.

JOHN BOWDEN 6729
HMP Glenochil, King O'Muir Road,
Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10
3AD, Scotland

Oppose the repressive Moroccan state!

The people in the Western Sahara are facing a struggle similar to that of the Palestinians. They are a people without a state, discriminated against by the late King Hasan of Morocco and the present King Mohammed V.

There is a media wall of silence even bigger than the one around Palestine. People are detained in secret prisons, tortured and murdered. Children are force-fed propaganda in schools and the Touareg and desert languages of the people of the Western Sahara

are banned in public. Medicine has to be smuggled in and four people assembling together in public is deemed to constitute a political meeting. Journalists risk their lives to get footage out of what is happening without being detained by the Moroccan police. The people of the Western Sahara are being left in the most desolate conditions as Morocco continues to help itself to most of the region's meagre resources.

Meanwhile, within Morocco itself, the Ishquial People's Party

is totally outlawed at the behest of the king. At the last election they won the majority of votes; the royalist vote was rigged to keep the King's party in power. Many of the Ishquial People's Party have been detained and there has been a clampdown on support for them.

The repression in Morocco is so bad that you can get shot for participating in a demonstration.

AMINA SIEGERSON
Glasgow

Turkey's elections

The 22 July elections were hailed as triumph for democracy and a 'delight for investors' (*Financial Times* 24 July 2007). The Development and Justice Party (AKP) won with 46.6% of the votes and 340 MPs; sufficient to form the government without a coalition. Turkey's election law states that any party must achieve 10% of the national vote to be represented in parliament. This was intended to prevent the Democratic Society Party (DTP), a mainly Kurdish party, from getting into parliament. The DTP stood candidates as independents and 24 of them were elected. Turkey's Election Board ruled that former Kurdish MP Leyla Zana and the

Turkish author Orhan Pamuk, who has supported Kurdish political rights and denounced the Turkish genocide of Armenians, were not allowed to stand as candidates as they had previously been imprisoned.

The US and European Union view the AKP as a 'safe pair of hands'. Although nominally an Islamic party the AKP government will not confront imperialist policies in the region, will proceed with further privatisations and deepen the poverty of the working class in Turkey. Communists have lots of hard work to do in Turkey.

DEVIRIM TEKYOŁ
North London

New Asylum Model – attack on asylum seekers

The New Asylum Model (NAM) has been piloted and partially operated since May 2005, and since May 2007 has been applied to all new asylum seekers' cases. It is a fast-track 'end-to-end' system, designed to process claims as quickly as possible, reduce new arrivals' chances of successfully claiming asylum and speed up deportations. **ALYSE THOMSON** reports.

Asylum seekers are subject to an 'initial screening' process, after which they are 'segmented' and assigned to a 'case owner', who handles all aspects of their case. There are five 'segments':

- 1) *Third Country* (people who the Home Office believes have or could have applied for asylum in a third country)
- 2) *Minors* (unaccompanied minors and children in families who apply in their own right)

3) *Potential Non-Suspensive Appeal* (nationals from one of 14 countries that the government deems 'safe')

4) *'Late and Opportunistic'* (people who apply for asylum after overstaying and have extension of leave refused, including those who apply after having been a dependant of a refused asylum applicant)

5) *General Casework* (cases that do not come into any of the other segments).

Formerly, adult asylum seekers had ten days to complete a detailed 'state-

ment of evidence' about their claim. This chance to present crucial information has now been removed. Decisions on many 'fast-tracked' cases are now being made in 11 days, while applicants whose cases are labelled 'late or opportunistic' have their asylum interview within two to three days, with the decision served within three to four days, and have only ten days to appeal.

These timescales mean that newly arrived, vulnerable and confused asylum seekers are bombarded with demands and often have insufficient time to seek legal advice and proper representation. Immigration lawyers are under pressure to conform to the time limits and do not have enough time to prepare cases properly.

The speed and nature of the processing of the claim, management of the case, access to legal representation and support arrangements are determined by which segment an asylum seeker is

assigned to. Accommodation arrangements and the frequency and nature of 'reporting' arrangements – which include the use of electronic tagging or voice recognition monitoring – are also determined from this earliest stage.

'Segmentation' decisions are often arbitrary and once made are difficult to change. The entire pejorative category of 'opportunistic' labels asylum seekers' claims as unfounded before any detailed evidence has been heard. For example, the Refugee Council cites the case of a woman who, following the refusal of her husband's case, in which she was claiming asylum as a dependant, submitted her own claim, providing details of having been raped. A senior Home Office official confirmed she would be treated as 'late and opportunistic'

without any real investigation of the reasons why she felt unable to make earlier disclosure, such as fear of stigma or wishing to avoid the trauma of recounting the experience.

The Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture states that policy regarding treatment of victims of torture is not always followed, and vulnerable and traumatised people can be subject to inappropriate clinical decisions by case owners. Women are particularly vulnerable as many have been subject to rape, sexual abuse and violence. Rushing their claims through cannot fail to cause them further trauma.

NAM is the latest vehicle for Labour's attack on asylum seekers, who are systematically and ruthlessly being deported back to war zones, persecution at the hands of corrupt regimes supported by the British government, such as that in Democratic Republic of Congo, and poverty resulting from exploitation, corruption and plunder of natural resources by Britain and other imperialist nations. We must defend all asylum seekers against the relentless attack on their human rights.



Protests after man dies in police custody in Burnley

EVAN CUNNICK

Hundreds of people protested in Burnley on 7 July after the death of Nadeem Khan in police custody. On 30 June the 28-year-old, known as Dean, was arrested following what officers described as a 'violent struggle'. His family, including his mother Brenda, currently suffering from cancer and who signed herself out of hospital, led the protest.

Mr Khan, a father of two, was arrested at around 8.50am Saturday. Police were called to the area after residents said they had seen a man in the street vandalising cars and homes whilst leaving a trail of his own blood. It is then reported that Mr Khan walked into a hairdressers shop on Burnley Road asking staff and customers for

help but was followed by officers and sprayed with gas.

Mr Khan was taken to Burnley Police Station and from there to Burnley General Hospital, where he died. His cousin, Jason Hogg, told the local press 'We have questions about the timeline we want answering. We have been told he was arrested at 8.50am it took them 15 minutes to arrest him and he died at 10.33am. The investigation only covers what happened when the police arrived. At the first shop Nadeem went into the shopkeeper said his arms were bleeding. He had obviously been attacked as he was asking people for help and was fearing for his life. It was not like he was walking through the street smashing things up. We want to know what happened before the police arrived and will not rest until we have answers.'

Solidarity with asylum seekers Close down Communications House!

London FRFI has been holding monthly demonstrations outside Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre for over a year. We spoke to Dixy, an asylum seeker from Congo Brazzaville, who reports there weekly:

'I came to England in 1999. My brother was granted asylum because he was an activist in my country. But they said that because I was too young, I would not be persecuted if I returned. In June 2006 I was taken to Harmondsworth. It is not a good place to be, the regime is bad, the people who run the centre bully detainees. For example they don't allow you to go to the library, to move around. What it says on paper is not what happens in practice. You are stopped from researching your case. You are told to get back into your room. They want you to take voluntary return so they make it harsh deliberately to force you to want to go. People were frustrated. Some were



Members of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees and FRFI supporters demonstrate against dawn raids and deportations in the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne

new arrivals; fresh claimants and they were confused. Being detained was mental torture. Some were screaming. They had thought they were coming to safety. They didn't think they'd be put in prison.

'At Communications House there is also a bad administration and regime.

People have to queue outside. It's deliberate, done on purpose to humiliate you. At the end of the day though, we are strong people and we don't give up. We have survived torture and things so we will get through this type of treatment.

'The movement outside Communications House is good because people pass the building and see people queuing and don't know what it is. By doing stalls outside you help show people what the place is. It lets British people know what some people who live in England go through on a daily basis. We are victimised and people are not aware.'

Labour racists – in their own words

There are about 49,000 racist attacks in a year. Let's see who is fuelling this.

- 1 March 2005 **Hazel Blears**: Muslims will have to accept as a 'reality' that they will be stopped and searched by the police more often than the rest of the public. 'There was no getting away from it.'
- 24 August 2006 **Ruth Kelly**: 'It is not racist to discuss immigration and asylum...our ideas and policies should not be based on special treatment for minority ethnic or faith communities...we have to have the confidence to say no to certain suggestions from particular ethnic groups.'
- 28 September 2006 **John Reid**: 'These fanatics are looking to groom and brainwash children, including your children, for suicide bombings, grooming them to kill themselves in order to murder others.'
- 6 October 2006 **Jack Straw**: 'The full veil was bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult. It was such a visible statement of separation and of difference.' [The following week at least six women were attacked

for wearing veils or even scarves.]

• 6 March 2007 **Jack Straw**: 'There is a big cultural divide between Muslims and the rest of us, more than say with the Afro-Caribbean community.'

• 21 April 2007 **Tony Blair**: 'The black community need to be mobilised in denunciation of this gang culture...we won't stop this by pretending it isn't young black kids doing it.'

• 10 May 2007 **Margaret Hodge**: 'We should look at policies where the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by new migrants...to decide who is entitled to access social housing.'

• 10 June 2007 **Ruth Kelly**: 'speaking [English] is absolutely key... translation has been used too frequently and sometimes without thought to the consequences.'

• June 2007 **Hazel Blears**: 'We have got people living in Salford now from every country under the sun... the community doesn't object to the people...but they object if they are undercutting wages and...not abiding by health and safety.'

Charles Chinweizu

Restrictions placed on migrant workers from Bulgaria and Romania

ALYSE THOMSON

Labour's exploitation of Eastern European migrants continues with its attack on the rights of people from new member states of the European Union (EU). Having welcomed in workers from those states that joined the EU in 2004, the government had taken a more restrictive approach to the recent accession of Bulgaria and Romania.

Although freedom of movement within EU states cannot be restricted, and Romanians and Bulgarians can therefore enter Britain and reside for an initial three months, there are restrictions on their right to seek employment and they cannot take

work without authorisation. Quotas have been imposed, with 'low skilled migrants' limited to jobs in agriculture and food processing, with a cap of 20,000 places available.

The Home Office, which had originally planned to discontinue the long-standing Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, will now restrict it exclusively to migrants from Bulgaria and Romania by January 2008. Migrant workers from Bulgaria and Romania are clearly being targeted as a pool of cheap labour, which can be used purely in order to fulfil short term seasonal labour needs. Once this seasonal employment is over, they will not be in a position to claim any benefit for being laid off, as their contracts of

employment were by nature temporary.

One way around the restrictions is for migrants to declare themselves 'self-employed'. This means they do not require permission to work. However they then lose their entitlement to the minimum wage and decent working conditions, and are open to exploitation by greedy agencies.

British capitalism is using the workers of Eastern Europe as a reserve army of labour, from which it can draw whatever type of workers it requires at any given point, with no regard either for the mass of the people in the country from which the labour is taken, nor for the conditions of the workers who are brought here.