

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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People queue for bread in Cairo, Egypt

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HUNGRY FOR CHANGE

Since the beginning of 2008, 37 countries have seen street protests and riots in response to spiralling food prices. In Haiti in April such protests forced the resignation of the prime minister. In Egypt, thousands fought riot police in pitched battles over bread prices. There have been violent protests in Cote d'Ivoire, whilst food price riots in Cameroon in February left 40 people dead. Demonstrations and protests have taken place in countries as far apart as Mauritania, Mozambique and Senegal in Africa, Uzbekistan, Indonesia and Yemen in Asia and Bolivia in South America. In South Africa, violence erupted as food prices pushed nationalist tensions to the fore. In Britain rising food prices have made the poorest people in Scotland food insecure for the first time since the end of the Second World War. The food crisis has become a major concern of ruling classes across the world and led the United Nations to declare the food crisis a major security issue. PAUL MALLON reports.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation food price index has risen 57% in the past year. The world's main staple foods have all risen in price: rice has risen over 100% in one year; since 2000 wheat prices are up 200%, while corn is at a twelve-year high. This has

had a knock-on effect on the price of meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products. The effects are being felt here in Britain. The price of a major brand loaf of bread has risen by 25% - 23p - to £1.29 in a year. The supermarket price of milk has leapt by 17%. A food

price survey published this April showed that the price of a basket of 24 staple items has risen by 15% in a year. The survey, by price comparison website MySupermarket.co.uk, showed that an average family spending £100 a week on food last year will now have to find an extra £780 to put the same items on the table this year.

While consumers in Britain are facing a pinch, around the world people are starving. According to the UN, of the 6 billion people who live in the world 1 billion now suffer from chronic hunger. Over 2.6 billion people live on less than \$2 per day; they have to spend 60-80% of their income on food. The consequence is that the total number of food-insecure people - those who lack critical nutrients and are malnourished - stands at around 3 billion. In 2007 18,000 children died every day as a direct or indirect consequence of malnutrition.

While starvation and food insecurity spreads, capitalism continues its drive to produce food for fuel with an ever-growing biofuels industry. The United States produces 40% of the world's corn and half the world's exports. In

2007, 81 million tons (20% of the entire US corn crop) was used for fuel and it is expected that in 2008 this will increase to between 100-110 million tons. Writing about the dangers posed by biofuels in 2007, Fidel Castro warned that such policies would condemn 'to premature death by hunger and thirst more than three billion people of the world.' He also argued that 'the sinister idea of converting food into combustibles was definitively established as the economic line of foreign policy of the United States'. The choice to produce food increasingly for fuel has been driven by demand for cheaper alternatives to the spiralling global petroleum price, itself a contributor to rising costs of food distribution. The corn required to produce enough fuel to fill a Sport Utility Vehicle's tank would feed an adult for a year. Such are the calculations and priorities of capitalism.

The move towards biofuels follows the failure of Genetically Modified (GM) crop growing to solve capitalism's problems with agriculture. The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for

Development announced in April that the industrialisation of food production cannot resolve the global food crisis. This represents a major rebuttal of the British and United States governments' preoccupation with promoting GM crops and biofuel production. While people around the world starve, agribusiness profits boom. The United States registered record agricultural export revenue in 2007 of \$85 billion.

In Britain the food crisis has priced many items out of the reach of ordinary working class people and is undermining basic dietary requirements. As Josette Sheeran, the head of the UN's World Food Programme, said in February, 'There is food on the shelves but people are priced out of the market. There is vulnerability in urban areas we have not seen before.'

Hugo Chavez is right to say that 'the problem is not the production of food...it is the economic, social and political model of the world. The capitalist model is in crisis.' The demand for bread will inevitably acquire a revolutionary significance for the poor of the world. ■

Welcome...

If you live in Britain you might be forgiven for thinking that the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is over. The mainstream media and government have adopted a policy of silence about the atrocities of the occupation. The closest we get to 'news' on the subject is visits from the heirs to the throne to the battlefield or a passing statistic hidden in an inside column of a newspaper, usually regarding the latest British casualty of the war. There is little reporting about the Iraqi deaths, that now exceeds a million people, or about the mass exodus of refugees to Syria and other places. There is scant reference to the failure of Bush's 'surge'; the pessimism of the US military leaders; the attacks on the apparently safe Green Zone or the renewed uprising by the resistance from Basra to Baghdad. In *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* we report this news and more on pp6-7.

There is another brutal occupation which gets little coverage. That is Israel's occupation of Palestine which has just reached 60 years. About this Middle East conflict we are told a lot, yet nothing. In the bourgeois media we have been told about the irreconcilable differences between the Palestinians and the Israelis, how the former are the terrorists who just aren't open to a peaceful solution, or at best that both sides are as bad as each other and just aren't willing to sit down and sort things out. The reality of course is a brutal Zionist occupation that has destroyed the lives of generations of Palestinians, who have seen their land stolen and been forced, like the Iraqis, to take refuge around the world. This onslaught continues to receive the full support of the US and British governments. On p11, we report the effects of the occupation and the truth about imperialism's support for the racist Zionist regime together with the struggle by Hizbullah in Lebanon against the puppet government of Siniora.

What we have heard in the news is a lot of anti-Chinese sentiment, triggered in large part by the protests at the



Nakba: sixty years ago the Palestinians were driven off their land

Olympic torch relays. We haven't though been told about the violence of the rioters in Tibet towards other ethnic groups or about the history of the reactionary theocracy that lived off the backs of the people (p10).

We've also heard a lot in the press about the turmoil of the Labour government following its hammering in the Crewe by-election and in the recent local elections. We have been told about the personalities involved, such as Cameron vs Brown or Ken vs Boris but little substance behind the election results (p2). With predictions that house prices may suffer double-digit per cent falls both this year and next, and oil prices projected to rise beyond \$200 a barrel, Labour's electoral coalition is disintegrating (p2). As the economy gets worse it is the poor who are being forced to pay, both here and in the US (p3).

It is always the poor who are forced to pay for the capitalist crisis. As a few continue to live in unprecedented luxury the majority are paying the price. Many are going hungry and are finding it difficult to pay for essentials such as bread and rice. This is not because enough food can't be produced, but because the mechanisms of capitalism has restricted both the production and distribution of simple food stuffs, causing shortages and spiralling prices (p1).

Even in a wealthy country like Britain basic services are also under attack and are being eroded. Rather than foot the bill for a quality health service the ruling classes are opening

health provision to the market (p5). Profits will be prioritised over quality of health care for all.

There is an alternative to this madness. In socialist Cuba good health care and nutrition for all are the main priorities. We are now seeing the strengthening of the revolution with greater access to communications technology, despite the best efforts of the US blockade to limit such developments (p12). Cuba's example is of vital importance to the developing revolutionary democratic movements in Latin America. However, they face stiff opposition from the bourgeoisie, particularly in Bolivia, where the ruling class is threatening to split the country rather than be defeated by the popular government under the leadership of Evo Morales (p8). On the other side of the world the rich have taken a battering with the communists winning elections in Nepal. This victory follows a decade of hard struggle by the Nepali people against a brutal monarch and imperialist attacks (p9).

The world is on the move. The direction it moves in is very much up to us. There is a famous saying that 'knowledge is power.' This is false. Knowledge by itself is worthless – but when combined with action then there is the power for change. At the back of this paper you will find details of the work that we are involved in, the attacks that we are fighting by supporters of the Labour Party and crucially the work we have planned for the future. Join us in action!



Livingstone, Johnson and Paddick – stitching up London on behalf of the privileged

Labour faces electoral meltdown

Labour is on course for a massive defeat at the next general election after its candidate for the Crewe and Nantwich by-election saw her inherited majority of 7,000 turn into a massive 8,000 defeat on 22 May. Tory Edward Timpson, heir to a £50m fortune, trounced Tamsin Dunwoody, daughter of the late Labour MP Gwynneth Dunwoody with a 17% swing. Labour's defeat follows on from its disastrous showing in the 1 May council, London mayoral and Greater London Assembly elections. The election coalition that supported Labour through three general election victories is disintegrating.

The local elections were the first test at the polls for Labour since Gordon Brown took over as prime minister. They were held during the row over the abolition of the 10% income tax band, in the midst of two unpopular wars, rising fuel prices, the nationalisation of the bankrupt Northern Rock bank and an increasing credit squeeze. You could almost hear the middle classes and the labour aristocracy crying out the words of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, yet we are not saved.'

Overall Labour won 24% of the vote, 1% less than the Lib Dems, making it, for the moment, the third party. Labour lost 334 council seats and with them control of nine councils – it now runs 18 councils compared to the Tories' 65. It lost six councils in Wales, most until recently considered rock-solid.

London

Its highest profile local election defeat was in the London's mayoral contest as Ken Livingstone lost by a substantial margin to Tory Boris Johnson with a gap of 6.1% on first-preference votes.

The Lib Dem candidate in the mayoral election was ex-cop Brian Paddick. Paddick claimed to be the best qualified to fight crime. What he did not mention was that in a three-month period in 2001 whilst he was police commander in Brixton three civilians were killed and a teenager maimed for life by the police. In fact the Lib Dems, Labour and Tories fell over each other boasting about how many cops they would put on the streets, buses and underground. Crime statistics do not drop with more cops, they rise because the extra cops find more 'crime'.

Boris Johnson is a racist bigot who has called black children 'piccaninies' and complained about the 'tyranny of black majority rule' in South Africa. He described the MacPherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence as a witch-hunt when it concluded that the Metropolitan Police were institutionally racist. He hates work-

ing class people, expressing this in tirades against people from Liverpool and Scotland. This Eton and Oxford-educated toff is bad news for London's working class and oppressed.

Livingstone, for the eight years he was mayor, loyally served the City grandees and Labour government. In 2004 when the RMT tube workers were on strike over pay, Livingstone said that if he were an RMT member he would cross the picket line and break the strike. In 1999 he hailed the NATO bombing of Belgrade. In 2000 and 2001 he demonised London May Day demonstrators; the marchers were attacked by cops and over 1,000 people were illegally held captive for over nine hours at Oxford Circus. He justified the cold-blooded killing of Jean Charles de Menezes in 2005, the most heinous crime of Labour's domestic 'war on terror'.

Labour won the last three general elections because it was able to create an electoral coalition which included the ruling class, large sections of the middle class and affluent layers of the working class. Now the better-off feel that their privileged position is under threat. House prices are projected to fall by 7% this year and 9% in 2009, with *The Times* (21 May) warning that it is looking ever more possible that these falls may be in double digits. The price of oil continues its relentless rise, with Goldman Sachs predicting it will exceed \$200 a barrel. These more affluent sections are looking to the Tories as they no longer believe that Labour can manage the economy for their benefit. They are being joined by sections of the poorer white working class. Livingstone won the support of the large number of ethnic minority voters in London, but lost heavily in the white working class estates, where there was huge anger at the loss of the 10p tax band and the reality of continuing inequality, increasing concern about the NHS and widespread opposition to immigration which is portrayed as costing jobs and housing opportunities.

There is little that Labour can

do to change the trend. The economy is threatened with recession. Oil prices continue to rise. It cannot stop the fall in house prices, particularly now the Bank of England says it will maintain interest rates at the current level through next year. Nor should socialists bemoan its possible fate. As George Monbiot says, this is the most right-wing government since the Second World War (*The Guardian*, 20 May). It does not deserve the slightest support.

However, as the general election approaches, we will doubtless witness the spectacle of self-proclaimed socialists coming to Labour's rescue. Already *Guardian* columnist Seumas Milne is urging the government to adopt policies which 'reverse its haemorrhage of support and lay the ground for a better future'. (*The Guardian*, 22 May) In the London mayoral election, the Galloway wing of Respect called for a vote for Livingstone and had his picture on its leaflets. The SWP wing of Respect, the Left List, stood a candidate, Lindsay German, but supported Livingstone as a second preference. Helpfully, *Socialist Worker* explained where you had to put your cross to do this. SWP leader John Rees agrees with Milne, saying we should 'insist that Labour can help to save itself if it begins to defend those who elected it. Even now Gordon Brown can reverse Labour's decline by making three announcements – that the troops will come home from Iraq and Afghanistan, privatisation will end and a programme of council housing will begin' (*Socialist Worker*, 24 May). We remind Milne and *Socialist Worker* that at the centre of the coalition that brought Labour to power was corporate and banking capital.

The left will also use the bogey of the BNP to re-build Labour's fortunes. That the BNP has done well electorally over the last few years is not in doubt. It now has 100 councillors nationwide compared to 16 four years ago, and it has a seat on the Greater London Assembly because it got just over the 5% threshold. It has attracted support from both the poor white working class and the newly-threatened more affluent layers. But its political influence is extremely limited: it is the government which sets the racist agenda with a succession of terrorism and asylum acts, and the creation of an atmosphere of hostility towards immigrants wherever they come from.

Jimmy German &
Robert Clough

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FRFI £10,000 Fund Drive

FRFI is asking you, our readers to sponsor us in our annual fund drive. The deepening economic crisis has triggered a political crisis for the Labour government. It has thrown into relief the urgent need to build a socialist, anti-imperialist movement in this country since the Tory alternative will be equally reactionary. Our consistent stand against Labour imperialism, our support for the oppressed and working class throughout the world, our engagement in the fight against racism and in defence of democratic rights in Britain, our solidarity with Cuba's socialist example together give us our distinctive voice. We need both to sustain that voice and renew and develop the facilities that enable us to translate our words into actions and campaigns that will help develop the new movement. For this we need your money, and once again we ask you to please give generously to enable us to meet our £10,000 target. Send your donations, payable to Larkin Publications, to: FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

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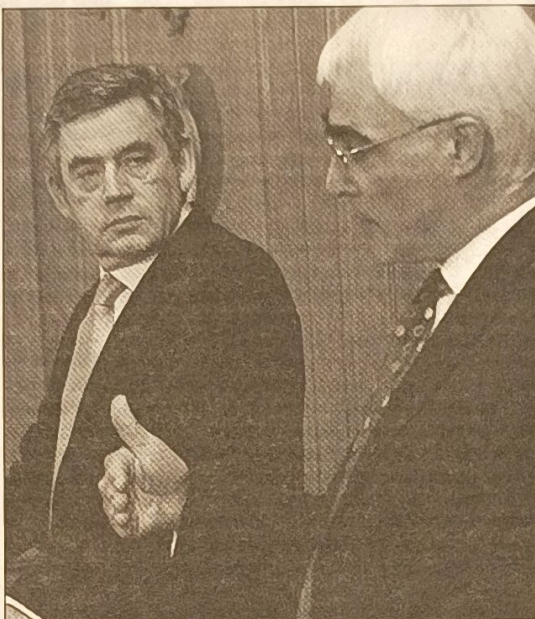
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Britain: digging an even deeper hole

Immediately after the March 2008 Budget a significant number of Labour MPs began to protest against the removal of the 10p starting rate of tax, which was due to come into operation in April 2008. This had been announced a year earlier in Gordon Brown's last Budget. As we pointed out in March 2007, over a year ago, this would hit millions of low-paid workers (see FRFI 196). Could it be that these same Labour MPs had not realised its significance at the time due to the theatrical declaration at the end of Brown's budget speech that the basic rate of income tax would be cut in April 2008 by 2p to 20p in the pound – the lowest basic rate for 75 years? Labour had been pandering to middle class voters throughout its decade in office, and this, after all, was one over on Tory leader David Cameron. DAVID YAFFE reports.

By March 2008 many Labour MPs were becoming uneasy as Labour's popularity rapidly waned throughout the country. Alastair Darling's first Budget heightened their fears. Their parliamentary seats and their privileged lifestyles could easily go in a couple of years if Labour lost the votes of millions of low-paid workers. Frank Field, a right-wing Labour MP, led the protest and the government was eventually forced to listen with local government and London Assembly elections imminent. The results of

those elections were devastating for Labour. Livingstone lost the London mayoral election to Boris Johnson and Labour was driven into third place in the local government elections with only 24% of the vote. With the by-election due in Crewe and Nantwich soon after, the government was forced to take panic measures. In what essentially was a mini-budget only two months after the Budget, Darling introduced £2.7bn tax cuts designed to end the rebellion over the removal of the 10p tax band and im-



Prime Minister Brown and Chancellor Darling: digging deeper holes

prove Labour's chances in the forthcoming by-election (all to no avail, see page 2).

The tax cuts, through an increase of the personal tax allowance by £600 to £6,035, will be worth £120 a year on

average to around 22m basic rate taxpayers. The level at which the 40p tax rate is paid has been lowered so that higher earners paying that rate will not gain or lose from the change. 17m basic rate taxpayers unaf-

ected by the removal of the 10p band will receive a tax cut costing £2bn and described by Darling as 'support for those on middle incomes'. 80% of the 5.3m households which lost from the removal of the 10p band will now be fully compensated at a cost of £700m. However, around 1.1m low-paid workers earning between £6,634 and £13,355 will still be worse off by up to £112 a year. Nevertheless, Frank Field ended his protest, saying the measures taken were wonderful.

In the wake of very poor election results, this somewhat desperate attempt to bribe the electorate will see Darling digging an even deeper hole in public finances than that left by his first Budget. If the tax cuts for most taxpayers this year are not repeated for the next financial year and low-paid losers from the removal of the 10p band are compensated only through tax credits, 18m households will be worse off by around £3 a week in the run-up to the next general election. If the gains are made permanent, public sector net debt will rise above 40% of GDP, breaching one of the government's self-imposed, neo-liberal fiscal rules.

The overall situation can only deteriorate. The government is relying on hopelessly optimistic growth forecasts to allow it to stay within the limits determined by its fiscal rules. A day after the 'mini-budget', the Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, argued that there could be no interest rate cuts before 2010 if infla-

tion were to be kept in check. Inflation will rise far above government targets over the next two years. 'The nice [non-inflationary] consistently expansionary] decade is behind us' he said. Inflation has already reached 3%, well above the 2% target, and with food prices up 6.6% and energy prices 8.3% over the last year and continuing to rise, millions of workers can expect a significant fall in real take-home pay, which will slow down consumer spending and growth. King does not rule out the British economy sinking into a recession. The continuing crisis in the housing and mortgage markets, record oil prices, the rising current account deficit and falling pound can only make matters worse.

Brown told the Institute of Directors at the beginning of May that, despite the fiscal crisis, he intends to cut corporation tax even further. Darling told the annual CBI dinner on 20 May that 'I am determined that British business will not be the fiscal fall guy'. The reform – that means privatisation – of state welfare will continue as Brown's draft Queen's Speech in the middle of May so clearly demonstrated. David Cameron even claimed that the speech had been stolen wholesale from the Tory Party. Public sector workers face significant wage cuts and more workers are being driven into poverty. The coalition that came together to elect the Labour government in 1997 for three consecutive terms of office has fallen apart.

US credit crisis: passing the buck

Since the last issue of FRFI the Bank of England has tossed \$100bn onto the roulette table of finance capital – secured against almost whatever manure the banks want to get off their books. Banks and financial institutions continue to announce write-downs: AIG, the world's largest insurance insurer, announced a further \$9.11bn write-down; bond insurer MBIA revealed a \$3.6bn write-down and Fannie Mae announced losses of \$4.4bn. All managed to sweeten the pill by announcing plans to raise more credit. Citibank announced it would get rid of \$400bn of 'non-core' assets. Wall Street loves optimism, so looked on relatively tolerantly as the billions were tossed onto the bonfire. Since the Fed's sponsored buy-out of Bear Stearns, dealers have begun to assume that it both will step in and can bail them out of any mess. US correspondent STEVE PALMER reports

Some questions

Q: Will it all be over next month?

A: No, this has several years to run – for the reasons why, read on ...

Q: Is this the end of capitalism?

A: Sadly, no – or at least, not yet: what we are witnessing is the slow death of credit as a mechanism to stave off the consequences in the imperialist countries of capitalism's decline. In the process, the underlying crisis will emerge, slashing jobs and living standards. Second, active mass opposition to the crisis has to develop. Finally, opposition has to develop into a real revolutionary movement directed against capitalism, root and branch. Only then is there a real possibility of end-

ing capitalism. Without this, capitalism will drive like a tank over the prostrate working class and reorganise and rebuild itself for another round of capitalist exploitation – if it doesn't destroy us and the planet in the process.

Q: What's going to happen next?

A: The following points may help you to understand what to watch for and how things are going to develop.

Are we 'over the worst'?

First, the 'we' here invariably means the capitalists, their banks and their loot – not your average Joe – 'us'. The US government leapt into action over a weekend in March to stop large chunks of the financial system from toppling over

the precipice, throwing \$50bn onto the table. Meanwhile, troubled mortgage borrowers have been roasting on a spit for months and months with plenty of verbal assistance, but mere crumbs of real help.

Second, it is quite useless to look to the opinions of the capitalists and their lackeys for any guidance. In fact it seems we've been over the worst for the last 18 months. In November 2006, Alan Greenspan, former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank told the *New York Times*, when asked about the housing market: 'It looks as though the worst is behind us'. In September 2007, Sam Molinaro echoed: 'the worst is largely behind us'. Sam was a Chief Financial Officer; by the end of March his job and his bank – Bear Stearns – had disappeared. 'Over the worst' ... 'turned the corner' ... 'stopped the bleeding' ... 'bottomed out' ... 'the correction is behind us' ... We've heard all the clichés, several times. Many who utter them don't even realise they are lying.

Massaging the numbers

Most of what we're told about this crisis, the state of the banks and the write-downs comes from press releases and 'executive overviews'. But the actual accounts raise more questions than answers. This is because of ingenious categorisation of some securities. For example,* Freddie Mac, the government sponsored enterprise which



Wall Street, New York

buys many securitized mortgages, tucked \$32.4bn of paper losses into a 'temporary' category. This means they don't have to be counted in the company's net income or capital. Which is just as well, since the losses are about double the company's stock market valuation.

This kind of quiet massaging of numbers is going on at many financial institutions. But what gets forced down like this, sooner or later, will get coughed back up. Remember to look shocked when these 'surprise' losses start to surface, the fall guys get fired and all the other theatrical antics of bourgeois hypocrisy begin.

It ain't just subprime ...

This crisis has been characterised as a crisis in the 'subprime' mortgage market; it is claimed that as soon as the 'resets' (raising of payments) have worked their way through, in 2009 everything should bounce back to 'normal'. First it's going to take longer than that to work through, since the process of

foreclosing on houses, whose 'owners' can no longer afford the mortgage, takes somewhere between 9 and 15 months to actually happen, meaning that the consequences of subprime for the housing market are going to continue into 2010. Also, 'subprimes' are only the first stage in the mortgage problems. There are another couple of mouthfuls of alphabet soup the money market is going to have to swallow: 'option ARMs' and 'HELOCs'. 'Option ARMs' are another variety of adjustable rate mortgage, which start to reset in volume in 2010 through 2012, leading to further losses in derivatives. HELOCs are 'Home Equity Lines Of Credit' – loans taken against outstanding equity in homes, secured loans, with a term of 5-25 years. Borrowers can borrow up to a limit, a limit which is now being drastically reduced because the fall in house prices is shrinking the available equity. Some people are finding that they now owe more than the equity in their house. Even if they were able to sell the house, they can't cover their borrowing. Add to this the increasing inflation (petrol prices at the pump have risen by more than 10% in the last month) and the pressure to default, even for prime borrowers, is going to soar.

It ain't just mortgages ...

The ripples from the crisis continue to spread outwards and turn into waves. In contrast to the relative complacency on Wall Street, a sense of fright, verging on panic, is starting to take over States and municipal organizations which sought finance in the auction-rate market which used to be a cheap source

of finance. The rates get periodically reset by an auction and, since this market seized up in January, they have shot up, sometimes to 25% or higher, and borrowers have found that they can only get out by taking a significant 'haircut' – penalty loss – of up to 50%. The lawsuits have started to fly; some banks have grudgingly returned some money; others are defiant. Worst of all, citizens are going to be paying the price – cuts in services, higher local and state taxes, deeper borrowing. California has issued 'pink slips' – US term for redundancy notices – to 18,000 teachers, further eroding the already poorly functioning public school system.

They'll fix it, somehow ...

No they won't, because they can't. What's going on here is an updated version of 'pass the parcel'. 'They' means the government. What has happened so far is that the US Federal Reserve and the British Bank of England have lent out tens of billions of dollars in exchange for securities of dubious quality – they have assumed the risks, or, at least, some of them, from the banks. They can't make the risks go away, only pass them on to the working class 'somehow'. It took the US Federal Reserve about 36 hours and \$50bn to stop the financial system collapsing. Yet millions of homeowners have been turning into ex-homeowners over the last year and are still waiting for Congress to vote them any serious relief. So long as they can keep this up, without resistance, capitalism will get through this.

* Jonathan Well, 'Freddie Mac suffers bout of temporary insanity', www.bloomberg.com

Trevor Phillips batting for Britain

Forty years ago, in April 1968, Conservative MP Enoch Powell gave a speech in Birmingham attacking immigration from the British Commonwealth into Britain. He declared, 'We must be mad, literally mad as a nation to be permitting the annual flow of 50,000 dependants... it is like a nation busily engaged in building its own funeral pyre'. Forty years on Guyanese-born Trevor Phillips OBE, on the same date and in the same place, put forward the opposite position: immigration is what will save the British economy in today's competitive and globalised world. **SUSAN DAVIDSON** reports.

The intervening 40 years saw the rise of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) which institutionalised 'multiculturalism' and 'ethnic diversity' into a large, well-resourced non-governmental organisation. Almost every group of immigrants in Britain was encouraged and funded to establish its own community centre and full-time paid workers, hire translators, celebrate cultural festivals and present a sort of corporate face to the rest of society. All this had little to do with the fight against racism. In fact it effectively marginalised the anti-racist struggle, even though all social indicators continued to show, as they do today, that immigrants are among the poorest of the working class in Britain.

By the time Trevor Phillips was appointed as head of the CRE in 2003 times had changed. Labour had been in power for six years, and British armed forces had been at war for five of them. Hostility to the British Muslim population was officially encouraged in the so-called 'war on terror'. The international turmoil caused by wars for oil and precious resources in Africa led to an increase in asylum seekers to this country. Thousands more migrants were to follow, seeking work, at least temporarily, from the new accession countries of Europe.



Trevor Phillips with his gong, earned for serving the interests of British imperialism

It was then that the Labour government decided a change of direction was necessary for the 'race relations industry', as it had come to be known. The CRE was closed down and in September 2006 Trevor Phillips was appointed as Head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which has overall responsibility for race, disability and gender equalities.

But there were other warning signs to give notice that the CRE had had its day and that its very existence had become an irritation to core Labour voters. By 2006 a growing chorus of commentators claimed to speak out for 'the white working class'. A flurry of books, memoirs and biographies were published celebrating the much whiter working class community of the 1950s. Such selective views of the past sentimentalised long-disappeared



The death knell for the CRE, however, was the violence between white and Asian youths that erupted on the streets of Bolton and other northern cities in 2001

skilled workers as essentially conservative, patriotic and British – useful characteristics when the ruling class is engaged in ever more military aggression abroad. Prime Minister-to-be Gordon Brown, in particular, was quick to use 'Britishness' to enhance his own populist image. 'British jobs for British workers', he declaimed to the TUC conference.

Margaret Hodge, Labour MP for Dagenham in Essex, argued that the white working class could turn to the British National Party (BNP) because it perceived the government as privileging immigrant communities over native whites.

The death knell for the CRE, however, was the violence between white and Asian youths that erupted on the streets of Bolton and other northern cities in 2001. Reflecting on these events in 2005 Trevor Phillips concluded that Britain 'is sleepwalking into segregation' and that the CRE had been totally ineffectual in addressing the fundamental structural problems of communities in Britain.

In his Birmingham speech Trevor Phillips offers a new way forward for Britain. He rejects the racism of Enoch Powell and the BNP which is based on the notion that assimilation of the races is impossible and repatriation the only answer. He rejects the special pleading of the 'white working class' lobby and finally he casts off the multiculturalism of the former CRE which, he now says, 'encouraged divisions in British society'. Instead, Phillips speaks on behalf of British capitalism in a globalised world in which national competitiveness is an urgent need and in which the planned

immigration of skilled workers is part of the solution.

Phillips first describes a Britain where integration of the races has worked well on the whole, citing a rate of intermarriage in Britain that is higher than that of the rest of Europe and the US, while 'official surveys indicate that 81% of people in England agree that their local area is a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together'.

He claims, however, that this Britain is threatened, both by those who whip up antagonism to immigration and from immigrants who do not accept integration and British values. Speaking on behalf of British capitalism, Phillips argues that future economic competitiveness and growth depends upon adaptation to the needs of multinational corporations.

Using Britain's Premier league football as an example, Phillips unfolds his vision of a race-blind global interchange of workers. Football is 'watched by half a billion people in over 200 countries... its revenues are touching two billion. Its foreign stars can earn in excess of £100,000 every week – but their good fortune does not depress the wages of home-grown talent. We have an effective system of controlling entry; and none of the teams for which the foreigners play needs some kind of bureaucratic multiculturalism to effect their integration to their club. No-one has had to abandon their flair and brilliance to fit in. In fact the migrant players have for the most part played by the rules... [and] become better at their jobs for learning British ways'.

From the Premier League Phillips

draws the lesson that 'the need for skilled labour is more important than anxieties about cultural difference'. In today's globalised world, he claims, the importation of skilled workers is vital for the economic benefit of a modern Britain and in this we are in competition with the US, Australia and Canada who are already sweeping in clever foreigners from other nations. Britain needs 'tens of thousands of qualified care workers from the rest of Europe, Africa and elsewhere' if British women are not to be forced out of work to return to work in the home. Already, 'we know that there would be no NHS without foreign doctors, nurses, cleaners and administrators... no Crossrail in London, no Olympics, no new wave of housing... without immigrant carpenters, electricians and bricklayers'.

'Immigration is part of our future,' says Phillips, approvingly quoting Tory leader Cameron's view that 'skilled foreign workers expand our economy and make us more competitive'. He urges the British government forwards to a new social contract: 'Managed Immigration, Active Integration'. He urges the interests of big business.

The immigrant communities for their part will have to make an exchange. They must learn English and, for example, play by the rules on the equality of women and children under the law – though a flexible view on arranged marriages should be taken. A reasonable, accommodating sense of British fair play 'is the essential attitude of British people to difference'.

The 'white working class', for its part, will just have to accept that the needs of big business come first. In exchange they should get more funding to expand and develop the infrastructure of schools, homes and services in areas which are unfairly carrying the burden of increased immigration. Such monies must be presented as public investment for the community as a whole. That, says Phillips, is the way to manage the anxieties of the white working class. Their concerns must be addressed but not by ending immigration: 'We should not try to unlock the potential of our own citizens by locking out the citizens of other countries'.

Phillips' speech is a grovelling manifesto on behalf of British capitalism. He speaks in the interests of the ruling class about the economic benefits of utilising migrant skills and labour. He urges the greedy seizure of talents, developed and paid for by other countries, in the interests of the British state. His talk of British fair play, British law and British decency ignores the reality of Britain at home and in the world. This is a country which is conducting an illegal war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and supports Israeli violence against the Palestinian people. The British companies on whose behalf he speaks so eloquently are involved in the exploitation of resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere. In Britain employers have sweated legal immigrant labour in the picking fields of Norfolk and the British state has criminalised asylum seekers fleeing from imperialist offences against humanity abroad. The public service sector is being delivered into the hands of the capitalist class by an ongoing programme of privatisation and the British state is increasingly persecuting the Muslim community and limiting the right to

protest. Yet this is the boss for whom Phillips is advocate and negotiator. Like a castle made by a child from building blocks, the combined reality of the profit motive, British imperial interests and cutbacks in public spending will knock his house down. The only planned economy is a socialist economy and Trevor Phillips, true servant of the British ruling class, would not like that.

EDUCATION NOTES

'Our schools are not for sale' campaign fights back

The local elections in England on 1 May resulted in the first victories for anti-academy campaigners voted onto local councils. Academy schools, we remind our readers, are state-funded private schools. These hybrid monstrosities were dreamed up from the office of Prime Minister Blair but are the direct result of Gordon Brown's Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Academies are being created by taking state schools out of the control of local education authorities and giving them, together with public land, building contracts and employer rights to private companies like Harris Carpets and organisations like the Church of England.

In Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, nine councillors, eight independent and one Liberal Democrat, were elected on an anti-academy platform and now hold the balance of power on the 36-seat district council. The Barrow councillors are opposed to Cumbria Council's plans to close three of the town's secondaries and open a new academy in September 2009, sponsored by BAE Systems, two local businessmen, the local sixth form college, FE college and university.

Cumbria County Council is following the Labour Party line that 'standards' will be raised through the inspiration and efficiency of the private business sector. Presumably Cumbria regards the armament manufacturer and international sales company BAE (that is currently dodging charges of corruption and bribery about a multi-million pound arms deal with Saudi Arabia) as a shining example of free enterprise and fit for purpose to sponsor a secondary school. Local people, however, have shown that they oppose both handing their schools over to private interests and the closure of three local schools to create one super school as a private finance showcase.

In Calderdale, West Yorkshire, a BNP councillor was elected after campaigning against plans to open a Church-sponsored academy in Halifax. Calderdale NUT secretary Sue McMahon said, 'If the main parties had done more to reflect local people's opinions in opposing this academy, then the BNP might not have got in'.

Deaf to the protests of local people the Labour government remains dazzled by the private sector and hostile to local government. Times are changing however. At this year's NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers) conference, the government was warned that schools are now more wary about the benefits of private business links. It was said that no school would trust the British Airports Authority (BAA) and the companies that run Heathrow's Terminal Five to be in charge of cloakrooms and bags, nor Northern Rock to do the school dinner accounts.

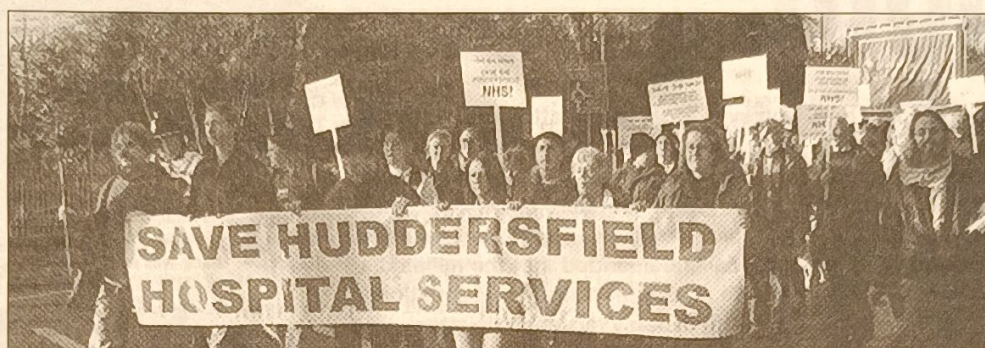
Susan Davidson

*See FRFI pamphlet *Education Notes*, available from BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, price £1+50p p&p.

NHS: multinationals cash in on health

In the last issue of FRFI we showed how the privatisation of the NHS is occurring on a number of different fronts (FRFI 202: Privatising the NHS – Labour steps up the pace). Since then:

- The Department of Health has announced a programme to produce a system of tariffs for community services – those delivered by district nurses and health visitors for instance working for Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) – which are worth £15bn per annum. This will open them up to private providers. The chief executive of Clinovia, a branch of BUPA that provides home treatments, said: 'Any form of tariff will be an enormous benefit to delivering care closer to home because the independent and third sector can look at the tariff and see where they can provide services for better value for money.'
- GPs in rural areas may lose their right to dispense drugs. This they can now do if their patient lives more than a mile from a pharmacy; in future GPs may only dispense if their practice is more than a mile from a pharmacy. Very few of the 1,100 dispensing practices will meet this criterion. Its purpose will be to hand over £400m business per annum to the big pharmacy chains.
- In April the government started a review of the NHS's property portfolio – estimated to be worth over £20bn – with a view to selling hospital sites to the private sector and leasing them back.
- A consortium of mainly US firms, which includes McKinsey, Kaiser Permanente and Humana, has been appointed to develop and implement an assurance system for 'World Class Commissioning'. This will have profound influence on the way PCTs and their GP practices purchase health care from hospital trusts.



A recent letter by Health Minister Ben Bradshaw to *The Guardian* (14 May 2008) had the effrontery to deny that Labour's proposals are for the privatisation of the NHS. He was responding to an article by George Monbiot, (29 April 2008) who rightly identified the development of polyclinics as a key element in the drive to hand over swathes of the NHS to multinationals. Bradshaw's letter is disingenuous. He claims that first, the main priority for the public is better access to their GP – which means being able 'to see a doctor in the evening or at weekends if they wish'. This was the outcome of a

CBI report on a poll it had commissioned that sampled just over 1,000 people. An earlier Department of Health survey covering 2.6 million people revealed that 84% were happy with GP opening hours – but that was the wrong result! Bradshaw then says that polyclinics have nothing to do with closing down practices or imposing polyclinics. However, simple arithmetic proves the contrary. The Darzi report for London proposes a network of 150 such polyclinics. Each will have between 35 and 50 GPs providing services from the site – a minimum of 5,250 GPs. Currently there

are about 1,600 practices in London with just under 4,900 GPs. It is inconceivable that GP practices will not close down as a consequence, particularly as any privately-run polyclinic will insist on having its own salaried GPs. Furthermore these polyclinics will be more inaccessible for those who need GP service most – the elderly, disabled and those with young children.

Bradshaw criticises Monbiot because he allegedly 'conflates what is being proposed for London with what might happen in other parts of the country'. Yet the polyclinic model is being imposed elsewhere in the country with the demand that every PCT procure one new health-centre in 2008/09 through a process whose detailed rules are not yet clear but where there is a clear bias towards the private sector. It is not for nothing that companies like Virgin Healthcare have been touring the country looking for openings. As with the Independent Sector Treatment Centres, which took work and money from NHS hospitals, the new health-centres will undermine existing facilities, in this case GP practices. The outcome of current proposals for primary care is inevitable: the transformation of GPs from independent contractors into salaried workers who can be hired and fired by the

multinational providers which will own the health-centres or polyclinics of the future.

Yet polyclinics are only part of the privatisation picture. The development of what is now described as 'world class commissioning' is equally important and little understood. The aim is to transform PCTs from being providers of services into commissioners of health care services – including those they currently provide. As Bromley PCT chief executive Simon Robbins puts it,

'We are not going to be in the provider business in due course...if we don't shed our provider arms, and I have two provider services, then we're never going to get the proper focus on commissioning'.

This view emphasises the importance of developing tariffs for PCT services since it provides the basis on which they can be privatised and purchased through the Payment by Results mechanism. Commissioning is already a PCT responsibility; all are supposed to have organised themselves so that GP practices lead the process through local groups or consortia. In the words of Mark Britnall, Department of Health Director of Commissioning, 'Practice-based commissioning is here to stay; my job is to ensure that it flourishes and thrives. World class commissioning is a very public process and practice-based commissioning is its engine room'. Further, he argues:

'I believe that those [commissioning] techniques that have been developed by health insurance companies from different parts of the world are very well suited to the best that we can provide for the English NHS – so that's just one example of where we will look at an idea from elsewhere in the world – in this case the USA and bring it into the English context for the NHS.'

This is the system that denies 20% of the US population access to proper health care and which Michael Moore exposed in *Sicko*. With US and other health care multinationals advising on 'world class commissioning' and, in the future, leading it on the ground through the GPs they employ in their polyclinics, both demand and supply in the NHS will be increasingly dominated by private enterprise. Ben Bradshaw will be proved a complete liar.

Robert Clough



Protesters around Britain have been demonstrating to keep the hospitals and GP surgeries out of the hands of private capital

Privatising the NHS in Newcastle

As part of Labour's privatisation drive, housing, education and healthcare are all for sale in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In 2006, Newcastle Hospitals NHS trust was awarded Foundation Trust status, giving it unlimited powers to enter into joint ventures with the private sector. Construction has already begun for the largest ever PFI health project in the North East and the closure of the General Hospital draws nearer. **SAM MAGILL** reports.

Background

Between 1990 and 2000, Newcastle City Trust greatly cut its hospitals maintenance budget, allocating just £200,000 in 2000 for building work. This was despite reports of cash deficits (£7m for the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) in 1997 alone!). Investment in much-needed refurbishment at the General Hospital (£6m) and RVI (£15m) was offered to the private sector. Then in 1998, plans were laid to close the General Hospital in order to build a new centre at the RVI providing emergency, trauma and intensive care, and neuroscience and infectious diseases services. This was due to be finished in 2002 alongside a new renal and cancer care unit at the Freeman hospital.

PFI profiteers

10 years on the completion date is now 2013 and Equion Ltd (a division of John Laing plc) has landed itself a deal worth £304 million to develop the RVI and Freeman. Construction began in 2005 by Laing O'Rourke, funding and management is being provided by Healthcare Support (Newcastle) Ltd (a joint venture including Equion Ltd, Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Interserve plc). Facilities management and maintenance of the new centres will be provided by Interserve FM. John Laing plc is behind 60 major PFI projects across the UK, including a £180m Ministry of Defence contract, and a £225m Tunbridge Wells hospital project. John Laing saw the value of its infrastructure portfolio

rise by more than a third to £610m in 2007.

Bleeding health care dry

Len Fenwick, the chief executive of Newcastle-upon-Tyne hospitals trust, claims the RVI plans will add 99 beds to the 1,890 already available. This is delusional given that PFI schemes require an average 30% bed loss to become affordable. Whilst Fenwick acknowledges that some PFI schemes have run into trouble, he stresses his trust has 'learned lessons from others' mistakes and negotiated the best contract.

However, Newcastle's health care has already run into problems with privatisation. In 1995 the RVI opened a new multi-storey car park funded by Private Finance Investors Centreland and costing £3m. By 1998 the RVI faced a £350,000 bill for empty parking spaces due to the high parking charges yet was tied into a 15-year lease with Centreland. In April 2007, a different private company, Parkforce UK, took over the parking at the General. They also hiked up prices and directed all the money back into the company – beforehand it had gone back to the hospital. The hospital has to use its own security guards to enforce the new parking system!

Smoke, mirrors and hypocrisy

Currently proposed for the General Hospital site is a 'campus for ageing and vitality', incorporating Newcastle University's Institute for Ageing and Health, an NHS walk-in service and one of Tesco's 60,000 square foot 'Regeneration Partnership Stores'. The closure of the hospital is already secured with a £100m deal for redevelopment of its site. The University, who already own large parts of the site, have invested an extra £30m. At the time of printing, it's uncertain whether Tesco's will secure their contract due to planning application obstacles. Predictably, in the run-up to the recent local elections, the Labour Party used smoke and mirrors in the Wingrove electoral ward which includes the General Hospital to secure votes: its spring newsletter said, 'we want answers' on plans for the General Hospital site from the Lib-Dem council. This is gross hypocrisy considering it is the Labour government that is driving PFI projects and hospital closures locally and nationally! The only thing that's certain for the future of health care in Newcastle is soaring profits for John Laing and friends, protection of big business and a squeeze on healthcare that will hit the working class of the North East hardest.

Old age tax

In May, health secretary Alan Johnson announced a consultation paper to prepare for new legislation to fund elderly care. It is suggested that this will require a new form of social care insurance – an old age tax – which is on top of national insurance contributions. He claimed that over the next 20 years there would be a funding gap for social care of £6 billion. Proposals for private insurance for care and support are also being discussed.

This comes at the same time as a recent British Medical Association survey showed that eight out of ten doctors think that health care services for older people are not good enough, citing a lack of services available in the community (foot services, services for dementia) and concern about inadequate physical and mental stimulation in residential and care homes. In one area in Wiltshire, elderly people have had their bathing support reduced from twice a week to once a week, whilst there is no longer a social worker, a community physiotherapist or a community psychiatric nurse. Increasing demands are being put on carers who are receiving less and less support. This makes it harder for older people to stay in their own homes, yet the same BMA survey found that staffing levels in residential and nursing homes are not adequate. One thing is certain: it is the poor who will feel the double burden of increased taxes and deteriorating care standards.

Hannah Celler

Iraqi poor resist imperialist onslaught

Much of the British media has fallen silent on Iraq. However, most recent attempts by the US, Britain and the Iraqi puppet government forces to secure the imperialist occupation of Iraq is meeting fierce resistance from sections of the Iraqi working class. The present onslaught began on 24 March when 15,000 Iraqi troops and another 15,000 members of the Iraqi police force attacked militia forces in Basra. At least 40 people were killed and 200 injured in the first two days of fighting. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki demanded that the militia disarm within three days. He proclaimed there would be, 'No retreat, no talks, no negotiations.' Al Maliki labelled the militias 'criminals' and 'terrorists', but the only target of his attack was the Mehdi Army, supporters of the Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. The militia supporting Al Maliki's own Dawa Party and the Badr Organisation, supporters of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), were not targeted. Many of the Iraqi government forces are Badr militia in uniform. JIM CRAVEN reports.



May 2008: Iraqi army swarms into Sadr City

The Iraqi government campaign turned into a rout as the Mehdi Army fought back in Basra and widened the struggle to Baghdad and a string of towns including the four southern provincial capitals of Kut, Amarah, Nasariya and Diwaniya. Within four days the Mehdi controlled three quarters of Basra and half of Baghdad, where they called a general strike. They captured Nasariya and in Kut took over five districts, expelling the police. Two brigades from the Iraqi army 14th Division, around 1,200 men, refused to fight. Two Iraqi colonels were suspended. Iraqi officers held fist fights with soldiers from the ranks, trying to force them into battle. In Basra, police loyal to Al Sadr fired on government forces. One hundred soldiers changed sides and joined the Mehdi. Iraqi Defence Minister Jassam Al Obeidi said, 'We were very surprised by a very strong resistance that made us change our plans.' Brigadier General Kathum Alwan said, 'This failure takes Iraq to point zero or worse.' Al Maliki was forced to extend his disarmament deadline to 14 days and offer cash payments for weapons surrendered. Rather than the Mehdi Army disarming, Iraqi TV showed pictures of government forces handing their weapons to Sadrists clerics in return for an olive branch and copies of the Koran. The campaign intended to demonstrate that Iraqi government forces were strong enough to operate independ-

ently of their imperialist masters, but proved precisely the opposite.

Imperialist forces take charge of slaughter

The US pretended to be surprised by Al Maliki's initiative but such independent military action is inconceivable given the range of US military support and that US Transition Teams operate within all sectors of the Iraqi forces. At the start of the attack US Colonel Bill Buckner admitted that 'coalition forces were providing intelligence, surveillance and support aircraft for the operation'. Within a few days, seeing Iraqi government forces being overwhelmed, the US sent in missile firing aircraft and helicopters to rescue them. By day six US ground forces took part in the fighting.

The British too declared they knew nothing of the offensive until it had begun. But Iraqi commandos had a few days previously been training in house-to-house fighting with the British. In Basra, around 150 British military 'advisers' accompanied the Iraqi forces and British artillery bombarded the city.

The imperialists declared curfews in both Basra and Baghdad to give them free-fire zones. By the end of the first week over 300 people had been killed, mostly from air and artillery attacks. The main markets in the Sadr City area of Baghdad had been destroyed. President Bush called it the 'defining moment of the history of Iraq'.

Class attack

The attack on the Mehdi Army signifies a heightening of the class nature of the war in Iraq. Al Sadr gains most of his support, an estimated eight to ten million people, from the Iraqi working class and urban poor. His stronghold, Sadr City in the poorest part of Baghdad, houses three million people. These people have suffered most from the violence and from the collapse of jobs and services due to the imperialist occupation. Unlike the middle classes they do not have the resources to seek refuge elsewhere.

Al Sadr has consistently opposed the occupation. He has also stood against regionalisation, for a united Iraq, and against the privatisation of Iraqi oil. Sadrists deputies withdrew from the Iraqi parliament in protest at the proposed oil law allowing foreign multinationals to plunder the industry.

Al Maliki's Dawa Party and ISCI, the Shiite group with the largest block in Iraq's parliament, always supported the occupation. They represent the elite Iraqi merchant classes who are keen to benefit from the privatisation of Iraqi resources. As commander of US forces General Petraeus emphasised, 'Mr Maliki is very keen on getting large Western corporations re-engaged in the oil and electricity sectors. The (Basra militias) have to be addressed in Iraq.'

The oil law, devised by the oil giants, has stalled because of widespread opposition within Iraq, not least from the oil unions. The unions

have been banned by the Iraqi government, using anti-union laws from Saddam's dictatorship. They remain, however, in control of most of the oil fields. Impatient with the lack of progress, the Kurdish regional government has taken autonomous decisions on the northern oil fields and signed contracts with foreign companies. ISCI now wants to do the same in the massive Basra oil fields. Provincial elections scheduled for October could decide the issue, but ISCI realise they have no chance of winning the election while Al Sadr commands huge support.

Clearing the way for plunder

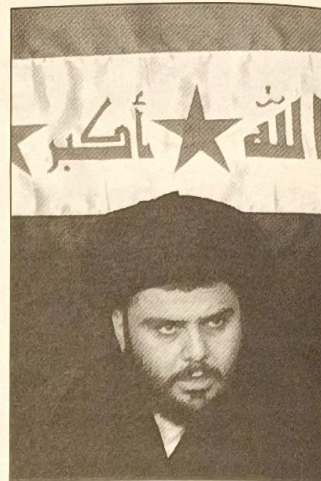
The imperialists have for a long time wanted to crush Al Sadr and the Mehdi Army. They removed the previous Prime Minister Al Jafaari for refusing to carry out their demands. In this respect it is no coincidence that the present attack was launched a few days after US Vice-President Cheney's visit. The US has previously favoured a united Iraqi solution to oil deals, so as to better keep control in their hands, but, as the Wall Street Journal recently reported, Exxon, Mobil Corp, BP and Royal Dutch Shell are increasingly frustrated by the present situation. Cheney's visit was intended to secure arrangements for permanent US bases in Iraq, but he also talked with Shia, Sunni and Kurdish leaders on ways of moving ahead with oil contracts and of the Iraqis taking on more of a fighting role. Even as the attack took place representatives of Exxon, Chevron and BP were negotiating contracts with the Iraqi oil ministry for the Rumaila oil field near Basra.

Imperialists ignore ceasefire

The Mehdi Army fought ferociously against the US onslaught in Najaf in 2004. However, Al Sadr has always been cautious about his supporters being in direct confrontation with the imperialists or with Iraqi government forces or other militias. In February he extended, for six months, a unilateral ceasefire that he announced in August 2007. The imperialists took this opportunity to arrest over 2,000 members of the Mehdi Army. General Petraeus's spokesman, Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, claimed, 'We've degraded their capability.' Republican presidential candidate John McCain, when visiting Iraq in early March, said, 'Moqtada's influence has been on the wane for a long time.' Two weeks later he was forced to pretend he had never said this.

After the first week of the present attacks Al Sadr called on his militia to end 'armed appearances', saying, 'I'm giving the last warning and the last word to the Iraqi government. If they don't come to their senses and curb the militias that have infiltrated the government, we will declare an open war until liberation.' He emphasised that the Sadrists' 'strategic objective' was the 'liberation of Iraq from the occupier' and that the US would be 'defeated just as they were in Vietnam'. A ceasefire was brokered by Shia leaders and Brigadier General Qassem Sulaymani, head of the Quds Brigade of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, a man designated a 'terrorist' by the US government. The reality on the ground, however, has sometimes forced Mehdi commanders to take a different perspective from Al Sadr. One Mehdi leader said, 'We are not ready to stay home waiting to be arrested by the army.' Another pointed out, 'They used Moqtada Al Sadr to publish this truce order so they could enter difficult areas which Iraqi forces could not otherwise control in Basra. They are bluffing and cheating us.'

He was correct. The imperialist and Iraqi forces continued attacking. A demonstration of one million people called by Al Sadr was stopped by the Iraqi army. Al Sadr's second in command was assassinated by Badr militia. US forces laid siege to Sadr City



Shiite cleric Moqtada Al Sadr

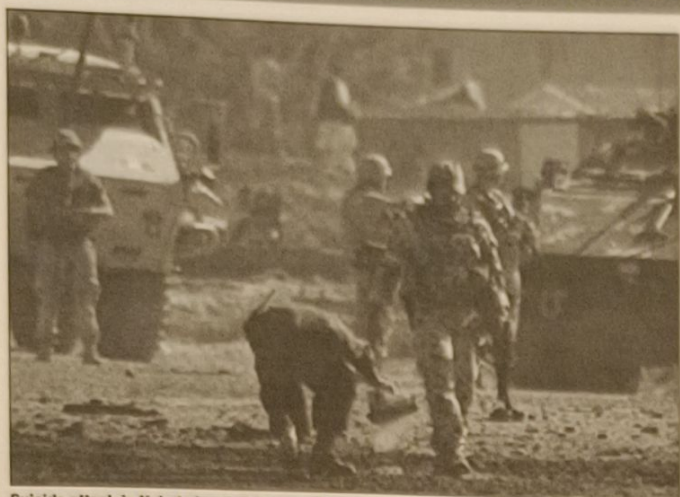
and began building a concrete wall to isolate it from the rest of Baghdad. British armoured vehicles went into Basra on 6 April to be joined two weeks later by US troops. The siege of Sadr City intensified throughout April. Under attack from US bombs, Predator Hellfire missiles and Apache helicopters at least 900 people were killed and 2,600 wounded. On 23 April the Red Cross reported that civilians were cut off from food and water supplies and hospitals were running out of necessities. A Sadr MP, Dr Al Dori, reported, 'They have now completely surrounded Sadr City. The hospitals are jammed with dead bodies... the occupation forces completely ban and open fire at any convoy trying to deliver humanitarian aid. People here suffer from shortage of food supplies. The occupation forces have burnt the city's market.' He went on to compare the atrocities being perpetrated by the Israeli forces in Gaza and what the imperialists were doing in Sadr City.

Resistance continues

The people of Sadr City resisted into May. The imperialist forces and their stooges only managed to penetrate the outskirts of the city. Government troops were forced to abandon their positions under fire from the Mehdi. Resistance fighters continued firing mortars into the Green Zone, previously the only bastion of safety for imperialist and Iraqi government officials. On 12 May Al Sadr allowed Iraqi soldiers, but not US troops, to enter Sadr City, and halted Mehdi Army bombardments of the Green Zone.

Al Maliki threatened that the Sadrists would not be allowed to contest the October elections unless the Mehdi Army disbanded and disarmed. This will not happen. So, if the imperialists fail to crush the Sadrists they may have to cancel the elections. The elections, however, were proposed by the US primarily to give Sunnis in the 'Awakening Councils' some share in the government. The Awakening Councils consist of 90,000 former resistance fighters who give tacit support to the US occupiers in return for \$16 million a month. The imperialists claimed their defection as one of the successes of the 'surge'. However, the Awakening Councils new-found allegiance is very fragile and could explode in the imperialists' face if the US reneges on its promises.

Claims for the success of the US 'surge' are sounding hollow. The official monthly death toll among Iraqis doubled between January and March. 49 US soldiers were killed in April, the worst month since August. The reduction of US forces has been halted so that, for the foreseeable future, there will be more troops in Iraq than before the 'surge'. The planned British force reduction has been cancelled indefinitely. Labour Foreign Secretary David Miliband admitted, 'It is evident that the mission has not been accomplished. The building of the peace [sic] has gone much worse than people expected. That is the basic truth and we might as well accept that.'



Suicide attack in Kabul aimed at German troops

Divisions in NATO aid Afghan resistance

In 2006, the then Labour Defence Secretary, John Reid, claimed British forces were in Afghanistan to 'help and protect the Afghan people reconstruct their own economy and democracy'. The following year was the deadliest since the 2001 invasion with over 6,200 Afghan people killed. Louise Arbour, UN Commissioner for Human Rights, said that civilian casualties have reached 'alarming levels' and an Oxfam report said the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was 'comparable with sub-Saharan Africa'. With the spring the struggle in Afghanistan has intensified again. The US launched unmanned Predator aircraft attacks on the Pakistan border and urged the Pakistan government to move troops into the region. Pashtuns on both sides of the border united. The resistance spread into the Swat Valley and rockets were fired at the provincial capital Peshawar. The Pakistan army suffered thousands of casualties.

In May, 2,300 US troops lead a major attack on the town of Garmser in Helmand province, believed to be a rallying point for resistance fighters from Pakistan. Many of these US troops, newly arrived in Afghanistan, were veterans of battles in Iraq. The Afghan fighters offered little resistance, choosing to tie-up their attackers and concentrate their offensives further north.

Attacks by the Afghan resistance now average almost 550 per month. They control large swathes of the country, forcing the imperialists to rely on missiles and bombs. These lead to greater civilian casualties and turn more Afghans against the occupation.

Imperialists divided

Divisions between NATO countries continue to create further problems for the occupiers. The Canadians, who along with the US, British and Dutch forces have borne the brunt of the

fighting, threatened to pull out unless other NATO members committed more troops to the main southern combat areas. French President Sarkozy, attempting to maintain a working relationship with the US, agreed to send an additional force of 1,000. However, many of these are civilian construction workers and the contingent will be posted in the less troubled east, only relieving US troops to assist the Canadians. German Chancellor Merkel had 'absolutely no time' to consider re-deploying German troops to the south. NATO members are also refusing to supply more helicopters, essential for transport and attack – and due to be in even shorter supply if reports that the resistance fighters are buying Stinger anti-aircraft missiles prove true.

In January the US sent a further 3,500 marines to Afghanistan. They want Britain to extend tours of duty for its troops and establish a permanent US and British command in the south. Britain has refused both requests. Given the reticence of other NATO countries, the US expects to have to send another 7,000 troops by 2009. This would bring total US and NATO forces to around 70,000. Even with 70,000 members of the Afghan army the total is way below the 400,000 that US counter-insurgency doctrine says are needed to control Afghanistan.

Afghan forces unreliable

Meanwhile, British commander Brigadier General Mark Carleton-Smith, has suggested that Afghan forces could take over security in Gereshk, Lashkar Gah and Sangin, while in the same breath saying it could take another eight years to build the Afghan army. Britain is already preparing to extend troop deployments beyond the present 2009 deadline.

The fragility of Afghan security was demonstrated at the end of April when resistance fighters bombed a military parade in Kabul, killing two government officials and narrowly missing the President Hamid Karzai. The British and US ambassadors had to run for cover as none of the forces involved in the event were armed. Just one month before Karzai had claimed the Afghan army were ready to take over security in Kabul. *Jim Craven*

BAE Systems – a case that will not die

Just in case you had no faith in the US Department of Justice, take note that when BAE Systems' chief executive Mike Turner and director Sir Nigel Rudd landed at Houston airport in May, they were arrested. Their documents, mobile phones and laptops were examined and they were told to come back for interviews at a later date. The pair were detained for all of 30 minutes, considerable inconvenience will have resulted. Unfortunately, the Justice Department's concerns are not so much the matter of trading in death, for BAE is Britain's biggest arms company, but rather BAE taking an unfair advantage over its US rivals by allegedly offering bribes to secure the £43 billion Al Yamamah contract with Saudi Arabia in 1985. This is considered not fair and plainly disconcerts Boeing, Lockheed Martin and the rest who consequently lost out. Justice must be done! **TREVOR RAYNE** reports on a case that will not die.

Richard Jordan Gatling, of the Gatling gun, recommended in the 1870s that 'our best policy will be to keep up the prices of the guns and give liberal commissions'. This is the customary practice and well understood as essential if a country is to maintain its arms industry. This industry requires exports if it is to survive and exports require 'commissions', 'agents' fees' and above all discretion. Traditionally, before the 1970s and such as the Lockheed scandal (where Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands was removed from duties for being thought to be 'on the take' in securing the Dutch purchase of F-104 Starfighter aircraft), governments would arrange payments and receipts themselves. However, in the age of privatisation, such responsibilities are subcontracted out, with governments paying firms inflated prices for arms and the firms passing the money on to agents and other intermediaries as payments for 'support services' and the like – about which the government (and Ministry of Defence – MoD) 'know nothing'.

Paying commissions to corrupt Middle Eastern government ministers is well-established practice for BAE. Its forerunner, BAC, paid bribes in 1965 to encourage Saudi Arabia's purchase of rifles and ammunition. However, £43 billion, the biggest contract ever awarded to a British firm, and reputed payments of £30 million every quarter for 10 years into a US bank account controlled by the son of the Saudi Defence Minister, are not easy to hide and incite envy.

The Serious Fraud Office (SFO) wrote to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Kevin Tebbit, about allegations concerning BAE Systems in 2001. Tebbit replied that he had 'no wish to set damaging hares running' and had 'conducted a discrete initial exploration of the allegations' implications'. Tebbit asked the Chair of BAE Systems who reassured him that it was an 'old story' and that BAE was committed 'to operation within the law'. Labour Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon said that, 'Sir Kevin looked into the issue at the time and was satisfied that the allegations were of no relevance to the MoD and that no contractual impropriety regarding government employees existed.' Surprisingly unconvinced by all this, the SFO continued investigations. A report by the National Audit Office into Al Yamamah has not been published. The government halted the SFO investigation at the end of 2006 citing 'security grounds' and co-operation with Saudi Arabia in the war against terrorism. The MoD pressured the investigation to stop.

This April the High Court ruled that the SFO had acted 'unlawfully' when it decided to end its investigation into



the allegations. The SFO is now appealing against the judgment. Should anyone anywhere be concerned about any laxity in BAE System's ethical standards, the firm hired, 'allegedly' for £500,000, the services of the senior judge Lord Woolf to examine procedures so that 'no similar allegations arise in the future'. Lord Woolf issued his recommendations in early May: BAE should develop, publish and implement a code of ethical business conduct; it should forbid 'facilitation' payments. BAE should be open and transparent and similar value for money suggestions from the noble Lord – who felt no need to add comment on public relations.

What is intriguing about the Houston arrests is that BAE owns companies in the US and employs over 25,000 people there. In 2003 this contributed to BAE being given official recognition by the Pentagon as an 'American' company for defence procurement purchases. BAE Systems also owns three Swedish defence companies (Saab, Hagglunds and Bofors) and could be central to the development of the European arms industry to rival that of the US. US shareholdings in BAE increased from 12.6% in 2004 to 26% in 2006. Consequently, BAE Systems is positioned at a critical juncture between Britain, the US and Europe, that repeatedly generates serious disputes in the British ruling class (Cabinet divisions over the sale of Westland helicopters, Thatcher's removal from Prime Minister and the war on Iraq). The case of BAE Systems is unlikely to quietly fade away.

(Acknowledgment to *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*)

Darfur Imperialists vie for Sudan's oil

Since February 2003 civil war has raged in oil-rich Sudan's western region of Darfur. As well as being sub-Saharan Africa's third largest oil producer, Sudan is believed to hold Africa's largest unexploited oil reserves. Sudan is also strategically placed near the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Sudan's oil industry is dominated by Asian countries such as Malaysia, India and China. French and British oil majors are small-time players and the US non-existent due to self-imposed sanctions.

Fuelling the war are the imperialist nations Britain, France and the US, thwarting all attempts at a peaceful resolution in favour of a militaristic solution. Having failed to get UN backing for a joint NATO-African Union force of 26,000 troops into Darfur, France led an EU force of 3,700 soldiers into eastern Chad in February 2008, under the pretext of 'protecting refugees'. Their aim is to get their hands on Sudan's oil and other resources, so choking off the supply of a vital raw material to their strategic rival, China. Understandable concern at the suffering in Darfur is being used by the imperialists to further their ambitions for the region. Meanwhile, the suffering in the neigh-

bouring Democratic Republic of Congo, where over 6 million have died since 1998 and 1,200 die daily, is ignored – why? The answer is that imperialism is in the Congo using the state's feebleness and the country's chaos to loot its mineral riches.

War in Darfur

When the war began it was between the government of Sudan and the 'Darfur rebels' of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Islamit Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). These rebels have split into over 30 infighting factions, much to the chagrin of the British, French and US imperialists who have armed, trained and funded them. The imperialists have been using Israel to attempt to unify the rebels under the name of the Revolutionary Forces for West Sudan. The Deputy Chief of Israeli Intelligence, David Kimsha, has played a key role in organising training in the Al Nagab desert in Palestine. Darfur has become both a cause celebre and a political tool for the Zionists, conforming to their racist anti-Arab ideology.

Over 2.15 million people are internally displaced in Darfur and some 200,000 have fled to neighbouring Chad. According to the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), present in Darfur since 2004, over 131,000 people may

have died there in 2003-2005. The UN said that about 200 people were dying every month in 2006. Most of the deaths result from starvation, malnutrition and diseases which are preventable. MSF says that a fifth, some 25,000 people, have died violent deaths. To promote their interventionist aims the imperialists exaggerate the numbers who have been raped and killed.

The British shed many crocodile tears over the suffering in Darfur but were keen to arrest and detain 80 Darfuri asylum seekers in dawn raids in Britain in March 2007. Lawyers initially obtained an injunction preventing any deportations; however the government appealed and a few Darfuris were deported.

The attempt to pose Darfur's conflict in simplistic terms of Arab versus African is false. It is pushed by groups with dubious political links and backgrounds such as the Zionist front group, the Aegis Trust, and The Independent. Policy Director for the Aegis Trust is Labour ex-minister Stephen Twigg. It is led by brothers Stephen and James Smith, who run the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre in Nottingham. They have led the propaganda campaign for military intervention in Darfur. They must not succeed. Hands off Darfur! No war for oil!

Charles Chinweizu



Bolivian President, Evo Morales

Bolivia Ruling class aims for destabilisation to overturn progressive government

On 10 August Evo Morales will face a recall referendum on his Bolivian presidency. Should he fail to get the same level of support as when he was elected in December 2005 (54%), he will stand down for fresh elections. The same will apply to the governors of the nine departments of the country. The referendum follows determined resistance by the Bolivian ruling class to the reforms Morales has introduced since he was elected as the first indigenous president of the country. This came to a head with an 'autonomy referendum' in Santa Cruz department on 4 May which the ruling class claimed as a victory since 79% of the votes were in favour of autonomy. However, the poor of Santa Cruz city rioted in protest and burned ballot boxes, and 39% of the people abstained compared to 16% in the 2005 elections. The Bolivian people face a tremendous challenge, the outcome of which could have a profound effect on progressive developments throughout Latin America. As Hugo Chavez has said: 'to hit Bolivia is to hit South America's geopolitical heart'. **ROBERT CLOUGH reports.**

Backed by the US and Britain, the Bolivian ruling class has been mobilising opposition to Morales in its Santa Cruz stronghold. Wealthy landowners and agribusiness representatives orchestrated the referendum which the National Election Court deemed illegal since it involved only Santa Cruz residents. In reality the referendum was not about autonomy but separation. The statutes that were put to the vote would allow the department to:

- determine its residency and immigration policy – a racist drive to exclude indigenous people migrating from the poorer west of the country;
- negotiate international treaties;
- levy its own taxes, retaining those derived from the export of gas;
- establish and run its own police force;
- end any attempt at land reform: 'Property rights over land, the regulation of rights, the distribution, redistribution and administration of lands

...are the responsibility of the Provincial government.'

From the 1950s, successive Bolivian governments and military dictatorships funnelled money into Santa Cruz, supporting the development of vast *latifundia* devoted to soya bean production and cattle ranching. Bolivia's Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) says that 400 individuals own 70% of the country's productive land, whilst in Santa Cruz department, 25 landowners hold 22m hectares, 60% of its entire territory. These shameful figures are backed by a 2005 UN report which calculated that 100 families controlled over 20 million hectares of land.

Systematic settlement of Santa Cruz started after the Second World War with pro-Hitler Ustashi Croats driven out of socialist Yugoslavia and Nazis fleeing a defeated Germany. They created a virulently racist culture which expresses itself in a violent hatred of indigenous people. During the Hugo



The poor burn ballot boxes in the slums of Santa Cruz

Banzer military dictatorship of the 1970s, vast tracts of lands, some exceeding 100,000 hectares, were handed over to political cronies regardless of whether indigenous people occupied them or not. Much of this land was left idle; where it was worked, landowners established a system of indentured labour which continues today. Banzer even offered 800,000 hectares of land to white Rhodesian and South African farmers, his Immigration Secretary telling them 'you will certainly find our Indians no more stupid or lazy than [your] own blacks'. Banzer also protected the development of the Bolivian cocaine trade; drug wealth flooded into Santa Cruz, financing a coup in 1980 and causing a US State Department official to declare 'for the first time the mafia has bought

itself a government'. The discovery of large gas reserves in Santa Cruz and neighbouring Tarija departments has augmented the wealth of the eastern part of the country even further.

The Morales government

What upsets the Santa Cruz ruling class is that Morales has delivered on some of his promises and it has a real fear that, however cautious the land reform proposals might be, they will pose a real threat to its wealth and power. In May 2006 Morales announced the nationalisation of Bolivia's gas and oil reserves, forcing the multinationals to renegotiate their contracts with much higher tax and royalty rates – 82% rather than the 18% set following the 1997 privatisation. Under the contracts negotiated in 1997, multina-

tionals had been paying around \$150m a year in tax and royalties (\$180m in 2005); in 2007 this increased to \$1.93bn, equivalent to more than 10% of GNP. Some of the extra revenue has been spent on providing a pension to the over-60s for the first time, despite determined opposition from the ruling class majority in the Senate.

Bolivia has joined the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. In March 2006 it implemented a literacy campaign with Cuban materials and financed by Venezuela which by this April had taught 77% of the country's illiterate population to read and write. The plan is to become the third Latin American country after Cuba and Venezuela to be illiteracy-free and to achieve this target by November this year. Cuban doctors have also treated tens of thousands suffering from treatable eye diseases.

The Morales government has also sought to restrict US economic and political domination in a number of ways. It has withdrawn from the US-run School of the Americas, the infamous torture school now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Co-operation. It opposed a free trade agreement with the US and in March 2006 refused to renew its standby agreement with the IMF which had been responsible for imposing the neo-liberal policies that devastated the country in the 1980s and 1990s. It also withdrew from the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, an arbitration system characterised by its lack of transparency and bias toward multinationals. On 14 May 2008 the government accused US multinational Hewlett Packard of failing to pay \$12m import duties on computers brought into the country – a standard practice of multinationals.

The Morales land reform pro-

Colombia – the sickness of US imperialism

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were formed in the 1960s as a defence force of armed peasants fighting their displacement in the south of the country. During its long struggle for peace and equality, FARC has undertaken three peace initiatives – 1984-1990, 1999-2001 and 2007-2008. Each has been met with the cruelest of responses, at best simple rejection, more usually the killing of any FARC member who stepped forward to discuss political solutions to the 45-year violent class war, or enter into any negotiation. Thus in March, Commanders Raul Reyes and Julian Conrado were killed by US aircraft after phoning to arrange the unilateral release of prisoners of war.

The current plan to liquidate the leadership of FARC, announced as Plan Victoria, started in January 2007 and extends the Plan Patriota of Uribe's first term (2002-6). It aims to

defeat all opposition to US corporations pillaging Colombia's oil, coal, and other natural resources. Plan Victoria is led by General Alejandro Navas, with 14,300 troops in southern Colombia and back-up from the air force and navy equipped with nine Brazilian Supertucano aircraft.

The US has exploited all attempts at negotiation by the FARC over the exchange of prisoners of war to trace and execute FARC negotiators. In 2005 the US extended its \$5 million bounty on each and every member of the FARC secretariat to foreign bounty hunters. In March this year, Commander Ivan Rios was murdered and the bounty claimed.

On 6 March, a 200,000-strong march against state terror saw hundreds of Colombian activists for peace and justice threatened, abused, and accused by Uribe of 'supporting the FARC'. This gave the green light to

the death squads, who murdered the leader of the march and four other human rights spokespersons. Immediately afterwards, the Confederation of Colombian Workers (CUT) reported several assassinations and assaults including the head of its education section, the head of the banking employees union, a leader of the teachers union, and a researcher at a pedagogical institute.

Uribe's US-funded killing machine has 200,000 military, 30,000 police, several thousand death squad killers and over a million middle and upper class Colombians who support 'wiping out the FARC' – meaning eliminating independent popular organisations. Uribe, in combining mass mobilisation with state terror, is the closest that Colombia has seen to a fascist ruler.

The battle in the US

Ricardo Palmera (Simon Trinidad) is a peace negotiator for FARC. More

than three years ago Palmera was in Ecuador to meet a UN official to discuss prisoner exchanges between the FARC and the Colombian government. US and Colombian agents kidnapped and extradited him to the USA in 2004 where he is held in solitary confinement. At his first trial the jurors did not find him guilty of any charge, so the Judge Hogan declared a mistrial. At the start of the retrial, Judge Hogan was caught collaborating with US Prosecutor Ken Kohl and had to step down. Hogan's replacement, Judge Lambert, refused to allow Palmera any witnesses, but let the US prosecutor use dozens – paid informants, convicted drug runners, and corrupt Colombian government officials.

Palmera was then found not guilty of four charges including terrorism and kidnapping, but guilty of conspiracy to kidnap three US military contractors in February 2003, captured as part of FARC's war against the Colombian government. On 28 January this year, Palmera was given a 60-year sentence, made possible by adding a charge of 'terrorism' to the accusations. The contractors, who were held following an air crash, remain in FARC's hands.

In an attempt to create a complete

cover-up, Palmera was also separately charged with drug trafficking. Judge Lambert, who had already won his spurs with the establishment, faced a hung jury in the Federal Court on 21 April, and declared another mistrial. Yet in order not to embarrass itself further, the US prosecution then asked that all drug charges be dropped. Tom Burke of the National Committee to Free Ricardo Palmera stated, 'The prosecution and the US government want to portray Ricardo Palmera as a criminal and criminalise the struggle of the Colombian people who are fighting for a just society free of foreign domination. They failed.'

Ricardo Palmera is held under 'special administrative measures' in solitary confinement, and not allowed any visits from family, friends, or supporters. The media is not allowed to interview him.

To write and congratulate Ricardo Palmera on his latest victory, address cards and letters to:

Ricardo Palmera
c/o Federal Public Defender for DC,
Robert Tucker
625 Indiana Ave, Suite 550
Washington DC 20004

Alvaro Michaels

gramme followed a series of decrees in May 2006. In its first year, it distributed six million hectares to landless peasants. It aims to award 20 million hectares, a fifth of the nation's total land area, over a five-year period, to those with insufficient land or none at all – some 2.5 million farmers out of a total population of eight million. Morales proclaimed that, 'the goal of this agrarian revolution is to break up oligarchic land holdings and distribute and redistribute land to those who need it'. So far redistributed land has been state-owned, but more recently officials from the INRA moved into Cordillera in the south of Santa Cruz to validate land titles and met armed resistance from landowners and their hirelings. The decrees allow confiscation of estates where INRA determines that there is any form of indebted labour, common in Cordillera.

Politically the most important measure of the government has been the establishment of a Constituent Assembly. Convened in August 2006, its purpose has been to refound Bolivia as a state that represents the indigenous majority rather than the privileged white and *mestizo* minority. Its deliberations have been fiercely obstructed by representatives of ruling class parties such as the right-wing PODEMOS, led by former president Jorge Quiroga, a one-time Banzer ally, which had a substantial minority of the delegates. In one incident, crowds of racists assaulted indigenous delegates including the president. The assembly finally approved a new constitution in December 2007, exploiting a boycott by the opposition to ensure that its statutes were approved by the necessary two-thirds majority. Plans to put it to the vote in May were suspended when the National Electoral Court ruled that there was not enough time to prepare the vote. The referendum would have given the Bolivian people the choice as to whether to limit landholdings to 5,000 or 10,000 hectares.

What will happen next?

In June three other resource-rich departments in the east plan to hold

equally illegal autonomy votes: Beni and Pando on 1 June and Tarija on 22 June. Landowners in the three departments are equally opposed to land reforms which would break up their holdings and hand them over to the 'Indians' they so despise. Leading the opposition, however, is Santa Cruz governor Ruben Costas, one-time head of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee, who owns 15,000 hectares of land. The current head of the Committee, Branko Marinkovic, is the son of an Ustashi Croat. Marinkovic is known to own 3,000 hectares together with a vegetable oil factory, whilst his sisters hold a further 14,000 hectares seized illegally from the Guarayo people. Some estimate the entire Marinkovic holding at 90,000 hectares – more than 300 square miles.

Behind these racists stand the US and Britain. In September 2006, the Bush administration appointed Philip Goldberg as US ambassador to Bolivia. Goldberg served in Bosnia between 1994 and 1996 and was Chief of Staff to the US delegation at the 1995 Dayton conference which agreed the break-up of Yugoslavia. From 2004 he was Chief of Mission in Kosovo and helped engineer Kosovo's separation from Serbia. He is also a member of the Latin American International Centre for Balkanisation (CONFILAR) whose headquarters are in Santa Cruz. The clear reason for his appointment is to promote a strategy of Balkanisation to undermine progressive developments in Latin America. He is being helped by grants from the likes of the National Endowment for Democracy and USAID totalling \$120m since 2005. The US Embassy has sent a letter to all US citizens in Bolivia asking them to inform on the activities of Cubans and Venezuelans in Bolivia, and to report any government action against reactionary protestors. Meanwhile the Bolivian Ambassador to Britain, Maria Souvion, has complained that the Foreign Office recently organised a meeting in Parliament with Morales' opponents.

However, the imperialists are not having everything their own way. Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua have made it clear that they stand with

Morales. Meeting in emergency session on 3 May, the Organisation of American States also agreed a declaration of support for the Morales government which opposed any attempt to 'disrupt' Bolivia's territorial integrity. Even the Bolivian army has weighed in: General Luis Trigo Antelo, the Bolivian Armed Forces' commander in chief, has warned Santa Cruz and the other departments seeking autonomy that the army will 'not allow separatism'. Meanwhile Morales has continued with the nationalisation programme. On 1 May, he announced that the Bolivian government would nationalise the local subsidiary of British Petroleum and two other companies: Ashmore Energy International (in which Marinkovic was a large shareholder) and Compañía Logística de Hidrocaburos Boliviana. That same day he also announced the nationalisation of Entel, the largest telecommunications company in Bolivia, despite threats from its Italian owners who are now taking the Bolivian government to the World Bank.

Crucially, however, it is the masses that will decide, as they did in the Cochabamba Water War of 2000 and the Gas Wars of 2003 and 2005. On the day of the referendum indigenous working class and poor from the huge Plan 3000 slum in Santa Cruz city burned ballot boxes and fought the neo-fascist Union of Santa Cruz Youth. The same day a massive demonstration took place in Cochabamba as up to half a million people showed the depth of opposition to the ruling class manoeuvres. Cochabamba's governor, Manfred Reyes, who was driven out of the city in December 2006 for supporting autonomy, remains unable to return from his Santa Cruz refuge.

Although the Bolivian economy is expanding and living standards are improving for many, the ruling class is likely to create food shortages and economic disruption to promote a climate of political instability. It is now down to the Bolivian anti-imperialist social movements which organise the mass of the rural and urban indigenous poor, and which have been undefeated for many years, to have the final say.

NEPAL

Maoist party wins election



'This victory is a command by the Nepali people to establish lasting peace' Prachanda, April 2008

On 10 April, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)) won elections for a Constituent Assembly with 31% of the vote: they gained 120 of the 240 directly-elected seats and 100 of the seats allotted through proportional representation. The Maoists' spectacular victory was a shock for the regional and global powers who presumed that the bourgeois Nepali Congress Party and its allies would form the government. The Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal (UML) had 110 and 103 seats respectively. The US embassy in Kathmandu had scornfully predicted that the CPN(M) would garner a mere 10% of the vote.

The election of a Constituent Assembly, which will write a new constitution for Nepal, was the cornerstone of the 2006 peace deal struck with the Maoist rebels which ended the civil war in Nepal and forced the king, Gyanendra, to end direct rule and restore parliament. An estimated 60% of the 17.6 million electorate voted, lining up before dawn at the 20,000 polling stations, many voting for the first time in their lives. Many of the CPN(M)'s votes came from the *dalit*, or untouchable caste, who form 14% of the population. The CPN(M) has promised to end both caste and gender discrimination. It has 21 women in the new assembly, compared with the Nepal Congress Party's one.

However, with 601 seats in total in the new Constituent Assembly, the CPM(N) lacks an overall majority, and will need to build alliances. CPN(M) leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, known by his rebel name of Prachanda, 'the fierce one', said that all political parties should unite to push ahead the peace process and implement the republican agenda. The most pressing task will be to form a new government. When asked how the CPN(M) could form a government without the two-thirds majority required by the Interim Constitution, Prachanda was clear: 'We are trying our best to build consensus and ultimately we will get consensus'.

The immediate aim is to replace the monarchy with an elected head of state. Prachanda has said that the king will be accorded every respect as a citizen of Nepal as long as he co-oper-

ates with the forthcoming abolition of the monarchy rather than having to be forced out. The CPN(M) is drafting a new constitution which provides for a prime minister and a president. Prachanda is likely to become Nepal's first 'executive president', but he has indicated that in the meantime he would accept the post of prime minister with the responsibility of the head of state, like the present incumbent Prime Minister Girija Prasad, who has yet to resign – an indication of some of the challenges the new government will face. The ruling class will not easily give up its privileges nor its power.

While the Maoists have put down their arms, they have not disbanded. Access to the People's Liberation Army's weapons is still under the conditions of a complicated arrangement involving the UN. The PLA has stated that they will be used in defence against any attack by the army or an outside force. They may yet be needed. For though isolated and discredited by the mass of the people and abandoned by even bourgeois forces, King Gyanendra still enjoys support from the army generals. They may not readily accept their leadership being replaced by PLA chiefs. The imperialist powers are also biding their time, waiting to see how much of a threat the Maoist leadership poses to their interests should they pursue a more revolutionary agenda. Prachanda has stated that after the implementation of the republican agenda the country would tread the path of 'economic revolution'.

The CPN(M) has been voted in because it has championed the cause of some of the poorest people in the world, promising to improve their conditions. How far it is now able to do so will depend on the Maoists' political will and their ability to mobilise the masses. Any radical economic reform will be met with opposition by the other parties and strain whatever coalition is now formed. This will derail the 'peaceful' conditions under which the CPN(M) is seeking to develop the revolutionary process. However, the elections have shown that the CPN(M) has the mass of the people on its side and in those circumstances, real change is possible.

Andrew Alexander

Venezuela Confronting the food crisis

'The food crisis is the greatest demonstration of the historical failure of the capitalist model.'
President Hugo Chavez

An extraordinary meeting of the member nations of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) met in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, on 23 and 24 April to discuss the world food crisis and the political crisis in eastern Bolivia.

At the meeting, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, Bolivian President Evo Morales, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez signed accords to promote mutual agricultural development, create a joint food distribution network and set up a \$100 million ALBA food security fund in the Bank of ALBA, created in January. As Chavez pointed out, the crisis, described by the United Nations World Food Programme as 'a silent tsunami', demands an internationally co-ordinated response. 'ALBA announces its willingness to assume responsibility, ALBA responds immediately... here we are'. Carlos Lage blamed the food crisis on an 'unjust international economic order' in which 'the logic is profit and not the

satisfaction of people's needs'.

The agricultural agreements will focus on rice, corn, oil for human consumption, beans, beef and milk and the improvement of irrigation. The ALBA leaders also agreed to form a public food distribution network with regulated prices to prevent private price speculation.

Venezuela has already redistributed over 2 million hectares of land and increased government funding for agricultural production by 728% over the past three years. Hugo Chavez has spoken of the need to 'move away from the oil-based production model. The future of the country is in the land... food production is the most important'. In February the Venezuelan government set up a state-organised food distribution organisation, PDVAL (administered by the state oil company PDVSA), to supplement its network of state-owned markets, Mercal, aimed at the poorest sections of society. PDVAL will ensure a wider distribution of basic food items to a wider section of the population at regulated prices, enforce distribution by privately-owned companies which have been stockpiling some items and combat the smuggling of food over the border. PDVAL is already going



some way to alleviate the shortages and high prices of items such as oil, rice, milk and wheat. PDVAL is to distribute some 74,000 tons of imported food, such as powdered milk. Despite its own shortages, in April Venezuela sent 364 tons of meat, milk, lentils, oil and vegetables to Haiti where the poorest sections of the population were facing near-starvation because of rising food costs.

The ALBA meeting also pledged solidarity with the Bolivian government against the right-wing secessionist movement led by rich landowners in Santa Cruz, calling it 'a frank violation of the constitution and Bolivian laws'. Morales described the May separatist referendum as 'a bridge point for the Empire here in Bolivia disguised by the euphemism of autonomy'.

Cat Wiener

Information from Venezuelanalysis.com
24.04.08 and Debate Socialist 3-9 March 2008

The rioting that started in Tibet on 14 March was quickly seized on by the imperialist media as a stick with which to beat China. There followed widely-reported protests as the Olympic torch made its passage through Europe. However, claims that what was taking place was a struggle for national liberation are wide of the mark, as THOMAS VINCENT reports.

TIBET

No struggle for freedom

Before the revolution: the rule of brute force and superstition

The socialist revolution which started in 1951 was a historic advance for the mass of Tibetan people.* Prior to the revolution the majority of Tibetans were held in serf slavery to the religious and secular aristocracy, and below this around 5% of the population were 'chattel slaves', lacking even the right to grow crops for themselves and were often starved, beaten or worked to death. The religious and secular aristocracy and the government accounted for 2% of the population, with just 626 people out of a population of two to three million owning 93% of all land and wealth and 70% of yaks. Serfs worked 16 to 18 hours a day, keeping only a quarter of the food they grew, whilst the ruling classes spent their time eating, gambling, memorising religious dogma and relaxing. Poor monks were subject to menial labour and beatings from the upper abbots. To be a woman was considered proof of sins in a past life. Women were forbidden from raising their eyes above a man's knees and husbands were permitted to slice off the end of their wife's nose as punishment for sleeping with another man. Freedom of religion was forbidden, and women were reportedly burnt to death for practising the pre-Buddhist traditional religion of Bon. Armed gangs were employed by the aristocracy to enforce their rule, combined with groups of monks known as the 'Iron Bars' after the metal rods they used to beat people. Whipping a person to the point of death and then leaving them to die elsewhere was considered consistent with the Buddhist conception of 'non-violence'.

Religious superstition dominated the lives of the Tibetan masses and was used to justify their exploitation. At a time when half of the Tibetan population could not afford butter, the main source of protein available, a third of all butter produced in Tibet was burned as religious offerings. Women were burned to death for giving birth to twins, which was considered proof of having slept with a devil. Using iron ploughs, mining coal, harvesting fish or game and medical innovations were all prohibited by religious dogma, holding back the development of the productive forces to meet people's needs.

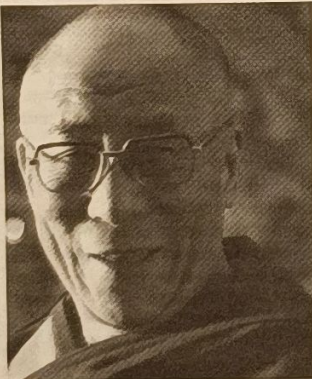
The revolution comes to Tibet

Socialism was not 'imposed on Tibet' at the end of a gun. When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Tibet in 1951 it was under a '17-point agreement' with the Tibetan ruling class, whereby they would remain in power as a local government, and Tibet would have the status of an autonomous region within the Chinese republic. Previous to this Tibet's geographical isolation had meant there had been little contact between the Tibetan masses and the revolutionary movements sweeping the rest of China. Yet it was not long before news of the freedom of serfs in the rest of China began to spread, and the actions of the PLA in building schools, hospitals and roads and importing af-

fordable goods such as tea and matches, attracted more and more Tibetans into the revolutionary movement.

Tibetan serfs had already been fighting back against their class oppression, with documented uprisings in 1908, 1918, 1931 and the 1940s, which were all brutally repressed. Now, with the spread of the Chinese revolution into Tibet they had the opportunity for a lasting victory against their oppressors. No longer bound to the monasteries for life, thousands of young monks abandoned the priesthood to take up productive work. PLA road-building camps became a magnet for escaped serfs and chattel slaves, where they studied the principles and analysis of the Chinese revolution.

In March 1959, in an attempt to put a stop to this, the Tibetan ruling class with CIA funds and training, organised an assault on the Chinese garrison in Lhasa and along the Chinese-Indian border. With little support from the masses, the uprising was defeated in a matter of days. 13,000 members of the old feudal aristocracy went into exile and new organs of popular power were created, with a thousand Tibetan students rushing to contribute to the organisation of the revolution. In the initial stages land rents were slashed, forced labour was abolished, slaves were freed, and the massive debts of serfs to their former masters were cancelled.



CIA-backed religious leader, the Dalai Lama, in exile

Exploitation returns to Tibet

In the years following the end of the Cultural Revolution and Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in China, these movements were defeated, and Deng's aims of establishing Tibet as an 'efficient' capitalist area of exploitation are now being realised. Major investment is taking place as part of China's Western Development Policy, and in 2006 the Qingzang railway was inaugurated, connecting Lhasa to the rest of China. Tibet's GDP in 2006 was \$3.8 billion, more than double that of 2000, with an average annual growth of 12%. In 2006 more than half of this was contributed by the service sector, such as hotels and taxis, with the service sector exceeding the area's primary sector for the first time.

There are more than 70 known mineral types in Tibet, with reserves of 12

of them ranking among the top five in China at a provincial level. These include minerals crucial to the metallurgical, chemical, construction, national defence and electronic industries. Whilst having few reserves of coal, oil and natural gas, Tibet has strong potential for hydro, geothermal, wind and solar energy, already producing around 30% of China's hydro energy annually at 200 million kw and leading China in geothermal reserves. It is this wealth which is being fought over by the Tibetan and Chinese ruling classes, in a counter-revolutionary process which has set the context for the recent violence.

Violence targets ethnic minorities

Although in the initial rioting police cars, fire engines and other official vehicles were torched, available eyewitness accounts suggest rioters quickly moved on to target homes, hotels and businesses owned by Han Chinese (China's largest ethnic group), Hui Chinese (a Muslim minority) and other non-Tibetan ethnic groups. Shops were smashed and looted, hotels vandalised. Han and Hui Chinese were beaten in the streets and had their homes torched, and at least one mosque was reported to be set on fire. The official Chinese media agency Xinhua reported that on 14 March rioters in Lhasa injured 623 people, 382 of them civilians, and killed 18 civilians. Tibetan exiles were quoted in *The Times* as saying five people were killed by police.

Dawa Tsering, an Additional Secretary in the Department of Information and International Relations of the Tibetan government-in-exile, argued in an interview with Radio France International on 2 April that these actions were consistent with the Buddhist conception of 'non-violence':

'First of all, I must make it clear that the Tibetan [rioters] has been non-violent throughout... From the video recordings you can see that the Tibetan rioters were beating Han Chinese, but only beating took place. After the beating the Han Chinese were free to flee. Therefore [there was] only beating, no life was harmed. Those who were killed were all results of accidents. From recordings shown by the Chinese Communist government, we can clearly see that when Tibetan [rioters] were beating on their doors, the Han Chinese all went into hiding upstairs. When the Tibetan [rioters] set fire to the buildings, the Han Chinese remained in hiding instead of escaping, the result is that these Han Chinese were all accidentally burnt to death. Those who set and spread the fire, on the other hand, had no idea whatsoever that there were Han Chinese hiding upstairs.'

Following this, protests took place involving Tibetans in Chinese provinces outside the Tibet Autonomous Region including Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Beijing. According to Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, attacks on between 10 and 20 Chinese embassies and consulates around the world took place at the same time as the riots in Tibet and



'Shops were smashed and looted, hotels vandalised. Han and Hui Chinese were beaten in the streets and had their homes torched'

other Chinese provinces. There have followed widespread support for the protests and vocal condemnations of the Chinese government by imperialist media and governments. Chinese students have mobilised across Europe to expose press misreporting of the riots, and the Cuban and Venezuelan governments have issued statements condemning the imperialists' attempts to isolate China for their own interests.

Forces behind the protests

The Dalai Lama's movement has received substantial backing from the CIA, with an intelligence operation established between the CIA and the Dalai Lama's second eldest brother, Gyalo Thundop, as early as 1951. Currently Tibetans in exile in India continue to receive an annual \$2 million from the US Congress via the National Endowment for Democracy and other channels, with additional millions for 'democracy activities' within the Tibetan exile community. The Dalai Lama has received additional funding from the likes of financier George Soros. Backing for the protests within Tibet has been reported as arising from anger at high inflation within the region, which has been attributed to the high levels of migration of other ethnic groups to Tibet in recent years.

In contrast to those who support a 'Free Tibet', the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile do not support total independence for Tibet, but only greater autonomy within China. The protests seem intended to establish a new accommodation with the Chinese government which will further return the privileges of the religious aristocracy alongside a new layer of wealthy landowners that has arisen as a result of capitalist reforms.

This is the tragedy of Tibet, not the denial of the freedom of the monks to accumulate wealth and live off the backs of the masses. Today monks continue to do no productive work and live luxurious lifestyles on the basis of donations to the temples, from where they travel into the cities to purchase luxury

items such as DVDs and computer games and eat for free at restaurants.

The response of the left

Unable or unwilling to grasp the significance of the counter-revolutionary processes which have led to the present situation, the majority of the British left have given support to the protests which is as fulsome as that of the imperialists. *Socialist Worker* uncritically parroted the line of the CIA-funded Tibetan exile groups, describing the protests as 'the product of decades of national oppression'. The Socialist Party cited casualty figures without mentioning that the majority of those injured and killed had been at the hands of rioters.

We should not forget that these are the same groups which have consistently supported counter-revolutionary movements such as the CIA-backed Solidarnosc in Poland, and the mujahideen in Afghanistan. The virulently anti-communist Reporters Without Borders, who have repeatedly attacked the Cuban Revolution, waged a high-profile campaign not only for the freedom of journalists to report from Tibet, but also against any press criticism of the 'Dalai Lama clique' or of the violence carried out by rioters against ethnic minorities.

There is no national liberation movement in Tibet. There is, on the one hand, the religious aristocracy and the new landowners, jockeying for a greater share of Tibet's profits, and gaining support from a section of Tibetan society through racist scapegoating of ethnic minorities for the problems caused by China's capitalist restoration, and from the US ruling class seeking to strengthen its strategic interests in the region. On the other hand, there is the Chinese ruling elite seeking to reach a compromise with Tibet's religious aristocracy which will allow it to maintain a large share of Tibet's growing wealth.

* Much of the historical material in this article is drawn from the *Revolutionary Worker*, newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party, US.

PALESTINE

60 years after the Nakba, Palestinian resistance continues

The imperialists were united in their celebration of the 60th anniversary of the formation of the state of Israel. Prime Minister Brown described Israel as 'one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century', declaring that 'Britain will continue to be a true and constant friend of Israel in good times and in bad'. President Bush told the Knesset on 15 May during a special trip to Israel to celebrate the anniversary: 'I am honoured to stand before one of the world's great democratic assemblies... My only regret is that one of Israel's greatest leaders is not here to share this moment. He is a warrior for the ages, a man of peace, a friend. The prayers of the American people are with Ariel Sharon.' BOB SHEPHERD reports.

Bush's speech was an open, unambiguous expression of support for Israel with only a passing reference to the fate of the Palestinians. Linking Hamas and Hizbullah with Al Qaida, he declared that Israel was right not to negotiate with Hamas and condemned any international attempts to rebuke Israel: 'We consider it a source of shame that the United Nations routinely passes more human rights resolutions against the freest democracy in the Middle East than any other nation in the world'. He finished his address with a clear message of support to the Zionists, '... you have built a mighty democracy that will endure forever and can always count on the United States of America to be at your side'.

The whole affair was a further humiliation for Palestinian President Abbas with his reliance on the US-sponsored peace process. Abbas said that the

speech had 'irritated' the Palestinian Authority and he had raised his concerns 'frankly' with Bush calling on him 'to take a neutral stance'. Abbas then more or less admitted that the talks were going nowhere: 'As for the Israelis, we negotiate with them, yet we do not intend to sell illusions and say the situation has been settled or it will be settled soon'. He added that not a single issue had actually been settled yet. In reality, with the support of imperialism, all issues are being settled in Israel's favour. Immediately before Bush's visit the Zionists had announced that 800 new housing units are planned for the Betar Illet settlement on the outskirts of Jerusalem. It is also reported that in the talks the Israelis have used written letters and pledges from the Bush administration that guarantee the incorporation of the settlement blocks into Israel to prevent any dis-

cussion on their continuing expansion.

Gaza

As part of its ongoing and intensifying blockade of Gaza, Israel had restricted the transport of diesel and petrol into the Strip, but since the 9 April attack by the Palestinian resistance on the Nahal Oz border crossing, Israel has imposed a virtual block on the transport of all fuel and cooking gas into Gaza. Limited concessions have been made for the import of industrial diesel for the power plant but this is inadequate to keep it running continuously. The results of this are creating a humanitarian catastrophe; power cuts happen every day as the main power station is continually running out of fuel. This affects hospitals, water supply and sewage disposal. John Ging, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) operations



Palestinians protest at the Israeli fuel blockade at the Rafah border

in Gaza reported on some of the consequences:

'60,000 cubic meters of raw and partially treated sewage are pumped out to sea every day, simply because the treatment plants have run out of fuel. Fifteen diesel powered water wells have shut down completely, leaving 70,000 people without water in their homes. Gaza's Public Water Authority now reports that because of the regular power cuts and a lack of diesel for back up generators, 30% of Gazans have running water for only four to eight hours per week, 40% once every four days and the remaining 30% every other day. The sewage at Sheikh Redwan in northern Gaza City and Jabalia refugee camp is overflowing into lagoons in residential areas which were designed for storm water. In

Jabalia, the amount is three million litres of raw sewage in the last week of April alone.'

The shortage of cooking gas means that people are searching for wood and other combustible items to burn for cooking purposes – an impossible task for a population of 1.5 million. Israel's complete block on petrol or ordinary diesel has forced more than 90% of cars off the road, including 70% of all ambulances. Donkey-drawn carts are now becoming the only way for most people to travel any distance.

The fuel shortages have also affected UNRWA's ability to distribute food aid to the 80% of Gazans who now exist below the poverty line. This shortage of food has been made worse by the deliberate destruction of farms in Gaza by the Israeli

army. On 17 May Israeli military bulldozers destroyed ten poultry farms, as well as orange groves, almond and olive trees and greenhouses near Rafah. The Ministry of Agriculture estimated the loss at \$1.5m.

Palestinian resistance

At the same time that Bush was praising Israeli terrorists, mass demonstrations marking the 60th anniversary of the Nakba took place across Palestine: in the West Bank and Gaza and at Nazareth, inside the 1948 Green Line. The demonstration at Nazareth was brutally attacked by the police force of the 'mighty democracy' using tear gas and batons.

Over 50,000 people filled the streets of Ramallah, the largest protest in the West Bank since the start of the second Intifada. The organisers of the demonstration, the National Committee to Commemorate the Nakba, issued a statement which called for the right of return of all Palestinian refugees and the need to, 'strengthen the popular campaigns in Palestine, the Arab world and internationally, particularly the campaign for boycotts, disinvestment and sanctions against Israel, as well as the campaign for an academic and cultural boycott, and the campaign against the Israeli Apartheid Wall'.

End British support for Israel!
Boycott Israel! Boycott M&S!

LEBANON

Set-back for US and Zionist plans

Fifteen days after armed clashes erupted between militants of the imperialist-backed 14 March coalition government of Lebanon and the Hizbullah-led opposition, the opposing Lebanese leaders reached an agreement at the Lebanese National Dialogue Conference held in Doha, Qatar, on 21 May 2008. It represented a significant set-back for imperialist plans for the country. The deal pledged to elect army chief Michel Suléiman as the president of the republic, and committed the participants to form a national unity cabinet and draft a new electoral law for parliamentary elections in 2009. The national unity government gives Hizbullah and its allies their long-demanded veto power, since they will have 11 ministers (one-third plus one of the 30-member cabinet). The issue of Hizbullah's possession of arms was neither discussed nor mentioned in the agreement, much to the concern of the US and the Zionists.

Following the Doha agreement, Nabih Berri, Lebanon's parliament speaker and a key opposition leader, announced the lifting of an 18-month sit-

in by supporters in Beirut. Within an hour, youngsters affiliated to Hizbullah and the Amal movement started to remove the protest tents and trucks which had paralysed the commercial heart of Beirut.

Origins of the crisis

The 18-month political crisis began on 1 December 2006 when the imperialist-backed Prime Minister Siniora, leader of the 14 March bloc, demanded that Hizbullah hand over its weapons in the aftermath of Hizbullah's victory over Israel in the war of July 2006. In response, Hizbullah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah accused Siniora of being a 'traitor' who worked for Washington and Tel Aviv. Militants set up tents on streets leading to Siniora's offices. The protests left the country without either a parliament or president.

Matters came to a head when Siniora's cabinet banned Hizbullah's telecommunication network and ordered the army to dismantle it, and also sacked the director of Beirut International Airport security, Wafiq Shqier, who is a Shia and alleged to be linked to Hizbullah. Hizbullah Secretary General

Sayyed Nasrallah declared that 'the decisions of the ruling bloc are a declaration of war... Our communications network is not a commercial telephone service, but rather a military communications system that backs the resistance... [it] is the most important of our weapons.' Hizbullah's network proved to be largely impenetrable during the war with Israel – hence the imperialists' concern.

Druze leader Walid Jumblatt of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), who is in Siniora's ruling bloc and very close to the US, alleged that Hizbullah was spying on Beirut airport and that it was linked to the assassinations of anti-Syrian figures and security personnel over the past three years. Jumblatt claimed that: 'They are monitoring runways 1-7 with cameras... in order to assassinate or kidnap their opponents along the airport road which runs through Shia neighbourhoods.' In mid-April, Jumblatt had met with the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, David Welch, who made an unscheduled visit to Beirut.

In response, Nasrallah singled out Jumblatt during a



Beirut: Hizbullah tent city

press conference as the main agent for US plans in Lebanon, saying: 'Jumblatt's government declared a proxy war on the resistance for Israel and the US... they want to extend their control on the airport... to transform it into a Mossad, FBI and CIA base. Therefore it has become necessary to remove Shqier.' Within an hour, clashes had broken out and within a few days Hizbullah and Amal's fighters seized west Beirut, besieging Jumblatt and Saad Hariri, leader of the 14 March coalition, in their homes, subduing districts loyal to them, and seizing strategic locations in the Shouf Mountain, a Jumblatt stronghold which provides views over the coastal

plain and Beirut on one side, and the eastern Bekaa Valley on the other. Hizbullah fighters defeated Jumblatt's militias, forcing him to order his fighters to stand-down. In an interview with *The Guardian* from his besieged Beirut home, Jumblatt said: 'Hizbullah and Iran won the battle of Beirut. The Iranians chose the moment America is weak in the Middle East. The balance of power has completely changed in Lebanon and now we wait to see what new rules Hizbullah, Syria and Iran will lay down.'

The opposition fighters also forced Hariri's television station off the air and set fire to his newspaper offices. The Lebanese army, however, stay-

ed neutral throughout the violence and, apparently in co-ordination with Hizbullah, set up checkpoints. After Siniora invited its arbitration, the army overturned the two decisions his government had made, and called on fighters to leave the streets. Once the army had reinstated General Wafiq Shqier, Hizbullah and allied Shia militants largely withdrew from positions captured in Sunni-majority west Beirut.

Commenting on Lebanon's internal clashes Israel's Military Intelligence Chief, Major General Amos Yadlin, told *Haaretz* that: 'Hizbullah proved that it was the strongest power in Lebanon... stronger than the Lebanese and had it wanted to take the government it could have done it.' He said Hizbullah continued to pose a 'significant' threat to Israel as its rockets could reach 'a large part of Israeli territory'.

The US had spent \$1.3 billion in support of Siniora's government, dedicating about \$400 million to boost Lebanon's security forces. However, these developments show how weak the imperialist-backed government was, despite all the financial and diplomatic support it received. And as Nasrallah has said, 'we are not worried about a Sunni-Shi'ite sedition. The problem is between a US project and a resistance project.'

Manal Darwish

Cuba: strengthening socialism not consumerism

Recent measures introduced in Cuba have led to wishful thinking among Cuba's enemies in the corporate media, who have seized on them as evidence of a return to capitalism. In reality they are the result of a profound process of self-criticism and debate within socialism.

On 24 February, following his election as President of the Council of State in the National Assembly of People's Power, Raul Castro said that 'the people's mandate to this legislature is very clear: to continue strengthening the Revolution at a historical juncture which demands from us to be dialectic and creative'. He called for less centralisation and bureaucracy, giving the example of better milk production and distribution as testimony to local decision-making and arguing that this approach could work in other areas of the economy: 'a more compact and operational structure is required, with a lower number of institutions under the central administration of the State and a better distribution of their functions'. There is, of course, no suggestion of a 'Chinese-style' market economy, so destructive to socialism: 'Good planning is most important for we cannot spend more than we have.'

Increasing food production

Increasing food production in Cuba has been identified as a primary task and, given rising global prices, the adverse effect of climate change and US aggression, an issue of maximum national security. As an example of the difficulties faced, the Cuban media recently reported that in one municipality, San Jose, only a little over half the arable land is farmed effectively, with 3,000 out of 52,200 hectares completely idle.

On 12 May the National Assembly appointed 30 of its members to a working commission on food and agriculture. It will address structural problems in Cuba's agricultural system that prevent full use of the land and efficient distribution of produce. It will oversee local offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, which are being opened in each of Cuba's 169 municipalities. These Municipal Agricultural Delegations will have authority to make decisions addressing concrete problems in their local area. Part of their task will be to eliminate corruption and train more agricultural workers. At the same time the government has raised the price it pays farmers for meat and milk as a way of increasing production.

Mobile phones, computers and DVD players

In December Raul spoke about an excess of 'prohibitions' in Cuba, arguing that it was no longer necessary to keep some of the restrictions on consumer goods that were brought in during the harshest years of the Special Period. In the 24 February session of the National Assembly he reiterated that some of the limits 'had the purpose of preventing the emergence of new inequalities at a time of general shortages, even when that meant relinquishing certain incomes.'

In April, following analysis of more than 1.3 million specific proposals made during the national consul-



tation, new services were announced making mobile phones, computers and DVD players more readily available, and making it easier for Cubans to rent cars and use tourist hotels. All of these restrictions were introduced during the special period as circulars to prevent a growth in inequality. They were not laws, so it was straightforward to reverse them. The developments in telecommunications are particularly important and priority is being given to the areas where there are the fewest phones. Ramón Linares Torres, First Deputy Minister of Informatics and Communications (MIC) noted that: 'for the Revolution, it was always a priority to advance communications in the rural areas. At the beginning of 1959 there were only 170,000 telephone lines and 73% of them were located in the capital and other major cities. Telephone density was 2.6 per 100 inhabitants, a rate that has been quintupled, but is still low.'

The reaction

The response of the Bush administration in the US has been to allow US citizens to send mobile phones to Cuba, in the vain hope that this will weaken the Revolution. Journalists in Europe and the US are jumping over themselves to portray the recent developments as a sign of weakness and stagnation of Cuban socialism. The *Guardian's* Rory Carroll, in an article on 7 April entitled 'To save communism, Raul experiments with consumerism', says that the 'reforms' would not have been 'imaginable' under Fidel, signalling 'tolerance for displays of wealth and, by extension, displays of inequality.' His article opened with a banal description of one Cuban family, dripping with gold jewellery and 'counting out the money with a certain panache', which rushed to consumer heaven to buy a pressure cooker and a washing machine - as if such luxuries had been prohibited from Cubans before Raul

was elected President of the Council of State.

On the contrary, in 2005 the Cuban government distributed free pressure cookers and rice cookers to every family home in Cuba. Cubans were able to replace their old refrigerators and televisions with new energy efficient substitutes provided at a subsidised cost, to be paid back in small instalments over many years.

Pablo Valiente, writing for the Cuban Union of Young Communists' *Juventud Rebelde* (Rebel Youth) newspaper about the new mobile phone services on 21 April, commented on the storm being whipped up by capitalist media about the so-called 'reforms':

'The old, small and smug Europe appears as the leader, with its exultant levels of life unapproachable for the rest of the planet, unaware of the reality that surrounds it. Not even the Americans, as free as they say they are, can exhibit such an encouraging performance... Almost none of those mathematicians, so skilful at comparing Cubans' wages but never their real income, mention the fact that the prices charged by ETECSA [the Cuban phone company] are among the lowest in the world... Nor does anyone say a word about how, for connection reasons, the Caribbean - where Cuba is



May 1 2008, Cubans march in Havana on International Workers Day, organised under the slogan 'Unity, Strength and Victory in support of the Revolution'. Millions took part in mobilisations across Cuba, also calling for the release of the Cuban 5

located - is, along with the Pacific islands, the area with the world's most expensive rates for phone services.'

The real background to these reforms is far more interesting than the mainstream media would have us know. Firstly, since Cuba's Energy Revolution in 2006, which involved the successful upgrade of Cuba's electricity grid, Cuba now has the capacity to provide the power needed to run high-end electrical equipment on a mass scale. Secondly, selling computers and DVDs at high prices to domestic consumers with significant financial resources will mop up

excess liquidity, which will in turn stem inflationary pressures, particularly on food prices. It will also provide the socialist state, which has a monopoly on imports, with additional revenue for its investment and welfare programmes.

Bourgeois journalists and middle class 'socialists' will continue to write about 'stagnation' or predict the downfall of Cuba's revolutionary system in the faint hope that it might one day happen. Meanwhile the Cuban people are building socialism.

Louis Brehony, Sam Vincent, Helen Yaffe

CUBA NEWS

Bank of ALBA founded

ALBA member states have officially established the Bank of ALBA with initial financing of US\$1bn. The bank will promote economic integration between ALBA countries and invest in infrastructure and social projects within them.

ALBA (an acronym in Spanish for Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) is an anti-neoliberal alliance of countries that now includes Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Dominica. The bank aims to free member countries from dependency on the World Bank and the IMF, which has caused havoc in Latin America through the oppressive loan conditions these institutions impose on debtor countries. In contrast the ALBA bank will not impose loan conditions. All member countries have an equal vote on funding decisions, and contribute capital according to their ability to pay. Each member state will host a branch of the bank, with the head office based in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas.

Free the Cuban 5! Support the call for action!

The Cuban 5, political prisoners in US gaols, are awaiting a verdict from a US Court of Appeal on nine key issues of their case. This comes in the Five's tenth year of unjust imprisonment, after an unfair trial and a previously successful

appeal which was later quashed by the US government.

The latest appeal decision could come at any time. If the court decides favourably for the Five on any of the appeal issues, the US government will likely launch a counter appeal. In the US, the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five has issued a call for international 'Day After' actions, calling for protests around the world on the days following the court decision.

The Five were arrested in Miami in 1998 on false charges ranging from espionage to conspiracy to commit murder. In reality they did nothing more than gather information about terrorist groups operating against Cuba from the US.

Here in Britain Rock around the Blockade has joined the 'Day After' pledge and is organising protests nationwide. If you want to be a part of this contact Rock around the Blockade and join the campaign today.

US diplomat ferries money for anti-Cuban terrorist groups

Over a dozen emails and a video recording released by the Cuban government show that Michael Parmly, US diplomat and outgoing chief of the US special interests section, has carried money into Cuba for Santiago Alvarez, a close associate and benefactor of notorious anti-Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles. Alvarez is currently serving a 30 month sentence for weapons possession. The money he sent was for Martha Beatriz Roque, a well-known Cuban 'dissident' who once boasted that she couldn't care less if

the Yankees invaded Cuba. She was receiving \$1,500 a month from Fundacion Rescate Juridico, an NGO set up by Alvarez.

The US government will this year award a record \$45.7 million to counter-revolutionary groups in the form of Cuba 'democracy' grants - more than triple the amount for 2007.

Sam Vincent

SWP poison

An example of the damage that the SWP try to do was demonstrated at a showing of the film *Soy Cuba* in London on 4 May. The SWP's main commentator on Cuba, Professor Mike Gonzalez, was due to talk about the film but did not show up. Two of his acolytes were there in his stead to parrot the line - they said nothing about the film. The customary wares of 'not a mass revolution', led by 'an elite that continues to govern' were peddled. But what was most striking was their argument that Cuba was a threat to the rising movement in Latin America that must not take Cuba as its model. When did Cuba ever seek to impose a model on other countries? This attack on Cuba is intended to work against the necessary unity of the movements in Latin America precisely at a time when they are uniting and must do so to survive and advance. The US Navy is resurrecting its fourth fleet in the Caribbean with the intention of threatening Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. The SWP arguments are characteristic of a Trojan Horse for imperialism that dresses up reaction in the language of socialism.

Trevor Rayne

Pauline Campbell fighter for justice

FRFI is deeply saddened by the death on 15 May of Pauline Campbell, who for five years had fought an unrelenting struggle to expose the inhumane treatment of women prisoners. Following the death in 2003 of her 18-year-old daughter Sarah – the youngest of six women who died in Styal that year – Pauline began a campaign of direct action to expose the British prison system's complete lack of care for vulnerable women. Between April 2004 and April 2008 every time a woman prisoner died, she staged a demonstration outside the prison – 28 demonstrations in all. RCG comrades regularly attended those at Styal, New Hall, Holloway and Durham prisons. Pauline was arrested 15 times and charged five times. The latest charges were recently dropped and we reprint below an article Pauline sent to FRFI just days before her death.



Pauline Campbell protesting outside Holloway prison at the death of a woman prisoner

Pauline was completely non-sectarian. She lobbied MPs, spoke to parliamentary committees, emailed journalists, addressed conferences, marched with other relatives of people who had died in custody and demonstrated alongside peace campaigners, communists, anarchists and feminists. She wrote regularly for FRFI, as well as for many other publications.

Eric Allison writes:

I was fortunate to consider Pauline Campbell a close friend. Since her death, I have been inundated with phone calls from people bereft at her passing – from a woman in her late seventies, who joined Pauline on the campaign trail and mourns the loss of a passionate and dedicated leader, to a young ex-prisoner, who viewed her as a surrogate mother. Because, despite her personal grief, Pauline always found room to comfort relatives of others who had died in custody and guide them through the legal minefield that obstructs the search for truth.

Few in the new Ministry of Justice will mourn her. She met the criminal

justice system head on and became a constant, sharp thorn in its side. Her direct action in blocking access to the prison she was demonstrating outside created a huge dilemma for the system; should it prosecute her and make her a martyr; or release her without charge, knowing full well that, come the death of another woman prisoner, Pauline would be back, confronting the system at full tilt? The police would often employ dirty tactics, such as keeping her in a cell until the early hours of the morning – for the heinous offence of obstructing the highway. If they thought this would deter her they badly miscalculated her determination.

During the five years that Pauline took on the system, it was easy to forget that she was a grieving mother, who had lost her only child. They say that time is a great healer, but the pain of her loss must have attacked her every day and every single day that she carried the banner was a day that her grief was stirred up yet again. I suspect that, in the end, she was simply very tired.

Rest in peace, Pauline, you were a true warrior.

CPS backs down

My letter published in FRFI 202 (April/May 2008) urged readers to write to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in Crewe to question how the prosecution against me could possibly be in the public interest.

Following written representations to the CPS and Attorney General, I can report that the charge has been dropped, and my three-day criminal trial scheduled for July 2008 cancelled. I am aware that FRFI readers have written letters to protest against this senseless prosecution, and I should like to place on record my thanks.

This prosecution should never have reached court in the first place. Both the CPS and the court were made aware that I am a bereaved mother, and that my only child had died at the hands of the state. This particular attempt to criminalise and punish me was especially cruel, as I was arrested outside Styal, the prison responsible for my daughter's death in 2003. Lisa Marley, a young mother held on remand at Styal, died on 23 January 2008, and I was arrested and

charged with obstructing the highway – a charge which I denied – at the demonstration to protest against her death.

Aside from the vindictive nature of this prosecution, the case has raised a number of issues. All along, the Crown had argued that the case was in the public interest. At each of my three court appearances, and in a three-page letter to the CPS in March 2008, I argued to the contrary, and challenged their assertion that the case had passed the public interest test. After three months they caved in but it is unclear to me why it took so long for them to see the light.

The case also highlights difficulties defendants face when applying for legal aid. My application for legal aid had been refused; apparently on the grounds it had not met the criteria necessary to meet the 'interests of justice' test. At each hearing, I had to attend court without a solicitor, which was enormously stressful. I am not a lawyer and have had no legal training. It is an affront to the principle of access to justice that anyone should have to stand criminal trial and attend pre-trial reviews without legal representation. Yet whenever I attended court, the Crown was represented by a lawyer. I fail to understand how a defendant in a criminal trial can adequately represent themselves. It defies common sense. How can justice be

achieved when there is clear inequality of arms?

There is a growing loss of confidence in our criminal justice system, which is hardly surprising. When laid bare, the system is frequently revealed as unjust and unfair and it is crucial that people speak out against this injustice.

But bringing pressure to bear on the authorities can and does work, as my case illustrates. The idiom 'the pen is mightier than the sword' tells us that words and communication are more powerful than wars and fighting. When faced with a prosecution and an attempt to criminalise me I will always fight my corner with strong words, and an even stronger determination to ensure that justice prevails.

Pauline Campbell

Bereaved mother of Sarah Elizabeth Campbell, 18, who died on 'suicide watch' in Styal Prison's segregation unit, 2003

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is supporting a demonstration called by No More Prisons outside Styal prison on Sunday 10 August 1-3pm to remember all the women and men who have died in British prisons and to honour Pauline's memory and contribution to the struggle.

US political prisoners' long struggle for justice

In 2007 the US prison population rose to an all-time high of 2.3 million. More than one in every 100 adults in the US is now a prisoner. One in 106 white men one in 36 Hispanic and a staggering one in 15 black men are behind bars. Among black men aged 20-34, the figure rises still further to one in nine.

Buried deep in the bowels of this massive prison system are political prisoners whom the US government has tried unsuccessfully to silence. The most internationally well known is Mumia Abu Jamal but there are many others. Following the article in the last FRFI about the Lucasville Five (see Letters page in this issue) we have heard from Siddique Abdullah Hasan and publish below an edited version of his article on Mumia. We have also received letters from Ana Lucia Gelabert, who has been incarcerated for 24 years in the Texas prison system and who has written many times to FRFI, and for the first time from Ruchell Cinque Magee. FRFI also continues to campaign for the freedom of the Cuban Five (see page 12).

Ruchell Cinque Magee

Ruchell Cinque Magee is the US's longest serving political prisoner. He has been in prison since 1963, when he was given a 'one-year-to-life' sentence for 'kidnapping' following a minor incident which in reality was little more than an argument over a bag of marijuana. In prison Ruchell became one of an increasing number of self-educated, politically conscious prisoners, who studied the law in order to challenge the system. He took the name Cinque from African freedom fighter Joseph Cinque, who seized control of a slave ship and tried to sail back to Africa. At Cinque's trial in 1841 the Supreme Court found him not guilty of killing captives on the ship, ruling that it was illegal to enslave a free man, and that 'a slave has the right to resist slavery'.

On 7 August 1970 Ruchell was at Marin Court House, San Rafael, California, as a witness for James McClain, a prisoner charged with stabbing a guard. The trial was interrupted by the armed intervention of Jonathan Jackson, younger brother of political prisoner George Jackson. Magee, McClain and another witness, William Christman, joined Jonathan in a bid for freedom. In the shooting that followed Magee was the sole survivor. He was tried, along with Angela Davis, for conspiracy, murder and kidnap of public officials. Davis was acquitted of all charges. Ruchell Cinque defended himself along the same lines as his namesake, contesting that as his imprisonment was itself illegal and a form of unjustifiable slavery, he had the right to escape. Despite jury acquittals at two trials on the majority

of charges he has remained in prison ever since and continues to campaign vociferously for his freedom.

Write to Ruchell Cinque Magee 3A5-142 #A92051, BOX 3461, CSP Corcoran CA 93212, USA.

Unleashing the power of the people – call for international boycott to support Mumia

In light of the adverse ruling by a three-judge panel for the Third Circuit Court of Appeals denying Mumia Abu Jamal a new trial and an evidentiary hearing, many of his supporters are outraged and weighing the pros and cons of what must be done to create the circumstances for his speedy release. At a press conference outside the Federal Court in Philadelphia, Sista Pam Africa hit the nail on the head when she so forcefully said: 'The power of the people has to be unleashed because what the court did was wrong!'

Being an activist and a revolutionary thinker, I'm totally convinced that what she was conveying is that the gloves must come off and the people must be turned loose to fight fire with fire via BAMN (By Any Means Necessary).

While there are many ways to unleash the power of the people, one way is by calling for an international economic boycott against Hershey's and other major businesses in the State of Pennsylvania. To make this boycott successful the help of the

European Union and other countries interested in the quality of justice should be sought. Such a stand will serve as a supplement to the work Mumia's lawyers and supporters are vigorously engaged in to save his life.

In a capitalistic society that prides itself on its superpower status, economic power and military might are the only languages this imperialistic government seems to respect and understand. Therefore, the heat must be turned up if we are ever going to acquire justice for Mumia.

The appellate courts have never heard the newly discovered evidence of his innocence. They have always found some flimsy excuse to repress it. In a case of actual innocence, the courts are under obligation to hear newly discovered evidence, but such has never happened in Mumia's case.

Justice in Mumia's case is long, long overdue. It's been 26 years and it's now time for the world to become morally courageous by stepping up to the plate and demanding justice for our elder Mumia Abu Jamal.

From death row, this is Siddique Abdullah Hasan

Write to Mumia Abu Jamal #AM-8335, SCI Greene, 175 Progress Drive, Waynesburg, PA 15370, USA and Siddique Abdullah Hasan #R130-559, Ohio State Penitentiary 878 Coitsville-Hubbard Road Youngstown OH 44505-4635, USA.

FRFI ROUNDUP

FRFI 'banned from May Day' by Labour sectarians

FRFI comrades in all areas joined the annual May Day international workers' day demonstrations. In London we marched with Turkish communists and Latin American community activists. In Edinburgh comrades marched with banners of Che Guevara and the Cuban 5. In Manchester FRFI and North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group NWASDG joined the demonstration there.

In Newcastle Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR), Rock Around the Blockade (RATB) and FRFI formed a militant anti-imperialist contingent on the annual Tyne and Wear May Day march. Advertised speakers for the end rally included Colin Moses, Chair of the Prison Officers Association (POA). The POA is currently in dispute over the pay and conditions of its members, which are under attack, as are those of all public sector workers. However, as FRFI has consistently pointed out, POA members are at the forefront of attacking and abusing prisoners and the union unashamedly defends those who are caught doing so. It also campaigns for greater weaponry with which to inflict

part he would have us removed by the police.

Three weeks later a comrade in TCAR received the following email:

'Dear comrades

It has come to my attention that the organisation who are promoting the Northern Conference Against Racism have attacked the Prison Officers Association at the recent May Day Rally in Newcastle. The "Tyneside Community Action For Refugees", who are organising the conference, along with the "Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!" group and the "Rock around the Blockade" campaign for Cuba are all fronts for the Revolutionary Communist Group. While the LRC supports any measures which raise the consciousness and awareness of these issues and defends the right of any organisation to pursue them in their own way, ie fronts etc, we cannot condone a blatant attack upon fellow Trades Unionists in such a negative way. Specifically; a banner was raised at the May Day Rally by the group, accusing the POA of being "enemies of the working class",

builds solidarity with those who fight for the principles of socialism upon which the movement was founded and which continue to develop.

The Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! group and the RCG have been banned from next year's rally.

Fraternally, Steve Brown, LRC Northern Region Co-ordinator'.

Some of this nonsense is not worth even engaging with, but the attacks by both Martin Levy (CPB) and Steve Brown of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) on FRFI have to be understood in the context that their organisations have consistently supported and covered up for the imperialist British Labour Party. The CPB is committed to the 'parliamentary road to socialism' and the LRC's entire reason for existence is 'rebuilding the Labour Party'. These organisations nominally oppose the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but do nothing to dissuade anyone from joining the party leading that occupation. Both call for a vote for Labour in elections and the LRC actively recruits members to it. Similarly, while they would never publicly own up to supporting brutality against prisoners, in reality they do nothing to support those who are beaten or murdered by prison officers. Instead they defend the 'rights' of the brutalisers. Labour has introduced 3,000 new criminal offences and the gap between rich and poor has increased. As a result of this inequality, alienation and repression the prison population has spiralled out of control. The overwhelming majority of prisoners are poor and working class. So-called left organisations like the CPB and LRC not only fail to support those at the sharp end of state repression, but when their view is challenged, reach for the same weapons their Labour Party taskmasters would employ – censorship and threats to call the police.

May Day is international workers' day. It belongs to the workers – all of us. Not to the CPB, the LRC or anyone else. They are in no position to 'ban us from May Day' as though it were their personal property. It is not our analysis that is confused, as Mr Brown suggests. We are clear. We defend the working class. As our article on last year's POA strike said: 'Most prison officers are from the working class but, like the police, they are hired to protect the ruling class by enforcing its laws and punishing those who do not obey them. They are the defenders of inequality and privilege.'



Fight racism!

Despite such sectarian attacks reparations are well underway for the Northern Conference Against Racism, being organised by TCAR on 21 June in Newcastle. Organisations around the country have expressed their support. The conference is a vital step in building alliances against the continuing attacks of the racist Labour government. Visit www.tynesidecam.co.uk to book your ticket in advance.

In Manchester comrades from FRFI and NWASDG held a 'speak-out against racism' on 10 May and in London FRFI continues to demonstrate monthly at Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre and has supported recent demonstrations against deportations to

Democratic Republic of Congo and in support of protesters in Harmondsworth detention centre.

Free Palestine!

15 May 2008 was the 60th anniversary of the creation of the Israeli state. In London comrades joined the march for Palestine on 12 May and on 15 May held a Street University outside Britain's biggest retail sponsor of Israel – Marks & Spencer on Oxford Street with talks, theatre and music, spreading the news to the British public about the history of the occupation. A similar demonstration outside and inside M&S in Newcastle called for an end to the siege of Gaza and all British support for Israel. Come and join us in solidarity with the Palestinian people!



The first instinct of sectarians is to cover up for the Labour Party

pain, including on imprisoned children.

FRFI supporters erected a banner behind their stall reading 'POA – enemy of the working class' and distributed leaflets exposing the racist, anti-working class nature of the POA. We called for solidarity with the prisoners who have experienced systematic abuse over decades by POA members. No one expressed any objection to our banner or leaflets until the rally had finished when Martin Levy, chair of the May Day Committee and Communist Party of Britain (CPB) member, demanded that we take down the banner immediately or face being 'banned from May Day' next year, fuming that if we attempted to take

which is clearly false from start to finish, being that the POA is an important section of the said "working class". How can a section of the "working class" be "enemies" of itself?

While some will be critical of some of the leaders of our movement, we cannot allow these sentiments and criticisms to be confused with the people they represent, ie the working class. The slogan "POA – enemies of the working class" makes no sense!

The LRC stands for the unity of all campaigns, both in the Labour Party and in the community, which seeks to unite and bond together opposition to attacks on the Trades Union movement and

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 3 June and 1 July 1-2pm
Demonstrate against Labour's racist immigration laws
Communications House
Old Street, EC1 (Nearest tube Old Street)

Saturday 14 June 12-3pm
Breaking the chains – international solidarity with prisoners
Trafalgar Square north pavement
Free the Cuban 5! Close Guantanamo Bay prison camp! Free Mumia Abu Jamall
Close Britain's detention centres!

Saturday 19 July 12-5pm
Day of discussion and debate
Housing, health and education in times of capitalist crisis
Venue to be confirmed

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Demonstration for Palestine – Boycott M&S
Outside Marks & Spencer, Oxford Street
(Nearest tube Marble Arch)

For further details call 020 7837 1688 or 07790 896 430
Or email northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com / eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 21 June 10.30am-5.30pm
Northern Conference Against Racism
Organised by Tyneside Community Action for Refugees
Northumbria Student Union,
2 Sandyford Road
www.tynesidecam.co.uk – details/tickets

Every Saturday 3pm
Weekly meeting of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop,
bottom of Westgate Road. Monthly general meetings in St Thomas Church, Haymarket.
tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk 07989 879 310

FRFI holds street actions in Newcastle every Saturday 11am-2pm and other stalls around the region: call or email for details
Phone: 07858 346 276
Email: frfinortheast@googlemail.com
Website: www.frfinortheast.co.uk

MANCHESTER

Saturday 31 May, 1pm
NWASDG Public Meeting
Friends Meeting House
Behind Central Library
Details 07779 189 794 or email fightback_05@yahoo.com



RATB ROUNDUP

All over the country Rock around the Blockade groups are busy organising lively and informative events, bringing together people of all ages in support of socialist Cuba. Find out what's been going on near you and check the events list to see what's coming up.

Manchester

A new monthly film night, Cine Revolution, started with a film about Venezuela on 18 May. The discussion afterwards reflected the desire of those present to know more about developments in Cuba, Venezuela and throughout Latin America. The next film is on 8 June (see events listing).

Scotland

RATB groups in Dundee and Edinburgh are being established following the successful speaking tour meetings in Glasgow. Comrades joined the annual May Day demonstration through Edinburgh,

displaying banners in support of the Cuban Five and the Cuban Revolution. Dundee comrades have screened a series of films exploring the revolutionary democratic movements in Latin America. On 31 May, an RATB day school at Glasgow University looked at Revolution and Socialism in Latin America. RATB activists across Scotland are building for a demonstration in support of the Cuban Five on 26 July in Edinburgh, including a protest outside the US consulate.

North East

The local RATB group in Newcastle has greatly expanded, with new people taking on responsibilities to organise film showings, educationals and street events. A local group in Durham is coming together, with a public meeting on the history of miners' struggles in Durham and Cuba planned for July. From 11 to 14 April an anti-imperialist weekend on the theme of 'Latin America: socialism and revolution' took place near Harrogate, attended by RATB activists

from Newcastle, Sunderland, Manchester and Glasgow. They discussed the wider international context, the theory and practice of the Cuban Revolution and its relevance to building a movement for socialism in Britain.

London

Educational meetings took place on 15 April and 13 May based around the RATB pamphlet, *Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours*. At the first of these Helen Yaffe from the Institute for the Study of the Americas introduced the history of Cuba up to 1959. The second meeting looked at the period from 1959 to the special period of the 1990s. At both meetings time was devoted to organising stalls publicising the case of the Cuban 5 at the Love Music, Hate Racism Festival on 27 April and at Wood Green on 4 May. There was also a rally for the Cuban 5 held in Trafalgar Square on 19 April and a screening of *Salud!*, an award winning documentary about Cuban health care on 7 May in

north London. The organising and educational meetings will continue on a monthly basis (next events: 10 June and 8 July) and are open to all those who support socialist Cuba.

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 10 June and 8 July 7.30pm
Rock around the Blockade monthly educational and campaign meeting
Venue to be confirmed

Saturday 26 July 12-3pm
Rally to celebrate 55 years since the Moncada Barrack attack
Trafalgar Square – north pavement

MANCHESTER

Sunday 8 June, 2pm
Cine Revolution film showing: With or without Fidel
Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street

Sunday 20 July, 2pm
Cine Revolution film showing: Soy Cuba
Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street

Saturday 26 July, 12 noon
Protest: Hands off Cuba!
Piccadilly Gardens, City Centre

EDINBURGH

Saturday 26 July
12.30-2pm **Street protest – defend socialist Cuba!**
Duke of Wellington Statue, Junction of Princes' Street/North Bridge
2.30-3 pm **Rally in support of Cuban Five**
United States Consulate, Regent Terrace

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

email _____

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LETTERS

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website: www.revolutionarycommunist.org

Solidarity, not sectarianism

It was very enlightening, if somewhat unpleasant, to learn from the April/May issue of FRFI that the so-called Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) took a deliberate policy decision not to co-operate with the Cuban Speaking Tour earlier this year – was this because they didn't think of it first?

In the event, the Speaking Tour

was clearly a resounding success, with people left queuing in the street, unable to get in to packed meetings. Congratulations to the Rock around the Blockade (RATB) organisers for their achievement, and many thanks for all your hard work.

I have maintained dual membership of the CSC and RATB for the last few years, but have no time for their divisive tactics and have resigned from the CSC. More strength to RATB's elbow!

Hasta la victoria siempre!

ROGER ENSKAT
North London

Struggle for a better world

Humanity has struggled against all forms of inhumanity throughout history, leading to the modern age, when we face the last great struggle to get rid of all forms of inhumanity. We live in the era of the struggle to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism, so as to bring about a world for the whole of humanity.

Think of a world without any war, violence, exploitation or oppression, a world without the promotion of crime and the brutal prison system. Think of a world where the whole of humanity lives in harmony with each other, without the need for armies and police, where everyone is well-educated, where all children are raised in a world of love without abuse or neglect. Think of a world where everyone's health and well-being is promoted, where the health and education system are excellent and free for all. This world is possible and follows the overthrow of capitalism. This world is both necessary and possible because it is in everyone's interests to bring it about.

You can contribute to this struggle for a better world by

starting wherever you are, for an end to the money wasted on war and nuclear weapons to be used for the good of the people, for a better health system, a fairer education system, a more just social system in every detail. Every time you raise your voice for progressive change, you are contributing to a better world. You can participate as an individual or through organisations, opposing all forms of bureaucracy and supporting democratic involvement and discussion to help create a truly democratic movement for a new social order.

The newspaper that best represents this great struggle is this paper, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* If you want to contribute to a complete change from rotten capitalism to genuine socialism, then join with others like the Revolutionary Communist Group. I am.

It helps if you situate your struggle in the context of the grand sweep of history, in which humanity's struggle against all forms of inhumanity has a champion in you. MARTIN STEVENS
South London

No to Remploy factory closures!

As a disabled person I have great sympathy with the workers who are to be made redundant at several Remploy factories in Britain. I note that the Remploy factory in York closed at the end of March.

Remploy was set up by Ernest Bevan in 1946 to give sheltered employment to mainly disabled servicemen returning from the war. Factories were set up across the country – but now Gordon Brown's government has decided to close several of them, including York, on a cost basis. For the first time we have seen these workers, in desperation, vote for strike action to protect their jobs. Several leading union officials have resigned from the Labour Party over this issue.

At last year's Labour Party conference it was announced that no jobs would be lost at Remploy;

six weeks later up to 30 factories were closed. I was present when Brown said he could guarantee redundant workers a job. But we can guess what kind of jobs – low paid and with poor terms and conditions, creating further health problems, financial difficulties and despair for these workers. One Remploy employee, a wheelchair user, responded: 'I do not need a job, Mr Brown, as I have one already'. He and others like him were working, paying their taxes and doing a good job. Now many are on the dole.

This is an absolute disgrace and shows how low into the gutter this government has sunk. Say no to Remploy closures and redundancies! Give Gordon Brown and his cabinet their P45s instead.

ROBERT REDFORD
Lincoln

Support Peter Hakala

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for sending me FRFI, which is each time very welcome and always offers great news.

I have been locked up for a little over 20 years and still can't see a ray of hope or light at the end of the tunnel. From day one I have fought for true justice and for the truth to surface, and I still am.

At the time of my wrongful arrest in January 1986, two police officers totally falsified and fabricated, together or separately, two statements against me. Much later, linguistic expert Professor Graham Nixon compared these two statements with the genuine and only statement I had made four days earlier. He found that these

statements (the genuine one, dated 6.1.1986, and the two forgeries, dated 10.1.1986 and 11.1.1986) could not have been written by the same person. Forensic handwriting examiner Robert Hadley carried out tests on the two fabricated statements and found:

- One statement had a start time that was the same as the completion time
- On one statement, the front page had been written well after the second page
- Numerous pages had been rewritten

In addition, both police officers ignored the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. I should have had a

solicitor and facilities to record police interviews should have been in use.

My retrial started at the Old Bailey but was mysteriously moved to Southwark Crown Court halfway. One witness was deported back to Australia before being able to give evidence, in a move orchestrated by the police. Forensic tests came up with no evidence against me.

My situation is still the same as it was from day one. I request all the support I can receive. Supporting material can be received from Dr George Coombs (letters sent to FRFI will be forwarded).

PETER HAKALA L44089
HMP Frankland, Brasside,
Durham DH1 5YD

US PRISONERS' STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

Justice for Lucasville prisoners

It has been 15 years since the Lucasville Prison Uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional facility, where nine inmates and one prison guard were murdered.

The search for retribution led to an absence of justice for the prisoners involved in the uprising. Prosecutorial misconduct and snitch testimony resulted in five men on death row, and many more serving extended sentences for convictions related to the uprising. Some of those convicted negotiated with authorities, saving officers' and inmates'

lives, and attempting to keep the peace.

2008 marks the 15th Anniversary of the Lucasville Prison Uprising, and those wrongly convicted are still awaiting their day in court. We ask that the governor appoints a special commission to investigate the uprising, bring justice to those who've been wrongly accused, and bring closure to the many families affected by the tragic events of 15 years ago.

The Lucasville Justice Project ask that you sign the on-line petition

(<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/tell-gov-strickland-to-review-the-cases-of-lucasville-prisoners>) and/or write to Ohio's governor Ted Strickland at Riffe Center, 30th Floor 77 South High Street Columbus, Ohio 43215-6108 USA and request that he investigate the grave injustice surrounding the Lucasville convictions.

Peace and solidarity,
SAADIQAH AMATULLAH HASAN
Free Siddique Abdullah Hasan
Coalition
Saadiqah@freeHasan.org
www.FreeHasan.org

Being Muslim is not a crime

In the aftermath of the 1993 Lucasville prison uprising, the state of Ohio was under enormous political pressure to bring to justice those responsible for certain violent crimes, including the murder of prison guard Robert Vallandigham.

With no concrete evidence at hand, the state of Ohio fabricated evidence and repeatedly utilised perjured testimony to obtain convictions. I am one of those innocent prisoners apprehended in the state's diabolical scheme. Because of my leadership role within the Islamic community and my outspoken criticisms of the oppressive prison conditions and policies, the state sought to make me its prime scapegoat. Thus I became the phantom 'ring leader' of the uprising, although there is ample evidence, including an audiotape, to the contrary.

At my trial in Cincinnati (a city notorious for its racism), the state prosecutors repeatedly focused on

my race, religion and Islamic attire, all to create an atmosphere of prejudice and Islamophobia before a predominantly white, Catholic jury.

The original uprising came out of what had been planned as a peaceful protest against the Mantoux tuberculin test which involves an injection of phenol, an alcoholic substance that is prohibited to Muslims. Rather than try to accommodate our religious needs or work out a reasonable compromise, the prison warden was set on forcing us to have the test against our beliefs and teachings.

While I will concede the TB test was the last straw, the inhumane treatment and long train of abuses are what induced some non-Muslims to seize the opportunity to convert a peaceful protest into a full-scale rebellion. But I committed no crime, unless being a Muslim in a non-Muslim society is a crime. My conviction and the death

sentence imposed on me are a direct result of perjured testimony. The state's star witness – who failed a polygraph test and was originally charged with the guard's murder – testified that he 'witnessed a 45lb Olympic weight bar being placed on the front of the guard's neck, with two inmates standing on opposite sides of it rocking back and forth'. Yet this evidence was completely discredited by the chief forensic pathologist, Dr Patrick Fardal. My conviction is the result of the state's desire to take away our right to practise our religion.

I believed that the US was a nation of laws, for everyone, not just a few. Such is obviously not the case. If this gross miscarriage of justice can happen to me, it can happen to anyone. As Martin Luther King said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere'.

SIDDIQUE ABDULLAH HASAN
R130-559
Ohio State Penitentiary, 878
Coitsville-Hubbard Road,
Youngstown, Ohio 44505-4635

Expose racist media lies

The corporate media in England encourages racism; it does so by perpetuating lies and myths about asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants 'taking the best jobs', 'scrounging off the British taxpayer', 'getting the best council houses', 'they're all criminals' etc. Meanwhile the government can ratchet up attacks on asylum seekers, making it illegal for asylum seekers to work, cutting asylum seekers' benefits, housing asylum seekers in some of the worst housing in the country, propagating scare stories about an influx of rapists, paedophiles and plague infested drug dealers. Thus they create moral panic and a climate of fear.

These lies serve to create a division between working class people in England and the working class internationally – the last thing the ruling class wants is politically aware and unified working class

opposition to their thievery, profiteering and plunderous looting of the very countries from which many asylum seekers are attempting to escape. Or for working class people in this country to begin to recognise that the same economic system and the same state that is waging war on the working class internationally is the one that is attacking them.

Tyneside Community Action For Refugees (TCAR) which campaigns against British imperialism and racism made a strong show of solidarity at the TCAR demo on 19 January 2008. There we witnessed yet again sinister attempts by the police at 'intelligence gathering'; two protesters were arrested. Such harassment must be opposed.

Groups like the TCAR are not charities and need the financial as well as political support of the

public. At TCAR meetings, leaflets advertising events such as film showings and fund raising gigs are often on display along with newspapers; particularly *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, which has a regular coverage in support of the struggles of asylum seekers. This kind of democracy and the publishing and information sharing it encourages need funding in order to print and distribute.

There are those who would like to silence an alternative, independent, non-corporate economic analysis. If the oppressed ask nicely for the door to be opened and to be let in from the cold, concessions might be made, but only as long as those asking for those concessions do so knowing the door can be slammed shut in their faces at any time. If like Malcolm X you not only demand that the door be flung open but want to rip down the wall that supports it – you will be silenced.

DEAN ADCROFT
Newcastle

Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours

The fully revised and updated Rock around the Blockade pamphlet, covering everything you need to know about the Cuban Revolution, from Columbus to Batista, the Bay of Pigs invasion to the Battle of Ideas.

Misinformation about Cuba is everywhere, from the mainstream media to the so-called British left. Counter the lies and distortion by informing yourself. Buy your copy today for only £3.95 inc p&p

Fill out the form below and return it to RATB c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Please send me _____ copies of *Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours*.

I enclose a cheque for £ _____ payable to Rock around the Blockade.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number _____



Labour launches Points Based System to control immigration

PBS is aimed at non-EU migrants. The five categories are:

- Tier 1: Highly Skilled individuals.
- Tier 2: Skilled workers with a job offer in the UK.
- Tier 3: Limited numbers of low skilled workers needed to fill temporary labour shortages.
- Tier 4: Students
- Tier 5: Youth mobility and temporary workers allowed to come to Britain for non-economic objectives.

To qualify for entry clearance or extend their leave to remain in Britain, would-be migrants have to score enough points under various headings. Points are awarded according to criteria such as; Attributes, Maintenance, and English Language Ability.

Under 'Attributes' prospective migrants can score points by obtaining a certificate of sponsorship from their future employer. Tier 2 workers must have a job offer to qualify and Tier 3 must have sponsorship from an employer. Under the 'Maintenance' section, migrants score points by showing they have funds in a bank account to support their stay in the UK. In all tiers points are awarded for criteria that indicate that the individual is likely to comply with immigration requirements.

Tier 3 (low skilled workers) is designed to replace current schemes such as the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme and the Sectors Based Scheme, however the government is currently saying that its introduction will be suspended indefinitely. Presumably, for the time being, there is sufficient cheap labour from

The Points Based System (PBS) for Immigration was launched by the Labour government in February 2008 to ensure 'only the best can work in Britain'. According to the Home Office migrant workers contribute an estimated £6 billion to the country's wealth. ALYSE THOMPSON reports.

the EU to meet the needs of employers who hire low/unskilled, seasonal labour. Tier 3 will only be introduced if there is a shortage of cheap EU labour. Tiers 3 and 5 are only temporary routes and once a migrant is assigned to one of these tiers they cannot switch to another tier. Unskilled migrants are not allowed to bring dependants and Tier 3 is to be applied only to migrants from countries which have signed a 'returns agreement' with Britain.

The PBS will have an impact on all migrants to Britain, as it will be a further sanction for discrimination on grounds of race, as preference is given to UK and EU workers, who are predominantly white.

The PBS will mean that migrant workers will be in a very vulnerable position in relation to their employment. Reliance on the sponsor system will mean that the workers are tied to their employers and therefore open to exploitation and abuse. There are many reported cases of domestic workers being held against their will, in appalling working conditions, with their documents withheld and treated like slaves. Now a migrant worker in such a position would be tied to their employer and denied the right to find

employment elsewhere. This is surely nothing other than 'bonded labour'.

However, workers' rights do not feature on the Labour government's agenda, which is to ensure that immigration is tightly controlled and used to the maximum benefit for capitalism. This is being achieved by instituting a neatly engineered system which 'cherry picks' from poorer countries highly skilled professionals who have cost Britain nothing to train, whilst at the same time ensuring a steady flow of cheap labour on demand. This potential cheap labour force, which waits in the wings in case EU labour becomes insufficient or too costly, consists of unskilled, poor, working class migrants who will be denied any right to stay permanently or to access basic services such as health care and welfare provision.

The PBS is the latest in a plethora of new policies and laws that prevent migration to the UK that is not of economic benefit to the ruling class. Having not long before changed the name of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate into the Border and Immigration Agency, in April the Home Office changed the name again to the UK Border Agency. The press



On 20 April the Ethnic Catering Alliance demonstrated in Trafalgar Square against the introduction of the PBS, which prevents workers from countries such as India, Bangladesh and China coming to Britain to work in the restaurant industry

release accompanying the change is full of talk of 'toughness' and 'policing', stating that the Agency 'will protect our borders, control migration for the benefit of the country, prevent border tax fraud, smuggling and immigration crime ... The new 25,000 strong organisation includes more than 9,000 warranted officers operating in local communities, at the border and across 135 countries worldwide, with wide ranging search, seizure and

detention powers.' On 19 May the Border Agency announced plans for a further 1,500 places in immigration detention centres and that it would better its current performance of removing one 'illegal immigrant... every eight minutes'.

The points-based system of entry and the ruthless attack and expulsion of those not needed by British capitalism go hand in hand and must be opposed.

Defend migrant workers

On 24 April, armed police and immigration officials broke down the doors of a number of shops owned by Latin American migrants, predominantly from Ecuador, in Elephant and Castle, south London, in a city-wide tawdry for so-called 'illegal workers'. Children who were off school because of the teachers' strike that day saw their parents pushed up against the wall, intimidated and treated as criminals. Jimena Espinoza, wife of Ecuadorian community activist Paul Fierro, was taken into custody along with their young son and kept in a prison cell for two days. Espinoza was put under huge pressure to call her husband, who gave himself up. The family, whose asylum application had been rejected, were taken to a detention centre in Dover.

Paul Fierro was an activist with the Ecuadorian Movement in the UK who had

worked tirelessly on campaigns such as Documentation for All Workers and on community radio Radio Vision and Centinela de Sur. Despite well-organised protests by the Ecuadorian community, with banners declaring 'No one is illegal', 'Human rights for all migrants', 'We are not criminals; we just want to work', he and his family were deported to Ecuador on 14 May. The crackdown on undocumented workers follows new legislation introduced in February and these brutal raids can be expected to continue. The campaign will continue to protest at the savage attacks on their community, and to fight for equal treatment for all workers.

For information about future events e-mail info@movimientoecuador.co.uk

Cat Wiener



Ecuadorian migrant workers marching against the war in Iraq, March 2008

More protests in immigration detention

Harmondsworth

On 1 April immigration detainees at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) began a hunger strike and peaceful protest about their conditions and treatment and the way in which their asylum applications were being dealt with under the fast-track system. On 5 April the protest was violently repressed by prison officers in riot gear, who stormed the centre and beat protesters; at least 30 were taken away, either to the segregation block in neighbouring Colnbrook IRC or to criminal prisons. We gather that five men were moved to Walton prison in Liverpool and another five to Manchester, either to Forest Bank or Strangeways.

One detainee who was moved to Liverpool, wrote to FRFI: 'On 5 April at around 8am my door was opened. To my surprise I saw people dressed in riot suits. They took me to the gymnasium where I saw many detainees sitting on the floor, telling me we are

going to prison... Getting to prison the officers told us immigration told them we were rioting. There was nothing like a riot. What happened is that people went on hunger strike. Even the immigration officers that came to address us said they are happy it is a peaceful protest'.

We have also spoken to a detainee still in Harmondsworth, who was beaten and moved to the Colnbrook punishment block. He is anxious to find out where the detainees in criminal prisons are and has asked FRFI to appeal for prisoners reading this to let us know the details of anyone who arrived from Harmondsworth on 5 April.

Yarls Wood

At Yarls Wood IRC on 10 April, 15 mothers, including two who were breast-feeding, began a hunger strike against appalling conditions, continued detention of children and the forced removal of a mother and child.



Demonstration in support of Harmondsworth hunger strikers, 16 April 2008

There have been ongoing protests at Yarls Wood, where single women and families are held. Women say that they are held in cramped confinement, meaning viruses spread quickly; that they have to wash babies' bottles in toilet bowls and that immigration officials totally refuse to listen to these concerns.

Nicki Jameson

Housing: racism and poverty in Glasgow

'The housing shortage is no accident; it is a necessary institution and it can be abolished together with all its effects on health, etc only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned.' Engels

In May 2008, for the first time in 20 years, Glasgow City Council forcibly imposed a closure order on a private property. Infested with cockroaches, damp, with no heating or hot water, sinks unconnected and no working toilet, the two-room tenement flat was home to a Slovak Roma family of four adults and seven children.

The owner, Mohammed Aslam, is reported to rent out around 60 slum flats in south Glasgow. Many are in Govanhill, a traditional working-class area that has seen generations of immigrants – Jewish, Irish, Asian. In the past two years, Roma migrants have settled there, fleeing persecution and unemployment. Despite what the tabloids, might say, far from taking up social housing, the new immigrants have been largely forced into squalid, overcrowded, privately-owned slums. There are 600 private flats in the area below tolerable standard. Anne Lear, of Govanhill Housing Association told the *Glasgow Herald* of people 'paying up to £650 a month for an unimproved flat that might have cockroaches, rats, bed bugs or a leaking roof, or where the cooker has to be used in lieu of heating', comparing conditions to slum deprivation of the 1960s. Many homes are tied to employment and if work dries up accommodation is withdrawn and migrant workers are thrown on to the street.

Govanhill housing conditions have been a problem for a long time, with decaying closes, leaking roofs,

smashed windows, piles of rubbish, rats and open sewage pipes. Housing associations have carried out repairs on 2,000 flats in recent years, but many are falling back into disrepair. In a familiar pattern, the anger of white and Asian residents over growing poverty and inequality is increasingly directed towards the new immigrants. Outside of the city centre, Govanhill had the highest number of racially motivated attacks in Glasgow for 2006/7.

With fewer people able to afford to buy property as credit tightens, and with an oversupply of larger, middle-class flats, rents for one and two-bedroom flats have shown the highest monthly increases ever. Dozens of massive tower blocks are being demolished, with not nearly enough social housing to replace them. Asylum seekers continue to be housed by the council in homes deemed unfit for anyone else, or by private corporations like Angel housing group; but in the absence of any campaign for decent housing for all, the provision of any housing for immigrants remains a catalyst for racism and fascism.

Despite all this, there are examples of anti-racist, working class solidarity. In 2007, asylum seekers and local residents in Pollokshaws, south Glasgow successfully united against attempts to evict and rehouse asylum seekers. Only such united community action can overcome the complete destruction of all social provision for the working class.

Joseph Eskovitch