

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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The Anti-Imperialist Bloc on the demonstration against the occupation of Iraq, 19 March, London.

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NO VOTE FOR LABOUR FIGHTBACK

The Labour government of 1997 inherited five years of economic growth, growth that has continued throughout its eight years in office. Gross domestic product (GDP) has risen by over 40% in this period. It represents the longest period of sustained growth since records began. Yet despite this, as JIM CRAVEN reports, Labour has completely failed to make any significant impact on the poverty, insecurity, poor health and education faced by the majority of the working class in Britain.

Instead, it has been boom time for the rich. The Labour government has assured complete freedom for the financial sector providing record profits for all the big banks, and maintained an unregulated labour market ensuring plenty of low-paid workers, easily hired and fired, working the longest hours in Europe. It has retained the Tories' anti-trade union legislation. To provide new sources of profit for its rich friends Labour has continued to privatise public assets and to encourage the intrusion of private capital into health, education and other national services. The transfer of

public services to private industry was worth £44 billion in 2003-4 and is set to rise by 50% over the next three years to £67 billion per year. In 2004-05 the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) will account for 18% of all publicly sponsored investment.

PFI allows private firms to build public utilities such as schools and hospitals and then lease them back to the state. These companies expect to make a handsome profit. Their fees will total many times the cost of building by the end of the lease and threaten the viability of the services provided. The projected fees in 2006-07 for PFI

projects are £6.3 billion. Meanwhile, Labour has cut back on the proportion of national income devoted to public spending. Only this year will it finally rise above the level inherited from the John Major government (40.6%). As a consequence, Labour has consolidated its position as the preferred party of the ruling class and so seems likely to be rewarded with another period in government.

Your family better off? Labour's poverty-ridden Britain

Labour claims to have taken one million children and 600,000 pensioners out of poverty in the last eight years and that it will achieve its target of reducing child poverty by 25% before the end of 2005. Whilst official poverty rates may have fallen for those targeted by Labour's slender improvements to tax credits and old age pensions, poverty amongst adults of working age without children has actually risen by 300,000 to 3.9 million. In 2002-03, the latest year for which official figures are available, 12.4 million people, 22% of the popu-

lation, were living in poverty. This includes more than a quarter of all the children in Britain, a total of 3.6 million. It excludes hundreds of thousands more such as asylum seekers and 'unofficial' workers.

These people, and millions more, cannot even afford basic necessities such as warm clothing, nutritious food or decent furniture. Half of them have no savings at all. Almost two million people cannot afford to heat their homes adequately, resulting in 50,000 deaths every winter. Poverty in Britain is still more than twice the 1979 level. Even those whom Labour claims to have taken out of poverty have not, of course, had their lives transformed. For the most part they have been lifted from just below the poverty line to just above it. For a lone parent with two children to bring up this amounts to just £207 a week. For all these people life remains a day-to-day struggle just to get by.

Inequality grows under Labour

The fruits of economic growth have primarily benefited Labour's wealthy

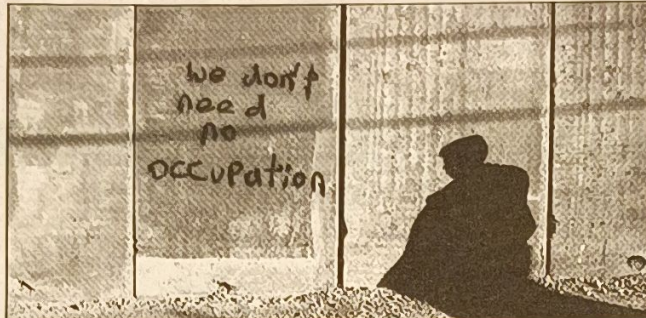
friends. By retaining low direct taxation for the rich and raising indirect taxation the tax burden has been disproportionately shouldered by the poorer sections of the working class. The gap between rich and poor is getting ever wider. The wealthiest 1% have increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% under Labour; an extra £737,000 each. The share of the poorest half of the population has fallen to just 5%. Under Labour top executive pay has risen by 500%. The average rise in earnings has been just 45%. In 1995-96 just before Labour came to power the gap in weekly disposable income between people in the 10th and 90th percentiles was around £300. By 2002-03 this gap had risen to around £490 (both figures based on 2002-03 prices).

This growing inequality means the official poverty line will rise faster than any increase in earnings for the poorer sections of the working class. Even if the economy continues at its present levels of growth this will mean more and more people will be threatened by poverty and Labour will

continued on page 8

Welcome...

'On the street in Somalia I can buy an assault rifle made in Britain, France or Germany, but I can't buy aspirin for my disabled son. That's why we came here. Now we are living in a terrible hostel, five of us in two rooms, and nobody wants to know. They blame us for everything and they pick us out one by one and send us back to our country which they have helped to destroy.' (Somali refugee to FRFI activist March 2005)



Racism is firmly on the ballot paper in this General Election – under the heading of immigration. The ruling class parties are tripping over themselves to gain the reactionary white British vote by promising to be the most punitive and repressive against desperate immigrants who arrive in Britain seeking a share of the stability and wealth stolen from their own lands over centuries of imperialism (see pages 6 and 7).

In Iraq over 100,000 civilians have fallen victim to the US and Britain's imposition of 'democracy' – culminating in a shambolic election with a 57% turnout. Excluded from the vote were the 200,000 forced exiles from Fallujah where in January the US military reportedly used napalm and poisonous gases to murder 6,000 civilians and resistance fighters. Now, despite Iraq's massive oil reserves, fuel shortages are common and electricity and water supplies intermittent. Unemployment in Iraq is 60% (see pages 4 and 5).

Yet when Iraqi immigrants arrive in Britain they are criminalised and used as pawns in the racist election competition. The same happened with Kosovans and Bosnians after the war on the Balkans in 1999 and with Afghans after the bombardment of Afghanistan in 2002. We bomb their workplaces, schools, hospitals, water, sewerage and electricity infrastructure and transport systems and when immigrants arrive here seeking work and stability, we call them scroungers or say they're potential terrorists!

Since 1997, this Labour government has introduced a catalogue of racist and repressive legislation; including denying all benefits for many asylum seekers, forced dispersal, 'reception', 'accommoda-

tion' and 'removal' centres, immigration snatch-squads and lists of 'safe countries' (see page 7). In this context there can be no excuse for any anti-racist or anti-imperialist to vote Labour in any election.

Or can there? RESPECT – a coalition of Trotskyist social democratic groups, liberals and other disaffected supporters of 'old Labour' – doesn't agree. It is tacitly endorsing Labour by refusing to stand candidates against 'anti-war Labour MPs'.

So what about these anti-war Labour MPs? Given that the occupation of Iraq is a principal policy of the Labour government, isn't their position like being in the Nazi Party but claiming you are not anti-Semitic? If you join up to a party, organisation, association or group, you are identifying with its principles and aims. If these anti-war MPs really opposed the war on Iraq wouldn't they sacrifice their parliamentary privileges and leave the Labour Party?

If the war on Iraq is not enough to make them leave, what about all the racist and repressive legislation at home? What about the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, designed to punish the working class and political activists (see page 16)? What about poverty and overcrowding in housing which disproportionately affects minority ethnic people in Britain (see page 3)? What about the brutality of our prison system, recently exposed by an inquest into a death in Frankland segregation unit (see page 13)? What about Labour's failure to tackle poverty and the growth of inequality in Britain? What about the privatisation of our National Health Service and the education system (see pages 8 and 9)? What about control orders –

which edge us closer to a police state than ever before (see page 16)? Aren't these good enough reasons to put their principles before their purse or prestige and stand down as Labour Party MPs? These people don't deserve our vote. They must be told to get out of the stinking Labour Party.

In the six counties of Ireland, the Republican working class is paying the price for Sinn Féin's compromise with imperialism (see page 11). Ironically, Sinn Féin took their cue to enter the 'peace process' from South Africa and Palestine. Today another bout of opportunist compromise from the newly elected bourgeois Palestinian Mahmoud Abbas is driving fast towards a dead end for the Palestinian people (see page 5).

For elections to be truly democratic, they have to accompany deep-rooted social and economic transformations, which give real power to the poor majority. This process is underway in Venezuela. In Cuba, where the means of production are in the hands of the people, elections offer us an insight into real, grassroots democracy. It is this example which the US tries to obscure with its fabricated and hypocritical accusations of human rights abuses (see page 14).

Bolivia and Nepal are ablaze with the righteous indignation of a risen people. The future is there for the taking (see pages 10 and 3).

Let's assert our democratic grassroots demands – don't vote for the racist Labour government – don't vote for a racist alternative. Don't vote for reformists. Don't vote – organise! Join us – there is strength in numbers.

Send us your contributions, written and financial.

The Budget: Scrambling for votes

Chancellor Brown's ninth budget was presented to Parliament 50 days before an expected general election on 5 May. It is designed to get crucial voters back on board in a period of rapidly deteriorating public finances and with millions of voters threatening to desert the Labour Party after its shameful imperialist intervention in Iraq. That is no easy task, as David Yaffe reports.

Brown is constrained by Labour's neo-liberal agenda, his 'prudent' fiscal rules needed to satisfy the interests of banking and multinational capital, which govern Labour's economic policy. His so-called 'golden rule' demands a low and stable public debt-to-GDP ratio, while the current budget has to be balanced over the economic cycle. (Borrowing to invest is permitted as long as public debt is kept below 40% of GDP). At the same time Brown has already committed the majority of the public funds made available on this basis to health and education, spending necessary to keep significant sections of the middle and upper working class voting Labour. In addition there is the rapidly growing expenditure needed to finance Britain's imperialist intervention in Iraq. Brown has very little room for manoeuvre, but manoeuvre he must to keep this rotten imperialist government in power.

Poor at statistics

Britain, said Brown, starting his budget speech, is 'experiencing the longest period of economic growth since records began in 1701'. There have been nearly 13 years of continuous economic growth, with low inflation, low interest rates and low unemployment and living standards rising 3% a year on average since 1997, when Labour took office. Yet Brown tells us that any 'fiscal loosening' this year 'would risk a return to high inflation, high interest rates, stop-go and short-termism of the past and put long-term stability at risk'. So how bad is it really?

The government has an estimated deficit of £16bn in the current financial year, £6bn higher than expected only a year ago. It would have been higher still if the government had not failed to invest an already allocated £4bn in Britain's crumbling public infrastructure. To finance its current expenditure the government borrowed £34.4bn. In 2001 Brown predicted he would borrow £16bn over this parliament. He has borrowed £95bn and on present plans will borrow £112bn over the next parliament. Not very prudent and very poor at predictions. However Brown claims that he will meet his 'golden rule' over the seven-year economic cycle ending next year with an improbable current expenditure surplus of £6bn. This budget will see, as a result, a small fiscal tightening (tax receipts will be greater than increased spending) of £265m despite the coming general election. Public finances have deteriorated precisely because Labour refuses to raise income tax on high income earners, and has significantly reduced capital gains tax on investments and corporation tax on highly profitable banks and corporations.

Wooing potential voters

With little room for manoeuvre, the budget targeted tax and spending cuts at what Labour sees as potential voters. There are 11 million pensioners in Britain and they are more likely to vote than the average voter. 70% of over 65s voted in 2001 compared to an average overall turnout of 59.4%. So pensioners have been offered free off-peak local bus passes and the over 65s a £200 council tax rebate for one year only. Millions of poor pensioners who do not pay council tax lose out. Together the cost will be some £1.25bn over the next financial year. In addition Pension credit will rise by 13% by 2008 in line with earnings and reach £119 a week, still leaving mil-

lions of pensioners on the poverty line. The basic pension will continue to rise with prices and therefore fall as a percentage of average earnings. Governments have saved around £30bn alone between 1979 and 1996 after the link between pensions and earnings was broken by the Tories. Labour refuses to restore it. Two million pensioners still live in abject poverty and a high percentage of the rest exists on the poverty line.

The budget also increased child tax credits in line with earnings increasing payments by 13% over three years. This will affect working families with children and cost £740m over three years. This is Labour's gesture to what it regards as the 'deserving' poor. The 'undeserving' poor will continue to be harassed with the government considering a fixed fine for people on unemployment benefit who fail to look for work. Working families with no children and working families with grown up children are not on Brown's list of handouts.

The doubling of the level at which stamp duty is paid on residential property to £120,000 and the above inflation increase of the threshold before inheritance tax is paid is designed to attract middle class voters. The fuel duty increase in line with inflation has been put on hold until September in order not to annoy car and lorry drivers before the election.

The increased spending will be financed from bringing forward tax payments due from North Sea Oil companies (£1.1bn), new tax avoidance measures (£1bn) and increased stamp duty on commercial properties in disadvantaged areas (£265m). These are small tax increases to finance small spending increases. Last year alone £4.9bn was spent on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and on so-called counter terrorist operations, with an extra £400m for this financial year. Money is always readily available for the real priorities of imperialist governments.

Not highlighted in the budget

Brown's projections for future public spending depend on the state of the British economy over the next few years. What were not highlighted in the budget were Britain's record trade deficit of £42bn and the rapidly growing current account deficit expected to reach £38bn in 2007. Nor was the record household debt of 140% of income, higher than that in the US and most other large European countries. That almost 1m jobs have been lost from manufacturing since Labour took power in 1997 didn't get a mention. Nor did the fact that inequality in Britain has continually grown with Labour in office, with the top 1% increasing their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% and the bottom 10% seeing their share fall from 7% to 5%.

Labour will continue to privatise public services and public assets. Foundation hospitals will be able to compete for patients outside their catchment area from 2006. Schools will continue to be handed over to private sector sponsors, who will pay less than one-tenth of their cost for a large degree of control of the schools curriculum, ethos and staffing. The government will continue to sell off public assets with a further £14bn worth to be disposed of in the next few years.

The budget should deceive no one. It is the shameful expression of a reactionary government that intends to stay in power at the next general election. ■

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www.revolutionarycommunist.com

25th anniversary fighting fund

Help us raise £5,192 in the next two months!

We have raised £4,808 towards our £10,000 target. We still have a long way to go, and urge all our readers to send us a donation.

We are fighting against imperialism with our consistent work in solidarity with the Palestinian people. We helped to build an anti-imperialist bloc contingent on the 19 March demonstration against the Iraq war. We remain the only left paper in Britain to fight Labour racism and imperialism. We say 'No vote for Labour' at the coming general election and continue to expose the Labour left's complete impotence in the face of massive attacks on democratic rights that the Blair government is introducing. We condemn those who refuse to break from Labour despite its unflinching promotion of British imperialist interests in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East. We will continue to stand for the independent interests of the working class and oppressed throughout the world.

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Housing crisis hits minority ethnic families hardest

BARNABY MITCHEL

In the last two issues of FRFI we reported on how the government's war on council housing is attacking the basic right of working class people to affordable and secure housing. The Labour government is refusing to allow local authorities to invest directly in council homes, despite this being the democratic choice of many communities, and is using blackmail and dirty tricks to force through its ideological commitment to privatisation.

Black and minority ethnic people are at the frontline of this war. The 2001 census revealed that black and minority ethnic households make up 7% of England's population. In the year ending June 2004 such households accounted for 20% of those accepted as homeless by local authorities. Black African/Caribbean households make up 10% of homeless acceptances despite accounting for only 2% of England's population. They also represent just under half (45%) of all black and minority ethnic homeless households (Shelter, *The black and minority ethnic housing crisis*, September 2004).

Between April 1997 and March 2004, total homeless acceptances by English local authorities have increased by 34%. However, in the same period, homelessness amongst non-white households rose by 77%. Black and minority ethnic families are also more likely to live in poor housing, with 8% living in accommodation that is deemed to be unfit, compared to 3.5% of white households. Over 9% of Asian people live in unfit housing.

Almost one in 10 households living in social housing in London is now overcrowded, an increase of 35% since 1991 (London housing briefing March 2004, *Overcrowding in London*). Nearly a third of all London's children live in overcrowded homes due to a massive shortage of affordable housing, especially homes for larger families. The stock of social housing in London fell by 50,000 between 1991 and 2002, a direct result of



the devastation of council housing by successive Labour and Tory governments.

135 years ago Frederick Engels said 'One thing is certain: there is already a sufficient quantity of houses in the big cities to remedy immediately all real "housing shortage", provided they are used judiciously. This can naturally only occur through the expropriation of the present owners by quartering in their houses the homeless workers or workers overcrowded in their present homes'.

According to the independent campaigning charity the Empty Homes Agency, there were 689,675 empty properties in England in 2004. 100,000 of these were in London.

Overcrowding is most severe amongst black and minority ethnic households and one-parent families (London Housing briefing, October 2004). 46% of black African and 53% of Bangladeshi households live in overcrowded housing (Census data 2001). In London, Tower Hamlets, Ealing and Newham have the worst overcrowding. Tower Hamlets has the worst record in London and England as a whole, with 64% of Bangladeshi households living in overcrowded condi-

tions. On average, black and minority ethnic households in England are seven times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions than white households. (Shelter, September 2004)

Living in overcrowded accommodation is debilitating and has an impact on both health and educational attainment. The increase in overcrowding has been mirrored by the rise in tuberculosis infections that began to rise in the 1980s after 40 years of decline. Research shows a strong link between low educational attainment and overcrowded or poor housing conditions.

According to housing law rules laid down in 1935, a child aged 1 to 10 counts as half a person and a baby counts for nothing. A living room counts as a bedroom. Overcrowding forces young people to hang out on the streets because there is nowhere for them at home; adolescent girls have to share rooms with male siblings. It is obvious that having no opportunity to study or read in a quiet and undisturbed environment affects a child's learning and personal development – and it is children from black and minority ethnic communities who are bearing the brunt of the crisis.

Nepal: King suspends constitutional rule

ANDREW ALEXANDER

On the 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra of Nepal declared a state of emergency. In doing so he sacked the prime minister, suspended many constitutional rights, banned peaceful assembly and decreed that there could be no free speech or expression for at least three years, nor were the people allowed 'free thought' for the same period. The media in particular has been hit hard with all press freedoms suspended and any criticism of the King outlawed. Countless journalists have been either imprisoned or forced out of their jobs and the television networks can no longer broadcast news – just entertainment programmes.

As the King announced his totalitarian measures on television, his loyal Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) and armed police started arresting people and enforced a brutal and sweeping clampdown on the capital Kathmandu. Prime Minister Deuba was immediately detained and placed under house arrest along with other leaders of the parliamentary parties, including the Nepali Congress and the reformist Communist Party of Nepal (UML). Further sweeping arrests were made of student and trade union leaders in order to prevent demonstrations against the new measures.

This move by the King is the culmination of moves to reimpose autocratic rule in the country. He tried to win popular support by blaming corruption in parliament, but in reality his consolidation of power will only antagonise the Nepalese people further. Gyanendra is gambling that he can get away with such action because the imperialist states will side with him rather than with the Maoist insurgency, led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). On this point he is cor-

rect. Despite criticisms of his move by the US, Britain and India there will be no long-term consequences for the King.

However, it is a gamble that may well lead to the King's downfall. The CPN(M) and PLA now have almost complete control of the countryside and they enjoy broad support not just from the peasantry but also, increasingly and crucially, amongst broad sections of workers in the cities. The harsh curtailment of freedom will generate sympathy for the democratic and revolutionary forces amongst the people.

The King has the same goal as the imperialists – to crush the revolution – but they are at odds on strategy. Many imperialist analysts have begun to state publicly that the PLA cannot be defeated militarily. If this is so, the greatest threat to the movement will come from the more opportunist parliamentary forces, yet the King's move will no longer allow them to play their role.

On the day of the King's new measures, Prachanda, head of the CPN(M), stated that the country had entered 'a turning point, a decisive battle between autocracy and republic...our party forcefully appeals to all the country's political parties, the intellectual masses, civil society and the masses of all levels and beliefs to create a storm of united countryside rebellion, under the minimum common slogan of a people's democratic republic and a constituent assembly, against the last lunacy of the feudal clique.' The CPN(M) has called for an indefinite blockade and traffic strike throughout the country, which has so far been relatively successful. It has also managed to keep communication channels open, despite a clampdown on internet facilities in the country, and on 9 February, barely a week after the new measures, attacked a gaol near Kathmandu killing five security personnel and freeing 166 prisoners (many of them Maoists) in the process.

A reporter from New Delhi said of the King's move that 'this is a fairly disastrous decision, the worst possible option that will alienate the King from all of the nation's major political forces even as it does nothing to strengthen his hand against the rebels'. The Indian government, more than any other, feels most threatened by the revolution in Nepal. *The New York Times* quoted C Raja Mohan, professor of South Asian studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, who pointed out that Nepal shares a border with China and borders three of India's largest states, all of which are battling Marxist Naxalite insurgents who have links to the Maoist groups in Nepal. 'Strategically,' Mohan said, 'you can't get any bigger than this'.

The imperialists are now trying to force the King to hand back some power to the parliamentary forces. Both India and Britain have temporarily ceased all military assistance to the country. The US State Department demanded an 'immediate move toward the restoration of multi-party democratic institutions'. However, while the imperialist countries voice their concerns, Pakistan has continued to equip the army.

Deuba has been released from house arrest after 38 days. He is now leading calls that 'the King should enter into dialogue with political parties and give all executive powers to a new multi-party government'. Whether he will or not is still to be seen. With India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines all now experiencing revolutionary movements, the insurgency in Nepal is taking on increasing significance.

In Prachanda's statement of 1 February he appealed to 'the entire pro-people forces of the world to raise their voices against this autocratic step and in favour of the Nepalese people's democratic movement'. It is our duty as socialists, especially here in an imperialist country, to show our solidarity with the Nepalese people. ■

Long live International Working Women's Day!

On 6 March in Turkey, a large number of women and men from 14 different civil organisations in Istanbul gathered to celebrate International Working Women's Day, protest against sexism and demand equal rights for women.

Not surprisingly, they were viciously attacked by the Turkish police who were armed with tear gas and truncheons, and who charged the demonstrators before the rally had kicked off. As a result of this ferocious attack, 65 people were arrested. Others who were trying to flee were caught and hospitalised by the fascist police.

The current government has been in office for four years. The US unconditionally supported the new government at the time of the election on the grounds its 'moderate Islamism' would set an example against the fundamentalist Islamists.

Since then there has been, in practice, no improvement in Turkey despite its effort to join the EU. Like the fundamentalists, the moderates have nothing to offer to ordinary women or men but repression and bloodshed.

Suna Gelik



Protestor against autocratic rule is arrested on a demonstration in Kathmandu

Iraq: democracy at gunpoint

Elections in Palestine, elections in Iraq, the 'cedar revolution' in Lebanon, local elections in Saudi Arabia and the promise of a contested presidential election in Egypt. Democracy is coming to the Middle East, or so the story goes. Behind the Palestinian election stands the Zionist military machine, crushing the Intifada and reducing the Palestinians to beggary. The road to the vote in Iraq passed through the rubble and uncounted corpses of Fallujah. In the name of democracy imperialism is setting the Middle East on fire. It is not freedom Bush and Blair bring – it is war. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

Prime Minister Blair declared Iraq's 30 January election 'magnificent'. Television and newspaper reports sought to use the election to justify and legitimise the war. The Labour Party hoped these would prove sufficient to retrieve support lost among Labour voters who opposed the war. Genuine demands for democracy among the Iraqi people are being cynically used to prolong the occupation of their country. Immediately after the election the US Pentagon announced it would keep 120,000 troops in Iraq until at least 2007. These elections were not about sovereignty.

The purposes of the elections, called and arranged by the occupying powers, were to extend the occupation and to create a reliable political entity willing to implement imperialist rule over Iraq. They were used to divide and rule the country by drawing as many forces as possible to the new National Assembly while isolating the resistance, thereby allowing the occupying armies to focus on the Sunni population.

In Iraq, as in Afghanistan, the US and other imperialist armies are incapable of waging a successful prolonged war of occupation without locally recruited military allies to fight for them. The new National Assembly is intended to provide that mercenary force.

Eight and a half million people voted in Iraq, approximately 57% of the electorate. In the mainly Sunni provinces few people voted: 2% in Anbar, 17% in Ninevah and 29% in Salahadin. Many polling stations did not open. An opinion poll in December showed 53% of five million Sunnis supported armed resistance. On 30 January an RAF Hercules C-130 cargo plane was brought down, probably by a missile, with ten British servicemen killed, the biggest single loss of British troops since the war began.

The elections have provided imperialism with gains. The armed resistance of the Shias ended, with supporters of Muqtada al Sadr joining the National Assembly. The leadership of the main parties benefiting from the elections, Shia and Kurdish, served in the previous Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) or its successor, the Interim Government and so might be considered reliable accomplices of imperialism. The main Shia groups, the United Iraqi Alliance (51% of the seats) backed by Grand Ayatollah Sistani, and Interim Government Prime Minister Allawi's Iraqi List (14.5% of the seats) both initially included a timetable for foreign troops withdrawal in their manifestos. The Alliance withdrew its manifesto just before the election, then re-issued it without the call for a 'conditions-based withdrawal'. The US complained so Allawi said it was

too early to talk about withdrawal. The CPA and the Interim Government stood on a foundation of occupying armies, and so stands their National Assembly successor.

Wider sections of the Iraqi ruling class have been mobilised to participate in the US- and British-sponsored organisations and political process, but how reliable are they? Apart from the Kurds, the great majority of Iraqi people want the occupation forces out of their country. Estimates of Iraqi civilian deaths due to the war have risen to over 100,000. They are estimates because the occupation powers deliberately refuse to record them. Each of those deaths is an indictment of the war. No figures means no evidence with which to prosecute the crime. On a recent visit to Iraq *The Independent's* Robert Fisk used Baghdad mortuary records to show that in this city alone 560 people are being killed each month.

It is thought that 6,000 civilians were killed in the US and British assault on Fallujah. There are reports that the US used napalm and poison gas. There are still over 200,000 refugees from Fallujah; they were not registered to vote nor given voting cards. Fallujah is symbolic of the terror and destruction that imperialism has brought to Iraq. The released Italian journalist Giuliana Sgrena believes the US forces deliberately ambushed her on 2 March. As the car she was in approached Baghdad airport its occupants were sprayed without warning by 300-400 bullets. This is what US soldiers do in Iraq: shoot first, ask questions later. With no official body count, all estimates state that the occupation armies have killed far more people than the resistance.

Living conditions have deteriorated across Iraq. Electricity and water supplies are intermittent. Fuel shortages are common. Unemployment is 60% and higher in many parts of Iraq. The ruling factions in the national assembly have to respond to the demands of the people or become isolated and hence useless to imperialism. The imperialists' show of democracy may well encourage demands for the real thing.

The dominant Shia parties have a religious affinity with Iran. Iran may be able to use them to exert influence over Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This would be at the expense of imperialism. The occupying powers will try to remove that weapon by breaking the leaders away from their allegiances to Iran.

The election and the National Assembly are intended to increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of the US- and British-recruited Iraqi armed



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forces. The Pentagon claims there are 142,472 trained and equipped Iraqi security personnel. This is nonsense, as only a small fraction of these are capable of fighting the resistance that daily kills new recruits. Auxiliary units are being formed to fight alongside the occupation armies and the Iraqi security forces. Former generals, sheikhs and bourgeois families lead these potential death squads. However, the only substantial, reliable fighting ally that the occupation forces have with them is the Kurdish militia.

The Kurdish Alliance won 27% of the National Assembly seats and is proving critical in establishing the Assembly and filling key posts. It was six weeks after the election before the Assembly met and the main positions were still not agreed. Elements within the main United Iraqi Alliance are threatening to leave it. There are disputes over Iranian influence, the role of Islamic law and Kurdish autonomy. The Kurds demand that they retain autonomy within Iraq and the resettlement of Kirkuk with displaced Kurdish families, in exchange for supporting a new governing coalition in the assembly. Kirkuk is in an oil rich region. The US and British governments can expect to play the role of broker: sharing out Iraqi oil revenues between multinational corporations and the competing claims of the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish ruling classes. These claims are not debated over legal titles, they are argued by physi-

cal force on the ground. These are the fault-lines along which Iraq could fragment.

Whenever it is formed the new Iraqi government must negotiate with the resistance and try to bring all those it can onto its side. *Time* magazine reports that Pentagon officials have met with resistance leaders from the former Ba'athist regime. The new government must attempt to repair the economic and social damage done to Iraq and improve people's living conditions and it must negotiate a timetable for withdrawal of the occupation armies. These three are interconnected; there are no prospects for social and economic improvement while the occupation forces battle the resistance. The primary requirement for any improvement in the Iraqi people's conditions is the ending of the occupation. End all the legislation privatising state assets and preparing the plunder of Iraq's oil. End the 15% flat tax rate and end the entire system of bribery and corruption accompanying the scandalous distribution of contracts supposedly for rebuilding Iraq but actually for looting it.

Violence of the oppressor and the oppressed

Communists in Britain have a responsibility to both the Iraqi and the British working classes. In *The Right of nations to self-determination* Lenin said, 'The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support. At the same time we strictly distinguish it from the tendency towards national exclusiveness; we fight against the tendency of the Polish bourgeoisie to oppress the Jews, etc.'* In so far as the removal of the occupation forces is a pre-condition for the advance of the Iraqi people, we unconditionally support the right of the resistance to fight the occupation forces and their servants. However, where sections of the resistance seek to promote privileged class interests at the expense of the oppressed Iraqi people we oppose it. We cannot support the attempt to impose a medieval theocracy on Iraqi men and women.

Bombings of mosques, hospitals and bakeries, all targets hit in February, are sectarian and tend to divide the Iraqi masses, immobilising rather than uniting them against imperialism.

At the same time, we say that the most hideous aspects of the resistance are ultimately the responsibility of the invaders. Writing after the 1857 Indian Revolt, Marx opposed the racist representations of Indian violence in the British press. He drew a sharp distinction between the violence of the oppressed and the violence of the oppressor, dialectically linking the two.

'Torture formed an organic institution in (Britain's) financial policy. There is something in human history like retribution; and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not only by the offended but by the offender himself.' 'In view of such facts [on British torture], dispassionate and thoughtful men may perhaps be led to ask whether a people are not justified in attempting to expel the foreign conquerors who have so abused their subjects. And if the English could do these things in cold blood, is it surprising that the insurgent Hindus should be guilty, in the fury of revolt and conflict, of the crimes and cruelties alleged against them'. (*Investigation of Tortures in India*)

Shock and Awe, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Fallujah and decades of brutal imperialist oppression are returned to the offender.

The bourgeois media focus on the sectarian attacks and do not cover the resistance's engagement with the occupation forces. On 7 September 2004 the number of US soldiers reported killed in action in Iraq reached 1,000. By 3 March 2005 the total was 1,500. This is an average of over 80 US soldiers killed each month since September 2004. Black youth recruitment into the US Army is down by 41% since 2000. Amongst US black youth unemployment is over 10%, double the rate for white youths. Army pay is attractive to black youths, in some years since the draft ended in 1973, they constituted close to 30% of volunteers. They now form 13.9% of new recruits. The Pentagon has announced that death benefits for soldiers killed in combat zones are to be doubled, giving families \$500,000 for their sacrifice.

Unaffordable war

This war is costing the US government \$1 billion a week, (the British Labour government is spending £408.3 million each month on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and against 'terrorism'). In 2004 the US trade deficit soared to \$618 billion. Net US external liabilities are about \$4 trillion or 30% of the US economy. To finance its external deficit the US must attract capital inflows of nearly \$2 billion a day. A handful of Asian central banks control \$2.4 trillion of reserves that prop up the dollar and the US economy. In February a Bank of Korea official said they might sell dollar assets. The dollar plummeted and markets had to be reassured by talk of 'diversifying' holdings. The scenario was replayed in March in Japan. The US cannot afford this war. Its trade and budget deficits now imperil the financial architecture of international capitalism. However, the US ruling class is fighting for global domination through victory in the Middle East; it cannot afford to lose.

* Poland was fighting for liberation from Russia.



Target Syria

The killing of Lebanon's former prime minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut on 14 February was pounced on by the US, Israeli, British and French governments to escalate their pressure on the Syrian government. Hariri wanted Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. He was a billionaire capitalist with many opponents. Nevertheless, by recalling the US ambassador from Damascus the finger was quickly pointed at Syria as the culprit and the imperialists demanded that Syria withdraw its forces from Lebanon. The Syrian government denied complicity.

Syrian soldiers entered Lebanon in 1976 with the agreement of the US government. Their purpose was to crush the Palestinians who were overwhelming the reactionary Christian militias. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and occupied southern Lebanon until 2000 when Hizbollah drove the Israeli forces out. Syria, Hizbollah and Iran quickly rose in priority as targets of imperialism. On 28 March 2003 US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld accused Syria and Iran of helping the Iraqi army as it crumbled before the invasion force. Condoleezza Rice repeated the accusation and on 3 May 2003 she then Secretary of State Powell visited Damascus to reinforce the message. In October 2003 the Israeli airforce bombed what they claimed was a Palestinian training camp outside Damascus. In September 2004 Israel's Mossad killed a Hamas commander in Damascus. Israel accused Syria of involvement in the recent bombing of a Tel Aviv nightclub. Iraqi government television shows 'confessions' of captured resistance fighters saying they have been trained in Syria or are Syrian intelligence agents.

Two days after Hariri's death the Iranian and Syrian governments announced they would form a 'common front' against imperialist threats. Israel responded by calling for the removal of Iranian Revolutionary Guards from

Lebanon. They left 15 years ago. In London, the Israeli foreign minister said Iran would be able to produce nuclear weapons within six months and by 2010 they could reach 'London, Paris and Madrid' - echoes of the 'weapons of mass destruction' pretext.

The US, British, French and Israeli governments call for the implementation of the 2004 UN Resolution 1559. This demands that Syria withdraw all its forces from Lebanon, the disarmament of Hizbollah and deployment of the Lebanese army along the border with Israel. Syria has said it will abide by the 1989 Taif Agreement which proposed a staged withdrawal of Syrian troops to the Bekaa Valley and then later to Syria. It contains no clauses on Hizbollah. Hizbollah draws its recruits chiefly from the Shia population of Lebanon. On 8 March over half a million Shia supporters of Hizbollah demonstrated in Beirut in support of Syria and against US and Israeli meddling in Lebanon. The demonstrators of the 'cedar revolution' come mainly from Lebanon's Christian, Sunni and Druze communities. On 14 March one million of them demonstrated in Beirut to demand the withdrawal of Syrian forces, the resignation of Lebanon's government and the truth about who killed Hariri. They appeared generally better off than the Shia demonstrators were.

Imperialist strategy is not simply concerned with removing Syrian forces from Lebanon. It is intent on destabilising the Syrian state and forcing it to renounce its alliance with Iran and Iran's ally in Lebanon, Hizbollah. Imperialism seeks to isolate each target in order to destroy it. President Bush has declared 'freedom will prevail in Lebanon'. Lebanese people have long been used in other people's battles. Imperialism intends that Lebanon becomes a front line in its battle with Syria and Iran.

Trevor Rayne

Palestine: 'so far we have nothing'

On 8 February, following meetings with the US Secretary for State Condoleezza Rice newly elected Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon met at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. Here they agreed a ceasefire, or to be more precise Abbas delivered an undertaking that the Palestinian resistance groups would not engage in attacks on Israeli occupation forces. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

Abbas declared 'we are committed to the peace process. The time has come for the Palestinians to achieve the independence of our people, to enjoy peace. Dialogue will replace weapons and shells.' Sharon was in no hurry to engage in any real dialogue and made it clear that he would carry on with his plan to withdraw all settlers from Gaza before returning to President Bush's 'Roadmap' and any discussions on a future Palestinian state. Sharon did however agree to initiate prisoner releases and begin the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from five main Palestinian cities on the West Bank.

At the end of the summit Abbas declared 'We jointly agreed with Prime Minister Sharon to stop all acts of violence against Israelis and Palestinians everywhere'. This formulation equates the legitimate resistance of the occupied Palestinian people with the violence of the Israeli occupying forces.

In fact, the aim of the summit had little to do with delivering justice to the Palestinians, but a lot to do with bolstering the position of Abbas, strengthening him in his confrontation with the Palestinian resistance. The period since 8 February has seen continued Israeli killings, continued building of the apartheid wall, no dismantling of army checkpoints, no meaningful pullout from West Bank cities and no release of long-term Palestinian political prisoners.

The ceasefire

In the first days of the 'ceasefire' Israeli forces killed two Palestinians, one in Gaza the other on the West Bank. Hamas responded by launching rocket attacks from Gaza onto Israeli settlements. Abbas condemned the rocket attack, sacked nine leading police officers in Gaza, declared a state of emergency in the Palestinian police force and promised a clamp down on the resistance. Ze'ev Boim, Israel's deputy defence minister, echoing imperialism's support for Abbas, declared: 'We still have a policy of restraint and civil gestures in order to strengthen him [Abbas]', but warned 'it must be remembered this won't last for ever. He has to take action'. The action demanded was of course action against the resistance.

By the end of the first week of the ceasefire, Israeli forces had killed six Palestinians including two young boys. After a meeting with Abbas, Hamas stated 'we explained to brother Mahmoud Abbas that we wouldn't accept a situation whereby Israel attacks and kills us with impunity'. However Hamas also conceded that they would consult with the Palestinian Authority before responding to any further Israeli provocation. In return for the continuation of what they term the 'calm down', the resistance groups reiterated their call for the release of all Palestinian political prisoners and an end to Israeli attacks on Palestinian areas.

The first and up to now only release of prisoners took place on 21 February. Israeli forces currently hold 7-8,000 political prisoners. Only 500



Palestinian families are still waiting for the release of long-term political prisoners

were set free and they were Palestinians who were either coming to the end of their sentence or those held in administrative detention. No long-term political prisoners were released nor any who had engaged in actions that had led to Israeli deaths. All that Israel has agreed to is the release of a further 400 political prisoners within the next three months. A joint Israeli-Palestinian ministerial committee has been set up to choose which prisoners will qualify to be set free.

A government report on illegal settlements in the West Bank published on 9 March revealed the real agenda being pursued by Sharon and the Israeli state. While the Israeli government is committed under the Roadmap to demolish settlements built on the West Bank since 2001, the report shows that the government has continued to encourage and finance their construction. The report details the financial support government ministries give to Jewish settlers to set up outposts, unauthorised illegal settlements, in the West Bank. In all, the Housing Ministry has spent around £10 million funding outposts since Sharon came to power in 2001. The Education Ministry has paid for nurseries, the Energy Ministry has connected outposts to the electricity grid, roads have been built and the army has provided protection. According to the report, of the 105 outposts it lists, only 24 have been constructed after 2001 and therefore face demolition. By concentrating on the outposts or unauthorised settlements, the report obscures the massive growth of 'authorised' settlements and therefore the full extent of Zionist colonisation of the West Bank. The continued construction of the apartheid wall in the West Bank clearly shows what is really going on.

On 14 March Sharon approved the proposed route of the apartheid wall around Jerusalem. It will place the whole of Jerusalem and part of Bethlehem on the Israeli side and it will almost cut the West Bank in half. A UN report states that the wall will swallow 10% of the most fertile land in the West Bank. It will also include the biggest Jewish settlement on the

West Bank, Ma'ale Adumin with a population of over 250,000, onto the Israeli side. As Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, 'Does anyone have even the slightest doubt that Ma'ale Adumin is an integral part of Israel?'

Whether the 'calm down' the Palestinian Resistance groups have kept to since 8 February becomes an official ceasefire or not, it is clear that the Zionists will delay any meaningful talks as long as possible. Sharon has already said that a ceasefire is meaningless whilst the 'terrorist groups remain'. In the meantime Israel will forge ahead with the construction of the apartheid wall creating 'facts on the ground'. With the encouragement of the US and Britain, the Zionists will keep the pressure on Abbas to confront the Palestinian resistance.

Evidence of Britain's pressure came at a one-day conference in London on 1 March. Tony Blair praised Sharon's 'courage' in disengaging from Gaza, whilst a statement from the quartet of the EU, the US, UN and Russia demanded 'immediate action' to arrest those involved in a bombing in Tel Aviv at the end of February. Abbas took the cue by saying that 'the most important message is our complete readiness to exert 100% effort in the domain of security.' One of the few concrete measures the meeting agreed to was the setting up of an international team, including Britain, led by Lieutenant-General William Ward, US security co-ordinator for the region, to reorganise the Palestinian security services.

The main opposition to Abbas has come from Hamas; it has announced that it will stand in the July elections to the Palestinian Legislative Assembly. To date Abbas has done nothing for the poor. Unemployment rates are now over 60%, and in Gaza, on 12 March thousands of unemployed stormed the government building demanding work. One of the organisers was quoted as saying that Abbas had promised jobs 'but so far we have nothing'. The resistance needs to take up the demands of the poor and oppressed as part of its struggle against Zionism.

Bob Shepherd

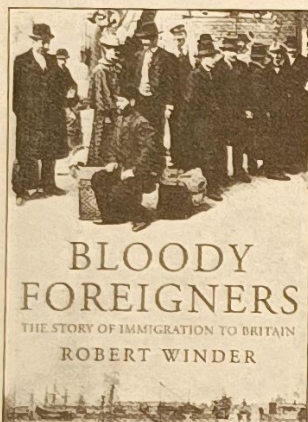


19 MARCH, London, 50,000-strong demonstration against war in Iraq: the RCG/FRFI with the Marxist Leninist Party of Turkey and Northern Kurdistan, ATIK, the International League of People's Solidarity and Migrant International marched with others under the banner of the Anti-Imperialist Bloc. The Bloc held an alternative open meeting in Trafalgar Square.

'We are all foreign scum'

■ Bloody Foreigners – the story of immigration to Britain

Robert Winder; Little, Brown 2004, ISBN 0-316-86135-9, £20



The good news about this excellent book is that it is due to be published in paperback in June 2005 at a more affordable price. We recommend everyone to beg, borrow or steal a copy, for Winder's book not only describes the sweep of British history from pre-Celtic times to modern day with humanity and fascinating detail, but he also arms the reader with the politics to stand firm against racism and xenophobia (hatred of foreigners).

Firstly, on the level of historical fact, the book serves to set the record straight both about nationality and about the numbers involved. Britain was a net exporter of people for most of the 20th century; for example, between 1961 and 1981 – a period including Enoch Powell and Mrs Thatcher – Britain's population declined by over a million. The 2001 Census shows that 7.9% of the total population belongs to the so-called ethnic minorities, the majority of them born in Britain. People from Britain have been and are today active emigrants with over 100,000 living along the French Riviera alone.

Repeated waves of immigration occurred in the thousand years between the Roman occupation of Britain and the Norman Conquest in 1066, let alone the following centuries of French Protestants, Jews, Hungarians, Indians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Africans, Cypriots, Chinese, Poles, Italians, Swiss, South Americans, and Caribbean settlers. This history makes nonsense of notions of racial Britishness; few residents of this island can claim genetic ties to Cheddar Gorge Man. The very category 'race' itself lacks substance in terms of this social history, let alone in a scientific sense. And yet the history of immigration to Britain has been a history of racism encountered, fought, accepted and rejected, of integration and persecution.

Time and again Winder peels back the layers of the past to show that much of what is regarded as essentially British is both recent and foreign in origin. Not only the German/Greek royal family but the artists who celebrated their reigns, Van Dyck and Handel, were 'bloody foreigners'. The flowering of British industrial world supremacy in the nineteenth century was boosted by the immigrant German Mr Volckmar who founded the General Electric Company, retired

As the main parties in the British general election fine tune their racist policies in the battle for votes, we publish a review of a book which charts the history of immigration and immigrants in Britain showing that in an imperialist nation, the state's immigration policies are necessarily racist.



East London: migrants from Sylhet settled in streets once occupied by Irish and Jewish families.

to an English country estate and was made baronet in 1925. Harland and Wolff in Belfast, the last remaining shipyard of British expansionism, was also established by Germans, as was Reuter's news agency, which was created by a Rabbi's son utilising the latest telegraphic inventions.

Like the Jews, the Irish were formally expelled from England by royal decree, twice, in 1243 and 1413. While it is a generalisation that the Irish were, in the main, unskilled navvies, the canal and railroad builders of this country, Winder's book unveils the stories of many others whose inventiveness and business acumen have long been absorbed into everyday life. Patrick James Foley, whose parents emigrated from poverty in the 1830s, remained a Catholic and supporter of Home Rule all his life and became a founder, then President, of Pearl Assurance, which by 1913 was the third largest life-assurance company in Britain. The Jewish Dubliner Dr Thomas Barnardo set up a school in his own home after seeing the ravages of the 1867 cholera epidemic on the children of the East End, which grew into the most renowned charitable institution in the country. Then there is the glory of the Irish contribution to British literature stretching from Swift, Sterne and Goldsmith to Shaw and Wilde, which continues today. By documenting hundreds of lives of real people in real circumstances Winder's book attacks the stereotyping that stands between the reader and real history.

The response to immigration by those already settled here is as much part of the history as the story of the immigrants themselves. The defining view has always been that of the title of this book – 'bloody foreigners!' Routine hostility is the norm, irrespective of the sufferings of the immigrants fleeing from their homelands,

despite the gifts and talents they bring with them, regardless of the economic, cultural and social contribution they can make if allowed to do so.

Winder shows that the ruling class has always been ready to use hatred of the foreigner as a tool to mould patriotism in the service of the state and its wars of imperial conquest. The persecution of German residents in the decade leading up to the First World War by rioting mobs was encouraged by the popular press in language familiar today when asylum seekers are vilified and lied about. The *Daily*

'When polls showed in 2001 that the public believed that Britain accepted 25% of the world's asylum seekers at a time when the real figures was only 2%, we see the impact of deliberate manipulation of racist opinion.'

Mail ran articles pointing out that German prisoners were 'coddled...to the disgust of all right-thinking women and men' while Horatio Bottomley, editor of *John Bull*, the biggest-selling weekly journal in the country wrote, 'I call for a vendetta against every German in Britain, whether "naturalised" or not...You cannot naturalise an unnatural beast – a human abortion – a hellish freak. But you can exterminate it. And now the time has come. No German must be allowed to live in our land' (15 May 1915).

Today such inflammatory language may be modified into snappier insults, 'Asylum Seekers Ate Our Donkeys!' or 'Scroungers!' but the intended results are the same: xenophobia, riots and the random murder of strangers. The immigrants are further demon-

ised, isolated and driven into the hands of 'people-traffickers' and suffer the kind of extreme exploitation that led to the drowning of some 49 Chinese cocklers on the sands of an English beach in 2004. (See FRFI 179, June/July 2004)

At the same time Winder's history shows that since mediaeval times fear of and hostility to immigration comes from those workers whose jobs and housing are most hard-pressed in the place and at the time of immigrant settlement. In 1903 and in the following years, the Trades Union Congress passed a series of resolutions calling for strict legislation against immigrants who were stealing their members' jobs, the Dockers' Union being the most powerful. The *Cardiff Maritime Herald* carried a typical article at this time saying: 'You know, we know and they know that a Chinaman isn't worth a toss as a seaman: that his only claim to indulgence is that he is cheap'. Despite periodic drives by British trade unions to recruit black and other immigrant workers to bolster membership, the unions never effectively represented such workers' interests when it came to struggles over equal pay and conditions or even the right to join a union, as at Grunwicks in the 1970s and Hillingdon Hospital in the 1990s. Only socialists were able to make the case that the harsh, grinding conditions of labour existed in spite of, not because of immigrant labour.

There are those today, like disgraced Home Secretary Blunkett, who 'play the race card', as it is put, and claim popular support for harsh treatment. Liberals may welcome immigrants but the working class does not, they say. Nothing new there then! But Winder's book shows the repercussions of a diet of unrelenting lies and distortions. When polls showed in 2001 that the public believed that

Britain accepted 25% of the world's asylum seekers at a time when the real figure was only 2%, we see the impact of deliberate manipulation of racist opinion. The concerns of the present workers are perverted by a presentation of the foreigner as the criminal, the scrounger and in the most recent period, the potential terrorist.

The role of socialists and all progressive people is to fight racism and organise against the real oppressor, the ruling class.

This book covers in some detail the history of the fightback against racism including the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign (VMDC) in the late 1980s in which this newspaper *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* and the Revolutionary Communist Group was centrally involved. Racist British immigration laws are connected to British imperialism's global multinational interests. In the case of the VMDC the campaign took on the issue of British arms sales and military training for the Sri Lankan government in pursuit of its war against the Tamils.

The present immigration into Britain from the Balkans, the Gulf, Colombia, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq are all tied to the struggle for national independence, imperialist wars of intervention and multinational investment strategies. Emigration – from war, from poverty, from military occupation – has always, throughout history, been the other story of the foreigners who come to this country.

Fortress Britain legislating against immigration is itself a meddler in the countries of the immigrant. The imposition of trade barriers, the neo-liberal domination of national economies and the arms trade all make a British presence as solid and real as any immigrant community in Britain could ever be. The foreigners' intervention in 'our' lives is always more than matched by British intervention in theirs.

Winder concludes his book with a useful review of the current discussion about asylum seekers showing how there is a division in the ruling class about the usefulness of allowing in foreign labour. Recent Treasury figures show that the immigrant population is contributing more in tax (£31.2 billion) than it receives in benefits (£28.8 billion) and that furthermore it provides an international aid service by transferring up to £2 billion back home each year, a sum a hundred times the amount that Britain gives to the UNHCR to help support displaced people. Winder also documents the massive contribution of doctors, nurses and other workers in the National Health Service, as well as the cuisine, music and cultural enrichment foreigners have brought to Britain. And yet all the audits of support for immigration are, in the end, beside the point.

The driving force of the movement of people will remain as long as wealth is so unevenly distributed across the globe. Racism is the form national oppression takes in imperialist countries. In 1968 the defining chant 'We are all foreign scum!' was the response in Paris and London to those who attacked the leadership of the student protest movement. Winder's book shows how profoundly true this slogan is. It is a good book. Read it.

Susan Davidson

No vote for Labour racists



On 7 February Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced a new programme of measures to restrict immigration. A few days later Tony Blair made 'Your country's borders protected' one of his six key election pledges. In January Conservative leader Michael Howard had promised an extensive range of vicious anti-immigration measures if his party wins the election. Racism is firmly on the ballot paper. NICKI JAMESON reports.

Racism and immigration

Every anti-immigration announcement that has appeared in recent years has been prefaced by the same lip-service to 'Britain's proud tradition of welcoming genuine refugees'. Announcing measures that will clamp down on their ease of entry to Britain, Charles Clarke also sought to assure MPs of the government's appreciation of tourists, migrant workers and overseas students. Such platitudes are worthless, and every single one is followed by a 'but...': '...but Britain has reached a turning point. Our communities cannot absorb any more refugees' (Howard); '...but we cannot tolerate abuse of our asylum system [and] have enhanced our border security and have taken action to tackle illegal working, people smuggling and trafficking' (Labour Party website).

There are several myths at work here simultaneously, including that the 'proud tradition' really existed unfettered in the first place. But the biggest lie of all is the claim that this is not a discussion about racism; that by calling it a debate on immigration, it is possible to avoid the fact that this election campaign is being conducted in an atmosphere of xenophobic rabble-rousing.

Labour's plans

The Labour Party's promises to the electorate on immigration are a blueprint for making permanent immigration to this country impossible for anyone other than the very rich. Its reliance on technology, surveillance, disincentive and destruction of family life to achieve this is undisguised. Asylum seekers are already being issued with ID cards holding their fingerprints and photographs. The government plans to introduce fingerprinting of all visa applicants and electronic checks on all those entering and leaving the country.

Labour is planning to drastically alter the asylum system. At present successful asylum seekers are granted indefinite leave to remain and those who have been in the country for five years in total can apply for British citizenship. Once indefinite leave is granted, unless the person is imprisoned for a criminal offence, it will not be reversed. The new system involves the granting of temporary leave, followed by a five-year waiting period during which the situation in the country they have fled remains 'under review'. This uncertainty means that

people fleeing war and oppression will be unable to fully settle in this country, either physically or psychologically. It also leaves the question of when a country is 'safe' in the hands of the British government. For example, occupied Iraq and Afghanistan are now presumably 'safe' as there have been 'democratic' elections.

More asylum seekers will be imprisoned in detention centres such as Yarl's Wood, Campfield House or Oakington, which was recently exposed by undercover journalists for its shockingly degrading and racist treatment of detainees. All these centres are run by private security companies, such as Global Solutions Ltd. The same companies also stand to gain money from government plans to introduce electronic tagging for those 'unfounded asylum seekers' it does not imprison, and are already heavily involved in carrying out the actual 'removals' process.

Clarke also announced an unashamedly class-based four-tier points system for people planning to come to Britain to work or study. Only those on tier one - 'highly skilled migrants', including doctors, engineers, IT specialists and finance experts - will be able to come to Britain without a job offer, and only they will be able to settle permanently.

The government also declared an end to what it disparagingly calls 'chain migration' - that is some members of a family migrating first, with other relatives joining them later.

With no hint of irony, the commitments listed by Labour on its website include 'Continuing to make the case for migration as an important contribution to the UK, while countering those who stir up hatred, intolerance and prejudice.'

The Tories

With the incumbent party already hell-bent on attacking immigrants, the Conservative Party has had to think of some even more draconian proposals than those currently promised by the government. These include pulling out of the 1951 Convention on Refugees and testing would-be economic migrants for HIV and TB. Labour has also mooted both of these at various times and most of the Tories' other proposals are similar to those already being brought in by Labour. In reality there is little difference in the content, only in the style. Howard is more upfront than Blair, telling GMTV that



'Subvertised' Conservative poster in the battle for racist votes

'what we ultimately want to do is say that no one should apply for asylum in Britain. After all... you can only apply for asylum in Britain today if you've entered the country illegally or by deception. It's an invitation to people to break the law.'

History and myth

Before the Aliens Act of 1905 Britain had no immigration controls. The Aliens Act was brought in at the time that large numbers of Jewish refugees were fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe and was designed specifically to limit their numbers. Media hysteria in support of the restriction was very similar to today's tabloid outcries. For example, the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* headed a 1904 editorial 'The Unwanted, the Unfed and the Unemployed', and supported the proposed law on the grounds it would exclude 'the dirty, destitute, diseased, verminous and criminal foreigner'.

In 1938, in the run-up to the Second World War, Britain brought in a visa requirement for German and Austrian nationals. The people hardest hit by this were again European Jews, who were fleeing Nazism.

Following the war, Britain invited immigration from the countries it had

earlier colonised. This was not about welcoming refugees fleeing persecution but recruiting a cheap workforce. Caribbean and Asian workers were encouraged to come to Britain to take low-paid jobs. However, there was an almost immediate demand for controls, culminating in 1962 with the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. This was followed by a further act of the same name in 1968 and the Immigration Act of 1971, which laid the ground for the panoply of controls and restrictions imposed by both Labour and Conservative governments on migrants ever since.

'Economic migrants' and asylum seekers

Depending on the dictates of British capitalism and the world political situation at any given time, the particular emphasis of British immigration control has varied. In some periods refugees fleeing persecution have been specifically targeted whilst economic migration has been tolerated or even encouraged; in others the aim has been to impose tight restrictions on economic migration whilst allowing limited asylum seeking. These shifts are always accompanied by a media attack on the group currently

subject to the heaviest scrutiny.

The whole dichotomy between 'refugees' and 'economic migrants' is a false one as the reasons a person leaves their country and moves to another one are generally complex, and migration from poor nations to rich ones can never fail to be a result of imperialism, whether it manifests itself as the fleeing of political persecution, war and upheaval or as the search for a better, less poverty-stricken life, or as a combination of the two.

Racism and the election

The coming general election is being fought by racist political parties unashamedly whipping up hatred, with the full support of most sections of the media. Do not be fooled in any way that the 'debate' is about 'immigration' and not about 'racism'. This is simply a sleight of hand that allows racist views to be aired in a way that is widely considered respectable. Say there are too many black people in London and you are a racist; say there are too many foreigners, asylum seekers, or people who don't speak English, and you are having a debate about immigration.

This is how imperialism works. For us to acquiesce in the oppression of the people of other countries, the ruling class first has to convince us they are less than human. British colonialism and imperialism has done this successfully for years, and continues to do so as it wages its wars against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Imperialist oppression creates migration, and the migrants therefore arrive in the oppressor nations already labelled and stigmatised. Britain has laws against racial discrimination but immigration laws are by definition exempt, as their very purpose is to prevent entry and stay in the country on grounds of nationality or ethnicity. In this situation some have weakly called for the implementation of 'non-racist immigration controls' but these cannot exist. In an imperialist nation that lives off the plunder and subjugation of poorer nations all immigration controls will necessarily be racist.

In the run-up to the last election in 2001 there was much talk of 'keeping racism out of the election' and, in the wake of the report into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, of outlawing institutionalised racism. But immigration laws are institutionalised racism and the main political parties are unashamedly campaigning to strengthen that racism still further. Just as no one who opposes the bloody war in Iraq should be able to bring themselves to vote for the party that began that war, no-one who is against racism should be able to vote for the party that has for the past eight years criminalised, imprisoned, deported and vilified thousands of men, women and children whose sole offence was to come to this country, seeking work or sanctuary.

Labour racism 1997-2005

Since coming to power, Labour's attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers include:

- Withdrawal of all benefit from asylum seekers who did not lodge their asylum claims immediately on arrival
- 'Voucher system' whereby asylum seekers received no cash benefit but were kept from starvation by the provision of food vouchers
- 'Dispersal system' which sent asylum seekers to far-flung parts of the country and withdrew all support if they refused
- Creation of 'reception', 'accommodation' and 'removal' centres
- Prosecution of detainees who rebel against the conditions in detention centres or hostels and deportation of their witnesses
- Increased powers for immigration officers to arrest, detain, search and seize property
- Reduced rights for asylum seekers to appeal; reduced access to legal advice
- Deportation of hundreds of thousands of 'failed' asylum seekers, overstayers and others
- Immigration snatch-squads taking children from schools to detention
- List of 'safe countries' from which asylum claims are automatically rejected, visa restrictions for visitors from a range of others, and official racial discrimination against 'Kurds, Roma, Albanians, Tamils, Pontic Greeks, Somalis, Afghans and 'ethnic Chinese' travelling on Malaysian or Japanese travel documents'
- Legal compulsion of registrars to report 'suspect marriages'
- The deaths of 58 Chinese men and women attempting to smuggle themselves into Britain in a lorry and racist murder of a 'dispersed' Kurdish asylum seeker in Glasgow.

■ No vote for Labour FIGHT BACK

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find it increasingly difficult to keep those who have risen just above the poverty line from falling back below it. Since Labour has retained the Tory policy of linking benefit and state pension rises to prices, which always rise less than earnings, people receiving these will fall deeper and deeper into poverty.

Labour's myth of full employment

Another of Labour's empty boasts is that it has substantially reduced unemployment. The official number of people out of work and claiming benefit has halved over the last decade to around 813,000. However, this figure is just the tip of the unemployment iceberg. Altogether there are 2.3 million unemployed people who want work. Job centres have reclassified workers as long-term sick or disabled to meet targets for reducing the unemployment figures. Their numbers have burgeoned by a third since 1997 to reach 2.4 million by last year.

The unemployment situation is particularly severe among certain sections of the population. The official unemployment rate among young adults aged 16 to 24 years is 10%. Among lone parents 40% do not have jobs. The official unemployment figures also hide the fact that there are 7.3 million part-time workers many of whom would like full-time jobs and 1.5 million other temporary workers who would like permanent jobs. 40% of unemployed people who do get a job are out of work again within six months.

Labour maintains poverty pay

If unemployment is a major source of poverty, getting a job is far from being a way out of it. Two fifths of those households below the poverty line have someone in work. In 2004, around seven million workers over the age of 18 years were paid less than £6.50 per hour. This equates to £260 for a 40-hour week; substantially less than the poverty level for a couple with two children. Rather than tackle low pay Labour has chosen to use a system of tax credits to lessen the impact on electorally high-profile groups such as families with children. Three times as many families now receive tax credits to top up their wages as were paid the old Family Credit ten years ago.

Labour also introduced the national minimum wage, which Blair described as 'a powerful symbol of how this country is changing for the good'. At present the minimum wage stands at a paltry £4.85 per hour, set to rise by a mere 20p to £5.05 this October. Even lower is the minimum wage of workers aged between 18 and 21 – £4.10 per hour – and that for 16 and 17-year-olds – just £3 an hour (apprentices aren't even guaranteed that!). Yet nationally over 1.4 million workers receive the minimum wage. Once again these numbers do not include the many tens of thousands of people working unofficially for poverty pay in jobs such as agriculture, catering and warehousing.

Homelessness increases under Labour

Labour's record on homelessness has been even worse. The number of households living in temporary accommodation has more than doubled since Labour first came to power in 1997. By September 2004 the total number of homeless households stood at 100,810. Of these 18% did not even have a temporary place of their own but had to share facilities with other households. The charity Crisis says there are a further 380,000 people living in hostels, squats and similar places. They estimate these numbers will rise to 650,000 by the end of another Labour term of office. These figures do not include an unknown number of people who have to sleep rough. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that there are an estimated two and a half million other people living in overcrowded conditions.

Racism and inequality rampant under Labour

Last year a series of reports demonstrated that there was no let up in racism within the police force, the armed services, the prison service, the National Health Service, in education and in employment. For instance, people of Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and African origins are twice as likely to be out of work as white people. Black pupils are three times as likely as white pupils to be permanently excluded from school. There are now a record number of more than 75,000 people incarcerated in British prisons, the vast majority of them from poor working class backgrounds, but black young adults are seven times as likely as white young adults to be there.

The number of women workers is rapidly increasing as more and more families require a second wage. But women are overwhelmingly allocated the most menial and insecure jobs. Over three-quarters of part-time workers are women. Despite equal pay legislation the median hourly rate for women remains over 14% below that for men for full time work, and over 43% below that for men for part-time work.

An early death for the poor

Labour's much-vaunted commitment to improving the NHS has certainly not eradicated huge health inequalities. Income remains the most accurate pointer to health and longevity. For example, infant mortality rates among the poorer sections of the working class are one and a half times higher than among middle class professionals whilst the incidence of low birth weight is one and a third times higher and continues to increase. Adults in the poorest fifth of the population are twice as likely to develop a mental illness as those on average incomes. A man living in one of the wealthiest 10% of areas in the UK has a total life expectancy of 77.4 years and can expect 66 years of healthy life. For a man in one of the poorest 10% of areas life expectancy is six years less and healthy life expectancy is only 49 years. Commenting on ways of radically improving the health



service the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded 'redistribution of wealth would have the greatest absolute effect in terms of numbers of lives saved'.

Your family treated better and faster?

The crisis in the NHS

Total UK health spending for 2005-06 is planned to be over £90 billion with a projected average annual rise of 7.4% over the next two years. Much of this increase, however, has already been earmarked for increases in pay, prices, pensions and negligence claims which means that the extra money available for equipment, materials and services is reduced to just 2.4%. On top of this, a government report to Labour Health Secretary John Reid last October indicated that output in the health service was falling just as spending was increasing. 40,000 extra nurses have been recruited during Labour's term in government but many have left the NHS. Nurses have been recruited from abroad but there is still a shortage. Consequently, the bill for private agency nurses, where pay rates are 70% higher, has tripled. The dental service is also in crisis. In most areas it is almost impossible to register with an NHS dentist. Labour's targets to cut waiting times have not been resourced adequately. They have forced hospital staff into some dangerous rescheduling of cases and have hindered clinical prioritisation. Overall average waiting times have not improved over the last seven years.

However, it is Labour's increasing privatisation of the NHS that poses the greatest threat to its long-term survival. In addition to PFI capital spending on new hospitals, the value of NHS services handed to private contractors is set to rise by 150% to £16.4 billion by 2006-07. The handing of hospital cleaning to private contractors has resulted in just one cleaner on the minimum wage for every five wards. Consequently, standards of hygiene have suffered. One in ten patients now contracts an infection whilst in hospital. These infections

result in 5,000 deaths a year and contribute to another 15,000.

Your child achieving more? Education – for the rich

Most early improvements in school test results under Labour have now stalled. For instance, the failure rate for level 4 in English and maths at age 11 has remained at around 25% since 2000. 12% of 16-year-olds in England and Wales failed to obtain five or more GCSEs in 2004 and 6% obtained no GCSEs at all, figures that have remained unchanged since 1999. The proportion of 19-year-olds who lacked an NVQ2 or equivalent has actually been rising over the past few years. In 2004 it was almost 30%.

It is the poorest sections of the working class that suffer the bulk of this educational deprivation. Only

45% of those children on free school meals achieve the expected standard at age 14, compared with 75% for others. The gap in GCSE success between children from professional families and those from unskilled worker families widened in the ten years between 1992 and 2002. By the age of 16, 87% of children from professional families were still in full-time education in 2002 compared with around 60% of those from unskilled families.

By contrast, in 2000, half of children from the wealthiest 25% of families were completing university degrees compared with just 9% of children from the poorest 25%. The disparity now is greater than it was in the 1950s. And, of course, educational qualifications are the key to better pay and job prospects. So, far from eliminating inequalities, the education system in Labour's capitalist Britain helps to perpetuate it.

Rising debt threatens Labour

As we have seen, despite rising prosperity for the rich and middle class, the conditions of the working class have barely changed under Labour. If they are not unemployed, these workers are increasingly forced into low paid, insecure, part-time and temporary work with few rights and poor conditions. For the most part they are unorganised. Barely 15% of those on £6 an hour or less are in trade unions compared with 40% of those earning £10-20 an hour. The trade unions are dominated by the middle classes and have continually covered up for Labour – for instance when they refused to challenge Labour's policy on Iraq at last year's Labour Party conference.

For the poorest sections of the working class elections are increasingly irrelevant. At the last general election, turnout was barely a third in

Labour's rich friends

Labour's close alliance with the ruling class is reflected in donations to the party. In the two years following the last election, Labour's rich friends gave it almost £8 million. Labour's paymasters included science and technology minister and supermarket magnate Lord Sainsbury, venture capitalist Sir Ronald Cohen, property developer Sir David Garrard and curry emperor Sir Gulam Noon. Altogether, this meant that the percentage of party funds from wealthy individuals rose to 41% while that from trade unions fell to 56%. Labour now gets four times as much money from individuals as the Tories who, together with the Liberal Democrats are increasingly reliant on the public purse for their survival.

The trend continued last year. Gulam Noon and Ronald Cohen made further donations. They were joined by, among others, Sir Gerry Robinson chairman of drinks giant Allied Domecq; Sir Frank Lowe chairman emeritus of his own multinational advertising agency; Sir Sigmund Sternberg, former chair of top software company ISYS, property developer and commodity consultant; publisher Sir Christopher Ondaatje who gave over half a million pounds and Lord Paul Drayson who gave over a million pounds. Drayson gave half a million the month after receiving a peerage and another £100,000 whilst bidding for a £32 million government contract for his pharmaceuticals company. Big businesses that bankrolled Labour included Reddington Finance, GNER trains, Aventis Pharmaceuticals, Bloomberg Tradebook, Sterling Capitol plc, Canary Wharf Group plc, Novartis Pharmaceuticals and Tesco.

Jim Craven

Left voting for Labour

The position of Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is simple: no socialist, no anti-imperialist, no anti-racist, no democrat should vote for Labour under any circumstances in the forthcoming general election. A vote for any Labour candidate is a vote to return a racist, imperialist, war-mongering government no matter how left-wing or anti-war that candidate is. Yet as the election campaign gets underway, already many on the left are urging us to vote for Labour, either to support anti-war candidates, or to oppose the BNP.

some of the poorest constituencies. But Labour's vote now comes increasingly from the wealthier areas. They hold five of the ten richest constituencies in the country. For the time being then, Labour can afford to ignore the plight of the poor and concentrate on maintaining the support of the middle class.

However, the conditions of the middle class are not guaranteed. Much of its present prosperity has been based on rising house prices and low interest rates for credit and mortgages. This has produced a massive increase in personal debt. The total level of personal debt broke through the £1 trillion mark last July when it was rising at a rate of £15 million an hour, faster even than in the United States. 80% of this debt is related to mortgages and other loans on dwellings. The rest, an average of £16,000 for a family of four, was credit card, bank or similar loans. The ensuing spending boom is an important factor in maintaining economic growth.

There are now signs that all is not well. Last year, one in eight homeowners reported difficulties in keeping up payments on loans and larger numbers of young people began filing for bankruptcy after building up huge debts. A fall in house prices, a rise in interest rates or a downturn in the economy leading to greater unemployment could all bring the house of cards crashing down. If Labour wins a third term in office, it may have to turn against a middle class suddenly thrown into poverty by economic crisis.



Respect supporter Gary Younge set the grounds for this in an article in *The Guardian* (21 February 2005) entitled 'We cannot vote Labour'. Younge says that we might have expected Blair 'as the political representative of a movement founded on the principles of international solidarity and equality' not to have followed Bush in invading Iraq 'under false pretences'. But, according to Younge, New Labour is now no longer 'an imperfect conduit for social change' but 'an active obstacle to it'. In such circumstances, 'to vote for it is to abandon any hope that such change will ever come'.

But all is not as it seems in Younge's arguments. When he turns to consider the electoral alternatives, he says that these will 'most likely be shaped by local factors'. And what is the first such 'factor'? 'Labour candidates who opposed the war should not be punished', he declares. So having started with a ringing opposition to voting Labour, Younge ends up urging support for Labour hypocrites who refuse to break from a party dedicated to war.

Younge's is not an isolated voice. The whole strategy of Respect is founded on an alliance with the Labour left, and receives its justification from the entirely bogus claim that the Labour Party was once a force for progress. In 'An Invitation to Labour Party members and supporters' issued on 8 March, four Respect leaders (including John Rees of the SWP) describe the Labour of the past as 'a natural home if you were a trade unionist, if you were poor, or if you were from an ethnic minority. For many it was the obvious party to join if you believed in equality, peace and justice'. However, 'Tony Blair has transformed Labour into New Labour. And New Labour no longer stands for those traditional working class values'.

The implication is clear: New Labour is qualitatively different from Old Labour; Old Labour was a force for progress, and the Labour left today embodies Old Labour values. So Respect is anxious to reassure Labour members and supporters: 'There is no reason why the growth of Respect should harm the Labour left. We are deliberately not standing against left wing Labour MPs like Jeremy Corbyn or Diane Abbott'. Far from it: 'if Respect grows in strength it will make it easier for the left in the Labour Party'.

Yet Labour has always been a racist, imperialist and war-mongering party. Between 1945 and 1951 Labour:

- Brutally suppressed the Malayan national liberation struggle;
- Committed British troops to aid the restoration of French colonial rule in VietNam and Dutch rule in Indonesia;
- Continued military intervention in Greece against the ELAS, and blockaded Iran following the

nationalisation of the British-owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company;

- Ruthlessly exploited the British empire in Africa to aid post-war reconstruction in Britain.

Later, between 1964 and 1970, it:

- Defended apartheid South Africa, blocking calls for sanctions in the UN. It capitulated to the racist settler regime in the former Rhodesia;
- Sent troops into Ireland in 1969;
- Was responsible for the routine torture of suspected freedom fighter detainees in Aden.

Between 1974 and 1979, it:

- Continued to defend apartheid South Africa in the UN;
- Began the infamous sales of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia at the height of the genocidal war in East Timor;
- Implemented a ruthless regime of torture against republican prisoners in the North of Ireland.

This is the tradition that Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott belong to. How can we possibly vote for them?

Respect's electoral support for Labour will not be restricted to left-wing candidates. Respect cannot be separated from Unite Against Fascism (UAF): both involve alliances between SWP and Labour. A briefing paper at a recent UAF conference assessed the outcome of the European elections last year and UAF's strategy in trying to mobilise votes against the BNP, which has recently said it will stand over 100 candidates at the general election. The paper claims that 'The BNP's rise has gone hand in hand with falling voter turnout: reversing that trend is critical to defeating the BNP.' It concludes that:

'Halting the BNP...will require a campaign uniting the labour movement, the black, Asian, Jewish and Muslim communities, gay and lesbian voters, trade unionists and everyone that supports democracy and freedom. At the heart of the campaign's strategy must be the aim of mobilising every vote possible against the BNP, and a key part of this must be the votes of those who are at the front line of the BNP's racist offensive - black, Asian and minority ethnic voters'.

So the 'heart' of the UAF strategy is to get 'black, Asian and minority ethnic voters' to vote for anyone other than the BNP - and that must mean for Labour where Respect is not standing. The SWP then is not just committed to supporting left-wing Labour candidates at the forthcoming general election, but a much wider spectrum.

How can this pose any sort of challenge to Labour warmongering, racism and imperialism? It cannot; it is not designed to. Its purpose is to create career opportunities for SWP leaders and their allies. Hence Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! will not support Respect. We demand a complete and unconditional break from Labour as the precondition for building a new movement.

Robert Clough

RASBOs - name them and shame them!

In response to the Labour government's vindictive ASBO scheme which is not, despite its name, designed to deal with anti-social behaviour, but to keep the working class off the streets, FRFI has decided to institute its own awards to deal with **real anti-social behaviour: RASBOs**. We will be naming and shaming the real offenders. We start off the awards with two government ministers and a cleric who have made working class lives a misery.



Hazel Blears MP

Labour MP for Salford and Minister of State at the Home Office, responsible for crime reduction, policing, community safety and counter-terrorism and author of 'The Politics of Decency'. This is enough to qualify for a RASBO on its own. In the course of trying to force through fundamental restrictions on civil liberties through the introduction of control orders, Blears announced that Muslims in Britain

must expect to be discriminated against by the police because the terrorist threat came from people 'falsely hiding behind Islam'. It's the same old story. When the government or the police want to target a particular community whether it's the Irish, or black people, or Muslims, they think they should have a free hand to pick on people because of the colour of their skin or because of their nationality or appearance. No Ms Blears, we do not accept discrimination - you are a racist and you are ordered to keep out of our lives.



Paul Boateng MP

Labour MP for Brent South and Chief Secretary to the Treasury, former GLC councillor. He was Labour's first black Cabinet Minister, wore posh suits and educated his children in private schools. He knows which side his bread is buttered. As a Blair loyalist he voted for the Iraq war, detention without trial, control orders etc. He greeted his election as an MP in 1987 with the words: 'Today Brent South, tomorrow Soweto'. This was a slip

of the tongue, he really meant: 'Today Brent South, tomorrow Pretoria'. He will stand down at the next election in order to take the post of High Commissioner to South Africa (salary £190,000 plus). Having liberated Brent South (not!), he is off to tell South Africa, and indeed the entire African continent, how they should be controlling the working class and poor. All at our expense. You should be ashamed (except that you are completely shameless).



Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

Catholic Archbishop of Westminster who promoted a priest knowing that he was a child abuser (the priest was later gaoled after 19 years of abusing children). Following this 'misjudgement' Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor held on to his job by the skin of his teeth and went into retreat. But he has now re-emerged in the public limelight. Quick as a flash after Tory

leader Michael Howard announced his wish to reduce the time limit on legal abortion to 20 weeks, the Cardinal was recommending that abortion and 'other issues' of morality should take centre stage in the next election, just like the United States! We have noticed how moral the US is - holding the world record for imprisoning people, the majority of them black; imposing the death penalty, including against the mentally ill or disabled; detaining prisoners without trial at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere; torturing detainees; invading other countries and waging war; polluting the atmosphere. There is no end to their morality.

Nonetheless the Cardinal is another old man who thinks he should have the right to determine the sexual and reproductive lives of women. All over the world 19 million women suffer the effects of unsafe abortion every year, for the simple reason that abortion is illegal in their country. In Britain the women and girls who will be most affected by reducing the legal limit for abortion will be frightened teenagers. The Cardinal's church believes there should be no abortion and no contraception, and that women and girls who have been raped, or are HIV-positive, or just simply want to make a choice about their own sexual lives, should abstain or put up with their lot. Apparently the Cardinal thinks that 'faith and reason always go together'. One wonders how the head of a church that persecuted Copernicus and Galileo has the nerve to say this, or, indeed, maintains any credibility whatsoever.

Let us know your nominations for RASBOs

NAME AND SHAME THE REAL ENEMIES OF THE WORKING CLASS

BOLIVIA: class showdown postponed

The challenge has been led by a plethora of social movements: FEJUVE, which organises in the neighbourhoods of El Alto, the poorest city in Bolivia; indigenous organisations such as the CSUTCB led by Felipe Quispe, organisations involved in the campaign against privatisation, and the trade union federation COB. These movements have established a Unity Pact demanding the nationalisation of all hydrocarbon reserves, the establishment of a Constituent Assembly, and the prosecution of former President de Lozada for the deaths of 69 protestors in the October 2003 Gas War.

Bolivia is the poorest nation in South America, and, with nine million people, one of the smallest populations. Yet in the last five years, the indigenous population has inflicted a series of defeats on the comprador ruling class which have made the country, according to current President Mesa, ungovernable. In 2000, mass mobilisations in Cochabamba, forced the government to backtrack on privatising the local water supply and terminate a contract with Bechtel. In October 2003, nationwide worker and peasant mobilisations protested at proposals to export gas at cut prices to the US through Chile. The police and army murdered 69 peasants and workers, but were unable to crush the protests. The people were victorious. President de Lozada resigned and fled the country.

Carlos Mesa replaced him as president, promising a referendum on the future of the country's hydrocarbon resources – second largest in South America after Venezuela's – and a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the country's racist constitution. Despite mass support for nationalisation, Mesa refused to include it as an option in the referendum when it took place in July 2004. The hydrocarbon bill he presented to Congress sought an increase in taxation on gas exports from 18% to 32%. However, this minor proposal immediately met with virulent opposition from the oil and gas multinationals, including BP, British Gas, Spain's Repsol and Brazil's Petrobras. They brought pressure on Mesa to abandon the proposal. Energy Minister Guillermo Torres described the bill as 'economic suicide' for Bolivia.

After a year of governmental inaction on the prosecution of de Lozada, further protests took place in October 2004 demanding his arrest and trial.

postponed

Bolivia is in a deep political and social crisis. The mass of the impoverished indigenous people who make up 70% of the population are demanding an end to the old political order and the establishment of their basic rights. They are standing up to a ruling class that allows the plunder of the country's hydrocarbon reserves; that excludes the mass of the people from any significant political process, and which is completely in hock to imperialism. **ROBERT CLOUGH** reports.



Roadblocks on the route to La Paz

Faced with a mass blockade in the capital La Paz, Congress deputies had no choice but to accede, voting for the arrest of de Lozada and 14 of his cabinet colleagues. De Lozada refuses to return from Miami. In late December, protests broke out in El Alto against another private water supply contractor, Aguas de Illimani, owned by the French Suez Lyonnaise de Eaux, the world's second largest water company. Water supply connection charges amounted to six months' wages. On 10 January the city, with its overwhelmingly indigenous working class population of 800,000, was brought to a complete standstill by a general strike. On 14 January, the government capitulated and cancelled the contract with Suez.

New protests took place in January when Mesa announced petrol and diesel price increases. Blockades continued in the south of Bolivia in support of demands for a new university. On 21 February, the Unity Pact called for further blockades and protests in pursuit of its demand for nationalisation of hydrocarbons. Whole areas of

the country came to a complete standstill. On 4 March, Mesa submitted his resignation to Congress, complaining that he could not continue to rule. The 15 months of his presidency had seen over 800 different protests.

Mesa has survived by balancing between the rich and the poor, making concessions to one or other dependent on the pressure. He has been able to continue because of the tacit support of Evo Morales, leader of the coca growers, and of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). Morales supported the referendum on hydrocarbons though it did not present nationalisation as an option. For this he was criticised by the indigenous movements' leaders, who also opposed his evident desire to pursue a parliamentary course and downgrade the mass movement, particularly during the Gas War. Leader of the Cochabamba water struggle Oscar Olivera warned in 2004, 'Today in Bolivia there are two currents within the social movements. The first current is a reformist current looking for changes within the

political structure. Others in the social movements are going toward the transformation of political and economic systems that aren't working. I think the concept of power is important. Some movements and leaders seem to think that power is in the parliament and the office of the president. And some think that, as in the water war and the coca war and the gas war, power comes from below.'

Although MAS emerged as the largest party in December's municipal elections, it received only 20% of the vote, no more than in the 2002 presidential elections when Morales came second to de Lozada. Morales was now in danger of losing credibility in advance of the 2007 presidential elections. Under pressure from the radical wing of MAS, he joined the Unity Pact and endorsed the mass action against the hydrocarbon bill whilst continuing to call in Congress for a 50% taxation rate.

Mesa's submitted his resignation to force Morales' hand. On 6 March, Congress rejected his resignation. However, the Chamber of Deputies gave

initial approval to the hydrocarbon bill, and, in response, the Unity Pact called a two-day general strike starting on 15 March, which Morales endorsed. That evening, Mesa proposed to Congress that the 2007 presidential elections be brought forward to August 2005 and take place at the same time as elections to the Constituent Assembly. Meanwhile, the Chamber of Deputies agreed a minor revision to the hydrocarbon bill removing some exemptions to the 32% taxation rate and passed it to the Senate for approval. The following day, Morales met with other leaders of the Unity Pact and proposed the strike be called off. The Pact was split: Quispe walked out of the meeting before it had ended, and Amayra leader Gualberto Choque denounced the decision. On 17 March, Congress rejected Mesa's call for early elections, leaving Morales with little to show for ending the mass protest. Mesa's manoeuvre had succeeded.

Divisions in the social movements could have serious consequences. Recently, the Chamber of Commerce in Santa Cruz, always in the vanguard of racist reaction, called for greater autonomy for this most affluent region in Bolivia, declaring that it would no longer subsidise the poorer regions where the indigenous population predominates. Repsol and Petrobras are on the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce. The US has endorsed this move, one that could lead to the break up of the country, or even the secession of Santa Cruz to Brazil. A war in the 1930s led to Brazil and Argentina seizing parts of Bolivia where there was thought to be oil. A repetition of this is not a fanciful notion.

The social movements have suffered a setback. It is now vital that they recover their unity if the current crisis is to be resolved in favour of the mass of the Bolivian people.



Aymara Indians block a road into the city of El Alto

VENEZUELA: a new stage on the path to socialism

In January, at the World Socialist Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, President Chavez said: 'We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything.' He described the US government as 'the most negative force in the world today'. On 27 February Chavez stated that he was convinced 'that the path to a new, better and possible world is not capitalism, the path is socialism'. On 4 March he declared that his government was determined to 'invent the new socialism of the 21st century. Capitalism is not a sustainable model of development'.

Chavez knows that the only way to prevent the resurgence of the previous system of injustice for the vast majority of Venezuelans is to rapidly develop a state designed to meet the needs of the masses. The numerous attempts on the President's life, the US-backed



President Chavez

attempts to remove his government by military coup, economic sabotage and a special referendum, all fed by a campaign of media abuse, have taught Chavez this. In March, Chavez bluntly stated that further attempts to assassinate him would mean a complete halt to oil supplies to the US. 60% of Venezuela's oil goes to the US.

The claim of a right to 'pre-emptive' action against any opponent of US imperialism is nothing new, and the Venezuelan government has taken steps to deter continuing US interference. The investigation into 400 people who signed the 'Carmona Decree' disbanding Venezuela's supreme court, National Assembly and new Constitution during the 2002 defeated coup, continues, despite November's assassination of the State Prosecutor. On 7 March raids on one of the sus-

pect's family properties discovered anti-tank mines, police uniforms and large quantities of explosive. Given the previous capture of saboteurs from armed fascist groups in Colombia, the army's reserve is to be doubled to 100,000 troops. Popular defence units of 50 to 100 workers, are being set up in work places.

Rejecting continued dependence on US weapons, helicopters and rifles are being bought from Russia, planes from Brazil and naval corvettes from Spain. The Venezuelan military have discussed with their Latin American counterparts and support the strategy of using non-US suppliers, preferably regional. The reactionary *Miami Herald* declared 'Chavez arms for war with the US'.

Diversifying trade links is a priority. Deals with China, Iran and Brazil will reduce the hold the US has over Venezuela's economy. Since December, China has access to Venezuela's oil and gas fields and will build 15

new well-head sites. Discussions are planned on using the Panamanian oil pipeline to the Pacific. Plans to construct a joint pipeline through Colombia were stymied when Colombian agents, directed by the US, kidnapped the FARC revolutionary movement's negotiator in Caracas.

Venezuela's joint strategy of establishing a modern armed force democratically subject to Congress, and a determination to strengthen international alliances to reduce its dependency on the US, has enraged Washington. The US Secretary of State and Director of the CIA led a chorus of denunciations of Venezuela. In March, US warships conducted manoeuvres off the Venezuelan coast.

Venezuela is the only net importer of food on the continent. Agricultural self-sufficiency is key to freeing the country from the political chains of food imports. Land reform is proceeding cautiously combining expropriation and redistribution with promoting proper farming techniques to the new peasant co-operatives. Three British Vestey Group land holdings are marked for expropriation.

Alvaro Michaels

Ireland: Republican Movement faces disintegration

The murder of Belfast man Robert McCartney and the political fall out which followed have expressed the crisis of the peace process in Ireland. It marks a watershed for the Republican Movement. Behind the media coverage in the wake of this latest incident lies the political reality facing the Republican Movement and the consequences for its dual strategy; because of the route Sinn Fein has chosen, the political process in Ireland has reached an impasse which can only be broken by the disbandment of the IRA. The killing of Robert McCartney expresses the degeneration of the Republican leadership since its engagement with bourgeois politics and its isolation from the Republican working class.

PAUL MALLON assess the implication of recent events in Ireland for Sinn Fein's strategy within the overall peace process.

The McCartney killing

On 30 January, members of the IRA were involved in the killing of nationalist Robert McCartney following a bar-room brawl in Belfast. Since then the family of Robert McCartney have led a campaign to reveal the truth and the identity of the killers. The campaign is led by McCartney's sisters and fiancée from the strongly Republican enclave of Short Strand in East Belfast, and has mobilised many nationalists on the streets against what they view as increasing criminality and misuse of Republican areas by members of the Republican Movement. Sinn Fein responded to this pressure by suspending seven of its members, and the IRA expelled three of its own volunteers. The family maintains that up to 12 members of the IRA were involved in the killing. The family have indicated that they may stand in the forthcoming election campaigning in their local area for justice for Robert. Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness issued a warning that 'The McCartneys need to be very careful. To step over that line, which is a very important line, into the world of party political politics, can do a huge disservice to their campaign.' Catherine McCartney responded by stating 'We have to be very careful that we're not being used by anybody and that includes Sinn Fein and all political parties. We're not stupid women'.

Since the McCartney incident, families from within nationalist areas have begun to speak out against the Republican Movement, some accusing the IRA of killing nationalists Mark Robinson and James McGinley in separate incidents in Derry in recent years. Many nationalists increasingly view the IRA's role as being one of policing the Good Friday Agreement. The McCartney killing is another embarrassment for Sinn Fein, so soon after the Northern Bank robbery in December (see FRFI 183). It further undermines the party's aspirations to bourgeois respectability, with general elections looming in both Britain and Ireland.

A key element of Sinn Fein's strategy has been the influence the United States could exert on political developments in Ireland. Sinn Fein persuaded the IRA to engage in a ceasefire in 1994 partly on the basis that Irish America could play a progressive role in Irish reunification. In the ten years since the IRA ceasefire, the Sinn Fein leadership have been wined and dined at the White House and around



The McCartney sisters

the US on a regular basis. Since the change of US Administration in 2000, President Bush has showed little interest in Irish affairs other than to insist that the IRA must disband. Following the McCartney killing Senator Edward Kennedy cancelled talks in the US with Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams during the annual St Patrick's Day celebrations, citing 'the IRA's ongoing criminal activity and contempt for the rule of law', and New York Republican Congressman Peter King, a key Adams ally in Congress, has called on the IRA to disband. Former US Irish envoy Richard Hass has stated that Adams could become an 'international pariah', drawing comparisons with Yasser Arafat. Imperialism will squeeze Adams and the Republican Movement in the next period until the IRA disbands.

Unionism and the peace process

In the early 1990s Sinn Fein argued that key to the development of a successful peace process was the emergence of progressive Unionism. Based

upon an optimistic assessment of imperialist-inspired peace processes in Palestine and South Africa, Sinn Fein saw imperialism as able to play a progressive role in Ireland. Speaking in 1994 in the period leading up to the IRA ceasefire, Adams suggested that the Protestant people needed a figure such as former apartheid president de Klerk 'to lead them and us into the next century' (*An Phoblacht/Republican News* 3 March 1994). The election of the British Labour Party in 1997 fuelled their illusions.

The Unionist veto is enshrined in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) briefly shared power at Stormont with Sinn Fein before the institutions collapsed in October 2002. The peace process, far from breaking or weakening Ulster Unionism, has served to further strengthen loyalist reaction and has elevated Ian Paisley and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to the position of being the main Unionist party.

Paisley's hard-line DUP had long been eclipsed by the UUP in electoral terms; in the 1997 British general

election the UUP polled 32.7% of the vote to the DUP's 13.6%. Following the UUP's power sharing with Sinn Fein in the Stormont Assembly, the Unionist community increasingly favoured Paisley's reactionary politics; in the 2001 general election the UUP polled 26.8% to the DUP's 22.5%. In the 2003 elections to the Stormont Assembly, Paisley eclipsed the UUP as the main voice of Unionism with 25.7% of the vote compared to the declining UUP's 22.7%. This is the context in which Unionism, supported by British imperialism, has stalled the peace process and blocked the return of devolved power to Stormont. Key to this is the nature of Unionism as a profoundly reactionary force where any perceived threat to its supremacy gives rise to deepening reaction. This allowed Paisley to raise the stakes by insisting on photographic evidence of IRA decommissioning of weapons prior to

mobilisations led primarily by women organised through the Relatives' Action Committees (RACs). The RACs arose organically out of the urgent need to mobilise in support of the prisoners; Sinn Fein was on the outside of this development. This political movement had remarkable resonance around the world, beyond the working class districts of the north of Ireland, and served to dramatically illustrate and directly expose the myth that Republican fighters were criminals and had no popular support among the nationalist working class. The RACs viewed the prisoners' struggle and the revolutionary struggle to drive British imperialism out of Ireland as one and the same. Militant marches on the streets by the RACs combined with IRA and INLA armed actions were used to demand political status for Irish political prisoners.

As the campaign intensified, the brutality inflicted upon the prisoners increased and the prospect of a hunger strike emerged. If the hunger strike was to be avoided then the struggle needed to be intensified. This did not occur. Instead the National H-Block Committee was formed in October 1979 to replace the RAC and determined thereafter the political direction of the prisoners' campaign.

The campaign for political status was reduced to a humanitarian campaign in order to win support from sections of the Irish middle class through the Irish government, the SDLP and the Catholic Church to pressurise the British government to give way. The Republican Movement chose to relate to established middle class organisations as a vehicle for achieving its aims. Fearing that militant demands and street campaigning would undermine the respectability of the prisoners' demands, concessions were made to middle class forces. It was the development of the pan-nationalist bourgeois strategy which dictates Sinn Fein's present-day standpoint. However, it failed. The hunger strike was defeated. Not even the election of hunger striker Bobby Sands as a Westminster MP could alter the balance of forces necessary to restore political status. With the demobilisation of the popular movement a key feature of this reformist strategy, the prisoners' campaign was undermined and this allowed British imperialism to isolate the previously growing revolutionary forces against its rule in Ireland. Sinn Fein member Owen Carroll was elected on 20 August 1981 to the seat made vacant by Sands' death. That same day INLA volunteer Mickey Devine became the tenth and final hunger striker to die. Six weeks later, the hunger strike was called off. Revolutionary nationalism had suffered a major defeat from British imperialism.

The election successes in this turbulent period led to the adoption of the electoral strategy which would later significantly alter the balance of forces within the Republican Movement in favour of those who saw a constitutional reformist way forward. The pursuit of respectability has directed Sinn Fein's political strategy since then.

Armed struggle must always be subordinate to revolutionary politics if it is to be successful. It is the separation of armed struggle from revolutionary politics which leads to the current situation where the Republican Movement no longer expresses the interests of working class nationalism. Since the defeats suffered by the Republican Movement following the hunger strike, the nationalist working class has been increasingly demobilised and depoliticised in favour of the bourgeois electoral strategy.

Recent events demonstrate the complete incompatibility of pursuing a bourgeois strategy on the one hand and armed struggle on the other and have placed the disbandment of the IRA at the top of the political agenda in Ireland.

What's the matter with the USA?

“When you inquire into the causes of the counter-revolutionary successes, there you are met on every hand with the ready reply that it was Mr This or Citizen That who “betrayed” the people. Which reply may be very true or not, according to circumstances, but under no circumstances does it explain anything – not even show how it came to pass that the “people” allowed themselves to be thus betrayed. And what a poor chance stands a political party whose entire stock-in-trade consists in a knowledge of the solitary fact that Citizen So-and-so is not to be trusted?”

In Britain a ‘liberal’ generally means someone who doesn’t have extreme opinions, while a ‘conservative’ means someone who is something of a political fossil, wrapping themselves in the Union Jack. Yet it is possible for a liberal and a conservative to sit down and discuss without disputing reality and without name-calling. In the United States, by contrast, ‘liberals’ (Democratic Party leftwards) are in a vitriolic confrontation with ‘conservatives’ (Republicans and further right), where there is not even agreement on basic facts. In the US it is as if conservatives are a political Flat Earth society, backed by a vast choir of commentators, TV networks, bloggers, and talk-radio hosts who ridicule any suggestion that the world is round. The energy, anger, hatred and contempt they spew are symptomatic of something far deeper than individual psychology: these are the seismic symptoms of deep class tensions of tectonic proportions.

In the big chain bookstores in the US, tables groan under the mounting weight of liberal anti-Bush books: *Bushwhacked*, *Misunderestimated*, *Worse than Watergate*, *The Bush-hater’s handbook*. Some blame a village in Texas for allowing their idiot to escape; others see sinister neo-conservative conspiracies at work, a lunatic Christian Right hurtling headlong for Armageddon, the machinations of oil companies, middle-class fear of eroding values. None of these theories, however, can explain how Bush could win so successfully at the polls. As Engels shrewdly puts it: how did it come to pass ‘that the “people” allowed themselves to be thus betrayed?’ The answer is to be found in the relationship between the classes, not in psychology or conspiracies. Only Thomas Frank’s book about Kansas politics² looks at this. A Mid-West state, part of the ‘heartland’, Kansas is a political laboratory for studying the class dynamics of the Conservative movement in a near-pure form, the better to understand this deadly bacillus, which, free in the wild, now infests the United States and stalks the world.

Kansas was one of the states essential to Bush’s victory in the 2004 presidential election. All but two of its 105 counties went for Bush. Yet it was not always so. Abolitionists and free-soilers settled the state to block the expansion of slavery by armed force. John Brown and his sons, who set out to instigate slave rebellion, were Kansans. The radical agrarian Populist movement (‘raise less corn and more hell’) swept into power in 1890 (pp 30-34, Frank). The revolutionary socialist Eugene Debs accepted the Socialist Party nomination for President there in 1908. Explaining how Kansas switched sides helps understand how the entire country could.

What’s the matter with Kansas?

Today Kansas could hardly be more different: the centre of the anti-abortion fight, anti-gay propaganda, the removal of evolution from the state science standards – Frank catalogues the various strands and aspects of this ‘backlash conservatism’. But – and this is where Frank parts company with his fellow liberals – he analyses

the causes behind the changes and puts his finger on the problem: ‘above all it is a class war.’ (p102) Sections of the working-class have peeled away from the Democratic Party and transferred allegiance to right-wing Republicans. Like some grotesque pantomime, workers suffering from conservative policies vigorously, enthusiastically line up demanding tax cuts for their class enemy and vote them into power. (p109) A coalition has formed of a section of the working-class with the right-wing upper class – lawyers, executives, etc – in support of conservative backlash Republicanism.

No longer only in Kansas: California’s recall election

But it is not only happening in Kansas. Such a coalition may seem both impossible and inexplicable. Professor Mike Davis, a left-leaning academic who contributes to *New Left Review*, was left reeling and spluttering in disbelief and bewilderment about another conservative populist backlash, the California Governor’s recall election in October 2003, which installed Arnold Schwarzenegger:

‘Analyzing this election is an adventure in a realm of stupefying paradox and contradiction... Strange... that almost two-thirds of the voters in the mega-state that supposedly belongs lock, stock, and barrel to the Democrats... endorsed the stealth return [of a Republican governor]... These are the kinds of election returns you expect to see from GOP [Grand Old Party – Republican] bedrock states like Idaho or Wyoming, not from the vaulted Left Coast.

‘When you peer at the dynamics of recall rage up close, the whole phenomenon becomes stranger still... what explains this astonishing mobilization of voter emotion, particularly in affluent white suburbs?’ (*Mother Jones*, 13 October 2003)

According to Davis, ‘exit polls show that, in San Diego as well as statewide, support for Schwarzenegger increased with income’. When combined with the ‘central role of traditional racist demagoguery and the revival of the Brown Peril [ie Latinos]’ and Arnie’s charisma: ‘not just another actor in politics... an extraordinary lightning rod... for dark, sexualized fantasies about omnipotence... the predominantly white voters of California’s inland empires and gated suburbs have anointed a clinically Hitlerite personality as their personal saviour.’

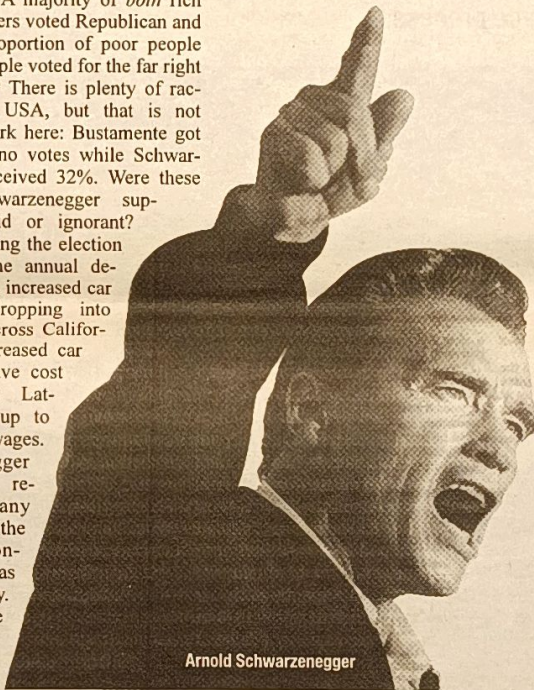
In fact there was no simple rich/poor split. There were two Republican

candidates: Schwarzenegger and McClintock, and the Latino Democrat: Bustamante. A majority of both rich and poor voters voted Republican and a greater proportion of poor people than rich people voted for the far right McClintock.³ There is plenty of racism in the USA, but that is not what’s at work here: Bustamante got 56% of Latino votes while Schwarzenegger, received 32%. Were these Latino Schwarzenegger supporters stupid or ignorant? Neither. During the election campaign, the annual demands for an increased car tax were dropping into mailboxes across California. The increased car tax could have cost the average Latino worker up to two weeks wages. Schwarzenegger promised to repeal it. Many Latinos drew the obvious conclusion. It was simple bribery. And, while there was racist anti-immigrant rhetoric, it appealed only to a minority: 64% of California voters voted down the racist Proposition 54, which would have destroyed affirmative action. The attraction of Conservatism to sections of the working class cannot be explained with simple ‘one-size-fits-all’ theories: specific conditions have to be sought in the particular cases.

Decline and change in the US working class

The US working class has been under serious attack from the 1970s on. The real weekly earnings of non-supervisory workers, in 1992 dollars, fell from \$315 in 1973 to \$271 in 1999. In 1979 23.7% of the workforce received poverty-level wages; by 1999 this had grown to 26.8%.⁴ Manufacturing employment fell absolutely from 21.9 million in 1980 to 19.9 million in 2000, a decline of 9.1%.⁵

With the decline of manufacturing went the decline of the most privileged sections of the US working class who had formed a strong basis of support for the Democratic Party. The Party has had to find other sources of support and turned more and more toward affluent professionals, who are liberal on social issues, and away from the working class (pp242ff). Without leadership from the left, the conservatives have moved



Arnold Schwarzenegger

in, providing a suitable ideology and organization, and have been benefiting ever since.

Con ideology

Frank shows how the conservative ideology works. Littered with lies, superficially emphasising the positive, it is in fact undiluted, screaming victimhood, with the endless recantation of innumerable supposed outrages against ‘traditional values’. With no Soviet Union, it’s no longer Reds lurking under beds, but liberals. In the conservative world, a faceless ‘liberal elite’ controls the media, and the government, imposing crushing taxation, rampant homosexuality, godlessness and gunlessness. It will bleed the working class Americans dry (‘Tax and spend!’ is a favourite squawk from the conservative parrots) in order to indulge its lavish, indulgent, ‘politically correct’ (squawk, squawk) lifestyle. Take any speech by Hitler, railing at Jews, substitute ‘liberals’ and you get the flavour. Ignoring unemployment and low income, the cons avoid all economic issues except taxes. Clever, since a few dollars more in the pay packet is far more tangible than ‘job creation’. Instead, con ideology focuses on social issues such as abortion, supposed attempts to force children into gay lifestyles, threats to

gun ownership, ‘activist judges’, environmentalist ‘tree-huggers’ etc.

Ingeniously, the ideology is designed to keep the conservative movement eternally frustrated and angry with the ‘liberal elite’: it froths about ‘vague cultural grievances that are all-important and yet incapable of ever being assuaged... the backlash was born to lose. Its goal is not to win cultural battles but to take offense, conspicuously, vocally, even flamboyantly’ (p121).

This vast, faceless liberal conspiracy manipulates everything from behind the scenes. Helpless Republicans, despite controlling the Presidency, both Houses of Congress, a good fraction of the Supreme Court, supported by the most powerful sectors of big business, and the military, are still, somehow, incapable of vanquishing the omnipotent, invisible liberal beast.

Intoxicated on this heady brew of anger, righteousness and fear, the conservative grass roots are building a movement from the ground up while liberals, like captive goldfish, simply stare, open-mouthed, aghast, at this monster, as if powerless.

How to fix the USA?

What is missing from Frank’s readable book is any analysis about why conservatism should be needed now, at this time, by the ruling class. It appears to be a sort of nightmarish accident, as if some dreadful weed from outer space suddenly appeared overnight, choking everything. Yet, the decline of the traditional working class, of its allegiance to the Democratic Party, the rise of conservatism, the shape and propagation of con ideology and the sophistication of con organization are not accidents, but facets of a deeply crisis-ridden imperialism. Its roots are deep, so the remedy has to be deeper.

The second weakness is Frank’s failure to provide any credible strategy for fighting the cons or to identify any agent that can be mobilized to struggle against this reaction. While noting: ‘liberalism deserves a large part of the blame for the backlash phenomenon’ (p242), his only suggestion is an attempt to roll back the history of the Democratic Party and return to a time when Democrats knew how to talk to the workers. Yet it was this futile past reliance on a declining pro-imperialist labour aristocracy that brought us to where we are today. This isn’t going to be fixed by rearranging a few pieces on the political chessboard.

Real change requires finding a section or sections of the US working class, uncompromised by, and uncompromising with, imperialism – a topic we will return to in future articles.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

1 Engels, ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany’, Marx Engels *Selected Works* (Progress, Moscow, 1983), I, p301

2 Thomas Frank *What’s the matter with Kansas? How conservatives won the heart of America* (Metropolitan Books, New York, 2004). Page references in text.

3 *Los Angeles Times* Exit Poll No 490: California Special Recall Election, October 7, 2003.

4 *Dollars & Sense* Economic Policy Institute.
5 US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2004-2005*, Table 591, p385.

Inquest exposes brutal regime in Frankland seg unit

On 2 October 2002, 31-year-old Paul Day was found hanged in the segregation unit of Frankland prison. His death occurred on the very night that he came off a dirty protest in the unit. The protest, the last in a series described by the coroner as the biggest in the UK's prison system outside of Northern Ireland, was the prisoners' response to a brutal and callous regime that had been operating, unchecked, in Frankland segregation unit for years. **ERIC ALLISON** reports on the inquest into Paul Day's death.

The inquest lasted four and a half weeks, and heard from prisoners and ex-prisoners, from members of prison staff, Paul's former solicitor and his parents. The jury heard graphic details about the dirty protests and the treatment of the men on them, as well as the harrowing details of Paul Day's own odyssey through the prison system to Frankland. They were even taken to see the segregation unit, a place where outsiders seldom venture. No doubt spotlessly clean on the day of their visit, they would nonetheless have been able to picture the seg two and a half years earlier as a Dantesque arena of torment, where men daubed their bodies and cells with their own excrement for weeks on end. They heard that, far from persuading the men to end their protest, staff subjected the prisoners to constant verbal abuse and did everything in their power to make the dreadful conditions worse. Prisoner after prisoner gave evidence of abuse from screws.

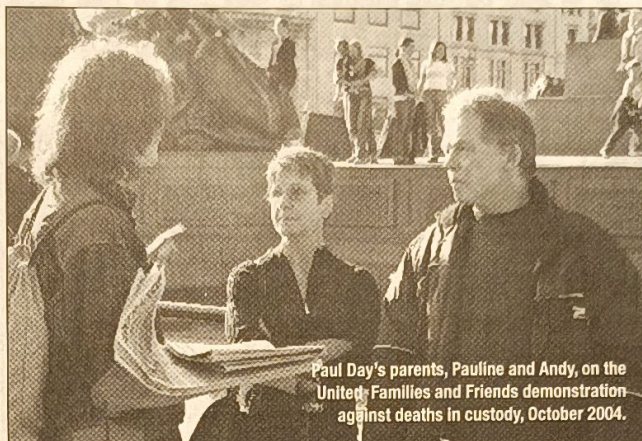
The jury must have wondered what drives men to eat, drink and live in such an environment. Dirty protests are not entered into lightly; they are undertaken by men in desperate circumstances, who feel there is little else they can do to protect themselves. As former prisoner Jimmy Boyle once put it: 'The screws liked the taste of my blood, they did not like the taste of my shit.'

Paul Day was serving eight years for robbery. He was a self-confessed, registered police informer. In that capacity, he had, without doubt, helped to imprison a large number of people over a long period, and would always have been in danger as a result. However, he was moved to Frankland at the point he told the police he was no longer prepared to play this role. He

was told he was going to a safe unit where he would be protected. No such unit existed. Instead he was put in the segregation unit, where he suffered abuse, firstly from other prisoners who knew who and what he was; then when, despite all this, he vociferously took the side of the men then on dirty protest, and went on to join the protest himself, directly from the screws.

The verdict was more than a decision on a death in custody; it was an indictment of the whole stinking segregation system. Furthermore, some parts of the verdict clearly exposed prison officers who gave evidence at the inquest to have lied under oath. Inquest juries now give their verdict in the form of a narrative. The narrative into Paul Day's death included the findings that:

- inadequate information about Paul was provided to HMP Frankland prior to his transfer and he himself was misled about the nature of this transfer, with the result 'that he felt abandoned, frustrated, depressed, helpless and defeated. He also lost trust in the system and his carers'.
- Paul suffered verbal abuse from fellow prisoners in the segregation unit at HMP Frankland and the staff did not act reasonably to deal with this.
- the systems in place to effectively manage and care for Paul were inadequate. There was a lack of staff on night shifts. The 2052 system (suicide prevention) failed, the observations on Paul were not effective... checks were insufficient and the entries of poor quality; checks by management were not done on the entries; the complaints procedure was too slow. Suicide awareness training was not frequent enough.
- The dirty protest protocol was not



Paul Day's parents, Pauline and Andy, on the United Families and Friends demonstration against deaths in custody, October 2004.

adhered to. No attempt was made to find out why Paul went on to the dirty protest. There was no encouragement to come off the dirty protest. Paul was moved back onto the same spur as the dirty protest after his shower on the day he died.

- Delay in seeing the doctor was inappropriate.
- Paul was intimidated and mentally abused.

By the end of the inquest, I found myself having massive sympathy for Paul Day and my overriding emotions were rage at a prison system that could allow such treatment to any individual and disgust at those whose task it is to monitor the welfare of prisoners on behalf of the public. Not least of the factors that influenced me was hearing the testimony of 'ordinary' prisoners who had been driven to protest in this awful manner. Like me, as criminal and prisoner, they must have considered grasses to be of the lowest order. Yet, when Paul Day showed solidarity by joining their protest, and after witnessing the appalling treatment at the hands of staff, they came to this inquest to tell the truth. In doing so, they were able to help his family, who are fine, courageous people, to take on the might of the Home Office and ensure that this window of degradation was exposed to public view.

Anthony Wood, one of the protesters was brought from the cages at Wakefield to give evidence to the inquest. He described how he'd been given a jacket potato that had dead flies carefully inserted into its centre. Another former protester, Gordon Foley, now in Barlinnie, told how he'd been driven on to the protest because, 'In 31 years in gaol, I'd never experienced anything like the seg unit at Frankland.'

He said that, after Paul Day's death, he (Foley) had been stripped naked by screws and thrown into a freezing cell. He was then moved to the cages at Wakefield and when he arrived there, his body was black and blue from the beatings he'd received.

In what was, at least in my experience, an unprecedented show of prisoner solidarity; a large number of cons and former cons who had not been involved in the protest gave evidence to the inquest. All except one testified

to the abuse that had taken place. (And that one's evidence was so transparently toadying as to cause jury members to shake their heads in disbelief. Surprise, surprise, he was still at Frankland and thought all screws were wonderful!). To their credit, many were vulnerable prisoners, still in the system. Yet they named incidents of abuse they had witnessed and did not hesitate to name the screws involved. Serving prisoners who are still 'listeners' (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to support distressed fellow prisoners), and therefore in a somewhat privileged position, came forward to damn the regime at Frankland. Prisoners everywhere owe a debt to these men.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons Ann Owens has written to Mr and Mrs Day promising that her office will carry out a 'thematic review into the way prisoners are treated in segregation units in the dispersal estate'. This is a very positive step towards exposing the hideous brutality that has gone on unchecked in these places and I encourage all prisoners who read this paper and have done recent time in the blocks to write to the Inspectorate describing your experiences, naming names and giving details. The more evidence that is presented of what we all know to be the rotten regime in these stinking places, the harder it will be for the abusers, and those at every level in the system who allow the abuse to carry on, to wriggle away. ■

Appeal to prisoners from Paul Day's mother

I am the mother of Paul Stuart Day who was found hanged at Frankland Prison in the segregation unit on 2 October 2002.



Pauline Day

His inquest, for me and my husband, was the most harrowing experience of our lives. We loved Paul dearly and are determined to make sure that we play our part in making the Home Office and the public

aware of how badly treated he was, not just in Frankland seg but in numerous segregation units which he was held in for over two years. If there is anyone who can offer information about Paul, and the way he was treated elsewhere (Wandsworth, Cardiff, Highdown, Pentonville), just to name a few of the prisons he was in, I would be eternally grateful for information. If you yourselves have horror stories to tell about your time in segregation and you write to me via FRFI regarding your experiences I will forward all mail to the Chief Inspector of Prisons, and will write back to you confirming that I have done that. I would like to personally thank all of the prisoners who were courageous enough to attend Paul's inquest and tell the truth on his behalf. I will be forever grateful to you all.

Pauline Day

Inhuman prisons in Argentina

The recent bloody prison riots in the Argentinean city of Cordoba are clear evidence of the decaying condition of the prison system in the whole country.

In November 2004 the Group for the Study of Human Rights and Persons Deprived of Freedom reported on the 'very critical' situation of 477 inmates in the town of General Roca, due to the lack of any separation between juveniles and adults, or between

remand and sentenced prisoners. Many detainees sleep on the floor; there is a lack of facilities for work or study; toilets are blocked, and electric and water supplies are prone to disruption.

The alarming situation in the Mendoza prison forced the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to send a delegation to the prison in December 2004. This gaol is considered one of the most disastrous in the hemisphere. It is 280% over capacity and 15 peo-

ple have been killed there in the last ten months.

A report in the newspaper *Clarín* on 13 December 2004 highlighted that in Buenos Aires province alone there are 25,000 prisoners, and that this figure is increasing on average by 300 per month.

Two main factors lie behind the appalling conditions. Firstly, the process of privatising services, pioneered by the US since the mid-1980s. This has led to controversy about the exploitation of prison labour through subcon-

tracts, for the benefit of Microsoft, TWA, Boeing, Konica, JanSport and Victoria's Secret.

The contract for Argentina's first privately managed prison was agreed in 1999 between the provincial government of Buenos Aires, the provincial Justice Secretary and a private company. This company is also in charge of prison catering, inmate healthcare and the maintenance of the building.

Secondly, although Statute 24660, passed in 1996, gave

power to some judges to look after prisoners' rights and to follow up their development, in practice this simply didn't happen. Instead the internal administration took on that role, deciding at will about the regime, transfers, correspondence and conditions of allocation.

The situation requires a dramatic change. Otherwise new uprisings could take place and more blood will be shed, as happened in Cordoba this February.

Juanjo Rivas

Cuba takes on US at UN Human Rights Commission

CAT WIENER

'Cuba speaks for the millions who are silent' (African delegate at UNHRC)

The 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) opened in Geneva on 14 March and will continue till 22 April. Once again, it has become an arena for a political battle of David and Goliath proportions between socialist Cuba and the might of US imperialism.

For 18 years, the United States has attempted to use the commission to condemn Cuba, either directly or by proxy, using the hypocritical cover of 'human rights'. Earlier this year, true to form, the US State Department published a report castigating Cuba for alleged human rights abuses, focusing in particular on the US-funded 'dissidents' jailed by Cuba in 2003. Since then, the US has been touting in vain around the countries of Latin America to find a willing cat's-paw. More recently, it has turned its attention to its client states in Eastern Europe, offering millions of dollars as a bribe. It is not yet clear who will present the resolution over the coming weeks, but Cuba has already demolished the validity of its arguments.



'Cuban elections: democratic bulwark of the Revolution': Cubans prepare for this year's municipal elections

Double standards at the UNHRC

In the first place, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque argued on 16 March, what is the moral credibility of the forum where the argument is to be had? The UNHRC has been turned into a 'court of inquisition', where the poor countries of the world are to be judged by the rich countries that have exploited them – yet those same rich

countries enjoy impunity before the commission.

'In it, there are lies, double standards and empty speeches by those who, while enjoying their wealth, squander and pollute, look the other way and pretend not to see how millions of human beings endure the violation of the right to life, the right to peace, the right to development, the right to eat, to learn, to work – in brief, the right to live in dignity'.

What else is one to make of the refusal of the European Union last year to co-sponsor and support Cuba's draft resolution to investigate 'the massive, flagrant and systematic human rights violations still committed against over 500 prisoners at the naval base that the United States, against the will of the Cuban people, keeps in the harbour of Guantanamo'? Or of the fact that this year, those same countries are remaining silent about the hideous evidence of US torture at Abu Ghraib in Iraq?

How can the US, in the face of such evidence, even sit as a member of the Human Rights Commission, let alone seek to judge Cuba? Why has a Human Rights Rapporteur been appointed to investigate Cuba – where there are no disappearances, no torture and no extrajudicial executions – and not the United States? Such double standards, Roque argued, make a travesty of the process.

Only socialism can guarantee rights for all

The hypocrisy goes further, for it is rooted in the fundamentally unjust division of the world into rich and poor nations, the oppressor and oppressed, that denies the vast majority of humanity the most basic human rights.

'There will be no real enjoyment of human rights for as long as we fail to achieve social justice in the relations among countries and within countries themselves.

'For a small group of nations represented here – the United States and other developed allies – the right to peace has already been achieved. They will always be the attackers and never the ones under attack. Their peace rests on military power. They have also achieved economic development, based on the pillage of the wealth of other poor countries that were former colonies... however, in those developed countries, the unemployed, the immigrants and the impoverished do not enjoy the rights guaranteed to the rich.

'Can a poor person in the United States be elected Senator? No, they cannot. The campaign costs, on average, some \$8m. Do the children of the rich go to the unjust and illegal war in Iraq?... None of the 1,500 American youths killed in that war was the son of a millionaire or a minister. The poor die there defending the interests of the rich.'

Meanwhile, the poor countries of the world have no right to peace: they can be bombed or invaded on the pretext of 'fighting terrorism' at a moment's notice. They have no right to economic development: the world economic system imposed on them prevents it. They have no right to health, nor to education, nor to culture. All they have is the right to be dependent countries.

The defence of human rights starts with building a different kind of society, for without equality and without social justice, there cannot be human rights for all. 'That is what we Cubans learned a long time ago, and for that reason we built a different country... We are a dangerous example; we are a symbol that only in a just and friendly society – that is, socialist – can there be enjoyment of all rights for all citizens'.

Hence the desperate attempts of the United States to condemn and destroy Cuba, attempts that have included military aggression, an illegal blockade, terrorist attacks, lies and propaganda. A recent US Agency for International Aid and Development report admits: 'What we are currently doing in Cuba: financing, organising and directing the counter-revolutionary factions'. Since new anti-Cuban measures were passed in the US last year, the US has channelled \$14.4m to Cuba to promote subversion, according to US Assistant Secretary of State Noriega. Cuba has described this as 'an act of war'. However, Roque warned: [The US] is afraid of our example. It is strong at the military level but weak on the moral front. And morality, not weapons, is the shield of the people'.

Defend socialist Cuba! Join Rock around the Blockade

Rock around the Blockade works to defend socialist Cuba, inform people about the gains of the Revolution and fight against the illegal US blockade. We understand that building a socialist movement in our own country is the best form of solidarity with the Revolution. In July, Rock around the Blockade will be taking a brigade of socialist activists from Britain to Cuba. We will be taking with us material aid in the form of a sound system for the Union of Young Communists (UJC) in Caimanera, eastern Cuba, the nearest Cuban town to the illegally-occupied Guantanamo Bay, site of the US torture camp.

We also campaign to free the Miami 5, Cuban political prisoners incarcerated in the US for fighting terrorism. It is now a year since their appeal and yet there has been no ruling. Meanwhile, relatives of the five men are still being denied full visiting rights.

Around the country, our Boycott Bacardi campaign targets this viciously

reactionary,

anti-Cuban

company and

exposes its links

with the US administration and Cuban exiles in Miami. A new Boycott Bacardi group has been set up at Salford University in the northwest. To find out more about our campaigns visit our website at www.ratb.org.uk or e-mail us on office@ratb.org.uk. Better still, join Rock around the Blockade by filling in the slip below. Future events in London include a public meeting, a sponsored bike ride, a Rebel Music club night and a night with live Latin bands. There are also regular events and stalls in Glasgow, Durham and Manchester and in the Midlands. Get active, get involved!



Yes, I would like to join Rock around the Blockade

and enclose £10 waged/£4 low-waged/£2 concessions

(delete as appropriate) £

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

Name

Address

Tel:

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

Rights for all in Cuba

Cuban democracy in action

As Britain gears up for a general election in May, the whole million-pound machinery of the charade that is bourgeois democracy swings into action – advertisements, billboards, party political broadcasts, soundbites and grinning, well-paid campaign managers. Who can be toughest on immigration, who can most discreetly privatise health and education, who will best protect the interests of the middle class and repress the poor? As the ugly, racist, imperialist, war-mongering parties battle it out for a self-serving chance to run the country, small wonder that a 50% electoral turnout will be considered a success.

Cuba's preparations for its local elections for the People's Power municipal assemblies in April offer a refreshing contrast. These local elections are held every two and a half years (a general election is held every five years).

Nominations for the delegates to the Municipal Assemblies began on 24 February. From then until 24 March, over 41,500 public assemblies will be held in approximately 15,000 districts. Cuban people nominate candidates directly at these public assemblies in their local neighbourhoods. Anyone can nominate or be nominated; the Communist Party does not stand candidates. A single

page containing a short biography of each candidate is put up in public places well in advance and a list of candidates is put up in more than 133,000 locations. No other campaigning is allowed. To be elected, a candidate must receive over 50% of the vote; if this is not received in the first round, the two candidates with the most votes go to a second round. All elected officials are accountable for their actions and can be recalled at any time.

All Cubans aged 16 and over can vote, and voting is voluntary and secret. The ballot boxes are guarded by schoolchildren and sealed in public, and the votes are counted in public. In previous elections, between 95% and 98% of the electorate has turned out. Unlike in Britain, the Cubans clearly feel they have something worth voting for.

Hannah Callier

War on illiteracy

'Without literacy, a better world is impossible'. With these words, Fidel Castro opened the 1st World Literacy Congress in Havana in February. He stressed that literacy is vital not just *per se*, but as a means of eradicating what he called 'that other terrible illiteracy which is political illiteracy'. He gave the example of Venezuela, where learning to read and write has been part and parcel of acquiring political and cultural knowledge.

Since Cuba's Literacy Campaign in the immediate aftermath of the 1959 Revolution virtually wiped out illiteracy in Cuba within two years, it has been spreading its ideas to countries in the

Americas, Africa and Asia – and its *Yo, si puedo* ('I can do it') strategy is now even being used to teach English in New Zealand. Cuba and Venezuela are encouraging countries to be part of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas which aims to promote literacy throughout Latin America.

'Cuba can confirm that in 12 years it is possible to teach over 1.5 billion illiterate and semi-literate people in the world to read and write to 6th grade,' according to Cuban education minister Luis Ignacio Gomez, at a cost of less than \$10 billion – equivalent to less than 0.004% of the annual gross domestic product of the developed countries belonging to the Organisation for Co-operation and Economic Development.

Cuba strengthens national currency

On 18 March, Fidel Castro announced the revaluation upwards of the Cuban peso, known as *moneda nacional* (MN), with immediate effect. This means that the price for buying the *peso convertible*, the Cuban currency which has replaced the US dollar, will drop from 27 to 25 pesos (MN); selling pesos in exchange for the *peso convertible* will drop from 26 to 24 pesos, an overall 7% increase in value of the Cuban peso (MN). This reflects the growth of Cuba's economy and its commitment to strengthen its national currency and will result in a rise in the standard of living. It is also a first step towards delinking the *peso convertible* from the dollar, to which it has been pegged.

Cat Wiener

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!**

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

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LETTERS

Che Guevara's comrade writes

This is not the time to lie with our scarves around our heads but rather with our weapons under our pillows. This is the time of judgment and we must march united'. (Jose Marti)

Most of the arrogant 'intellectuals of the left', who sit on their comfortable sofas, with their fridges stocked and their rooms heated, question the quality of our socialism, to what extent it can really be supported and, quite incredibly, reach the conclusion that Cuba is not worthy of help. They would rather deliver our island to the empire so that Cuba can be another Haiti, El Salvador or Honduras.

Cuba is on the line. It is not only a miracle representing equality and fraternity but it stands also for the true and definitive

independence of the developing countries which have been so undeservedly mistreated and humiliated. Cuba is therefore a trench. Anyone who has visited Cuba, however, will know that in this trench life is lived in a very intense manner. Cuba talks, sings, dances, falls in love, because this trench of so many palm trees is inhabited by intelligent human beings who work hard and struggle; because for us, Cubans, who have been fighting for over 200 years, struggle is also a festival and in this trench heroism is the common feature of our compatriots.

The world may call us naïve for fighting against the major empire throughout the ages. But it is the duty of millions of Cubans who support unconditionally our revolution and who believe a better

FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk website: www.revolutionarycommunist.com and www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk

Red Letter Press

Thank you for publishing a book review of *Revolutionary Integration: a Marxist analysis of African American Liberation* in the December-January issue of FRFI. I hope it will deepen your readers' awareness of the history of the US Black movement.

Susan Davidson's review quite accurately conveys many of the book's main ideas, but I was bemused by some of her conclusions, in particular that 'The Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) remains tied to the Trotskyist view that the socialist revolution is the task of the organised working class to which other concerns such as sexism, racism, student rights and peasant struggles must be subsumed'. The FSP is, indeed, Trotskyist and also defines itself as socialist feminist. Neither the party nor the book ever calls on African Americans, women, lesbians and gays, or others to 'subsume' themselves to the union movement. In fact, Fraser and Boot consistently discuss how oppressed groups cannot, must not, and will not wait for initiative to come from bureaucratically controlled unions that are bastions of race and sex privilege. Instead, the authors describe how the movements of

super-exploited members of the working class will sweep past and awaken labour militancy, whether within or outside the unions. In so doing, people of colour, women and queers exert crucially needed leadership for both the labour movement and the revolutionary movement.

FSP does believe that successful revolution can occur only with the leadership of the working class, in all its diversity, organised in a Leninist party and that while struggles against racism, sexism and homophobia are a crucial part of fighting the bosses, they cannot be eradicated until capitalism itself is overthrown, since it is the drive for profits that fuels inequality. This is the Marxist view. Davidson's unsubstantiated comment that the book 'is no Marxist analysis' seems like gratuitous sniping.

FRFI readers can learn more about the perspectives of the FSP by visiting www.socialism.com or by examining other Red Letter Press titles such as *Crisis and leadership or Socialist feminism: the first decade, 1966-76*.

HELEN GILBERT
Managing editor, Red Letter Press

Population explosion

Hannah Caller's excellent article on 'Capitalism's car culture' (FRFI February/March 2005) reminded me that it's no coincidence that the modern urbs sprawling onto the horizon and beyond, where a two or three hour commute to work is viewed as normal, began in earnest with the Cold War and nuclear arms race between the USA and USSR.

Indeed, the H-bomb 'exploded' the until then densely centralised American cities with their underground trains and prestigious addresses. The fear of having such a highly concentrated population literally go up in smoke prompted the mushrooming of the Levitowns throughout the USA. Instead of the convenience of walking to work or to one's favourite movie house or of shopping at Macy's - instead of all those nice urbanite conveniences, panic set in and furthest from downtown became best.

Similar explosions soon blew apart all of America's largest cities,

giving rise to the high-speed three-, four- and even six-lane expressways and soon 'suburbanised' each city in ways which rail or bus services could not accommodate. The mandatory family car, then the two-car family, was born. Also born were each family's personal nuclear shelter in its backyard and the systematic abandonment of city public transport.

And what happened to most of the formerly luxurious downtown accommodation left behind in the urban flight to the suburbs? An expendable population, whose disappearance into smoke in case of nuclear attack would be unimportant, was found - the ghetto was born. No longer would an evening stroll alongside Broadway or 42nd Street in Manhattan be 'leisurely'.

ANA LUCIA GELABERT # 384484,
Gatesville/Riverside Unit, 1401
State School Road,
Gatesville, Texas 76599,
USA

Ana Lucia has been in prison in the US for 21 years and is now 66. She has always maintained that the US authorities framed her for attempted murder, and that in any case her age and lack of previous convictions make her 'an unlikely recidivist'. She is coming up for parole but is petitioning to be repatriated to Cuba and has renounced her US citizenship. Support her application by writing to Maria Ramirez, Clemency Administrator, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, PO Box 1340, Austin TX 78711.

Thank you

Thank you all for your ongoing efforts - analysis, solidarity, struggle - and for continuing my subscription. I trust your eyes so much more than so many others who pour out words. In the spirit of Malcolm X.

MARILYN BUCK
US political prisoner

Labour cripples disabled

The most vulnerable and poorest sections of the population are being hammered financially by the Labour government. A typical single disabled claimant on income support and receiving the highest normal rate of disability premium and living in a council-owned bedsit in Hackney, currently receives £79.35 a week, less water rates of £2.80 - a net weekly income of £76.55.

From 13 April, their income support will go up by 80p. However, their water rates will rise by 60p, so the actual rise will be 20p - a quarter of one percent on £76.55.

Year on year under Labour, disabled benefits have risen by less than half the rate of inflation. None of us can live without water, so the water rate under Labour has always risen by more than twice the rate of inflation. This year income support has risen by about 1% but water rates by just over 21.5%.

Disabled claimants should not be surprised if in future, under Labour, their benefits don't just go down in real terms, but in actual terms (benefit cuts) too.

JIM WILLS
North London



RCG

ROUND UP



Nora Castañeda

people in defeating fascism. We have also picketed M&S branches at Camden and Holloway where we had a good response from the local Irish community. In early April we will target East Ham M&S.

In February the Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Society at the London School of Economics in London held a joint meeting with the International Solidarity Movement where we heard reports from activists who had recently returned from the Occupied Territories. In March, as part of International Women's Week, FRFI LSE Society organised a meeting addressed by Nora Castañeda, the president of Venezuela's Women's Development Bank (Banmujer) and Angelica Alvarez (Banmujer's co-ordinator in Bolivar state), who were in Britain on a tour organised by Global Women's Strike. 300 people packed the hall to hear an inspirational speech from Castañeda. FRFI has also held joint meetings with the MLKP, as well as working with them

The regular Victory to the Intifada picket outside the Marks & Spencer at Marble Arch, London, continues to be well supported every Thursday evening. We are often joined by passing shoppers and tourists. In contrast, the Zionist counter-demonstration has seen its numbers dwindle and on 17 February, when it was very cold, they did not turn up at all. They have also been involved in physical confrontations with local youths, with the police siding with the Zionists.

On 10 February the Zionists sent us a note asking us to call off our picket during the 'peace negotiations'. They got their reply when we told them over the megaphone on the

picket to write to Stuart Rose, CEO of M&S and ask him to stop supporting Israel and trading with illegal Zionist settlements in Palestine during the so-called peace talks.

On 27 January, the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet Red Army, we had speeches and a minute's silence remembering the victims of fascism. We also used the opportunity to remind the public that we needed to be against all forms of fascism and repression - including Zionism. We were joined by the Marxist Leninist Communist Party of Turkey and north Kurdistan (MLKP), whose red banners displayed the hammer and sickle, a welcome reminder of the role played by the Soviet

and other groups for events around International Women's Day.

Marching against war in Iraq

On 19 March RCG/FRFI marched under the banner of the Anti-Imperialist Bloc on the anti-war march in central London (see p5). It was a large, vivacious and very political contingent that chanted slogans against imperialism and the role of the warmongering Labour Party, new and old, as a willing agent of imperialism. Two weeks before the demonstration the bloc wrote a letter to the Stop the War Coalition Committee asking for a speaker on the platform at the end of the march. Our request was refused. As a result we set up our own parallel speakers' area in Trafalgar Square, where all on the demonstration were welcome to come and speak on the megaphone and make their voices heard. Many people, angered at listening to the same old Labour members and sympathisers on the platform, took up our offer and made speeches. Despite the crimes of the imperialists in Iraq the march was the first one since last October. FRFI and the anti-imperialist bloc will be at the next one, but will not stay idle in the meantime and will continue to hold meetings, demonstrations and cultural events.

In Manchester the struggle con-

tinues to seek justice for the nine Victory to the Intifada activists unlawfully arrested in December 2004 and banned from picketing the Marks & Spencer in the town centre over the Christmas period (see FRFI 183). VTI is currently awaiting the outcome of a judicial review in the High Court to have the December ban ruled illegal. Despite harassment from both the police and the racist Zionist counter-demonstrators, VTI have continued successful demonstrations outside Manchester's Marks & Spencer.

FRFI comrades in Scotland have maintained their momentum in local anti-war work since activists met together to co-ordinate protest. In early February, FRFI joined with others to picket the army recruitment office in central Glasgow. The Scottish Socialist Party with thousands of members, hundreds of thousands of votes and six Members of the Scottish Parliament, has not organised its own supporters against the war. FRFI stands with all activists who want to organise against war without regard to the consequences for Labour's vote - we say 'No Vote for Labour imperialists!' FRFI supporters and others are united in keeping the anti-war protest going. We stand as 'Active Against War' in Buchanan St. **Glasgow** every Saturday from 12 noon onwards. Join us! **Contact active_against_war@yahoo.co.uk**

EVENTS

LONDON

Victory to the Intifada weekly Thursday picket of M&S: Marble Arch, Oxford St, 6-8pm.

Weekly Saturday stalls, **against the war and occupation of Iraq, in support of socialist Cuba, against the repressive Labour government laws:** 12-2pm, Phone 0207 837 1688 for details.

Public meetings of LSE FRFI Society: London School of Economics, Houghton St, WC2 (nearest tube Holborn).

Wednesday 23 March: Anti-imperialist Bloc public meeting, 7pm, Room S75, St Clements Building.

Wednesday 13 April: Remember Deir Yassin - defend the Palestinian struggle, 7pm, Room H103, Connaught House.

Wednesday 11 May: Cuba at the UN - what price human rights? 7pm, Room S75, St Clements Building.

Rock Around the Blockade fundraising events for the sound system for the Union of Young Communists in Cuba: ring 020 7837 1688 for details of sponsored bike ride, fundraising meal and Rebel Music club night.

Thursday 12 May: the Underground Bar at LSE, LSE FRFI Society night of Latin American music raising money for Cuba.

MANCHESTER

Regular pickets of Manchester, Rochdale and Preston Marks & Spencer. Contact 07816 547066 for details.

Sunday 12 April: Anti-imperialist forum, Cross St Chapel, Cross St, Manchester. 2pm.

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Labour's police state

ASBOS

Charles Clarke is currently pushing for yet more draconian policing to make 'naming and shaming' the rule rather than the exception and boasted: 'Your photo could be all over the local media, your local community will know who you are, and breaching an ASBO could land you in prison'. Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 the press already has the power to picture and name those charged, which it has done without hesitation. Children as young as ten have received ASBOs. Police can threaten young people congregating in the street with an ASBO if they refuse to disperse, and do not have to prove their allegations.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 also gives the police powers to charge people with on-the-spot fines for loosely defined 'offences' such as 'wasting police time', 'sending a false message' and 'consumption of alcohol in public' – all £80. Prostitutes, beggars, and travelling communities are also targets for police harassment. The government is now trying to give the police and local councils the power to impose ASBOs on people that receive three fines.

Since they were introduced nearly 4,000 ASBOs have been imposed. From October 2003 to October 2004 2,600 orders were issued – twice as many as in the previous four years.

The statistics show a high concentration of ASBO charges in poor areas. In Manchester, where 40% of the population is 'economically inactive' – ie not working nor registered as unemployed – the Labour council has enthusiastically jumped at the chance

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were introduced in April 1999 under the guise of combating 'yob' culture and preventing domestic crime and disorder. In reality, along with the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, ASBOs are a means of repressing the working class, especially the youth. **HEATHER KEATING and LOUIS BREHONY report.**

to further oppress the city's poor. Manchester has issued more ASBOs than anywhere else, making it one of the government's 'trailblazer' areas for attacking 'anti-social behaviour'; Manchester City Council has issued the highest number of ASBOs since they were introduced, with 509 served between April 1999 and June 2004 – nearly double the number for Greater London. Manchester Labour Councillor Eddie Newman defended the council's record by claiming ASBOs are 'a preventative measure to lay down in clear terms what is unacceptable behaviour.' This comes from a council that has obtained ASBOs against beggars, homeless people, and even charity soup vans. It is not surprising that areas where anti-social behaviour is high are deprived areas such as Gorton in Manchester. Gorton is full of run-down estates with no facilities for children or young people. Having neglected such areas for years, the state now punishes the very behaviour that inevitably results from deprivation. West Yorkshire, the West Midlands

and Merseyside are all high on the list of 'offending' areas.

The Home Office is putting £1.25m into 50 'anti-social behaviour action areas' and to promote eviction of 'chaotic families.' Lisa Hindle of Cheetham was evicted because her partner and son received ASBOs and the council considered her responsible for their behaviour. A woman who has repeatedly tried to take her own life has received an ASBO banning her from rivers, railways, bridges etc and will face a jail sentence if she breaches it. An 18-year-old man from Fife was served with an ASBO for playing loud music. He is prohibited from going home for three months, essentially making him homeless. Minister Hazel Blears said that 'many families are facing eviction. We don't want them to be evicted, we want them to change their behaviour'.

Some ASBOs are clearly racist, as in the case of a Yemeni woman from Leeds who has been suffering racism for five years from her community and whose son has constantly been



stopped in his car by the police. The woman complained about police discrimination and has now been threatened with an ASBO and also with an eviction warning for causing 'alarm and distress' to the community – for complaining! Her son has also been threatened with an ASBO for dangerous driving.

10-15 year olds are most likely to breach ASBOs, with 39% of orders being broken. 38% of 16-20 year olds and 31% of people over 21 breach their orders. The probation union Napo reported recently that 50% of those who are served with an ASBO end up in prison, many for an offence that would not have originally warranted a prison term. The Napo report highlighted 'abuse of ASBO powers', such as the case of a Manchester prostitute who was served with an ASBO for

being a nuisance to the community and as part of her ASBO terms was banned from a certain area and prohibited from carrying condoms. The woman's drug clinic was in the forbidden area and she has breached her order by attending and is now facing a possible prison sentence.

ASBOs and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 have also been used against activists and political protesters. In addition to those mentioned in our last issue (see FRFI 183) a man from Moston has since been threatened with an order for handing out 'Victory to the Iraqi resistance' leaflets on his estate, and also for putting a leaflet on the door of his own flat! Here the political character of ASBOs is as clear as day – in firm support of those in power and with contempt for those who oppose them.

Control orders

The new Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 became law on 11 March. Britain now has a Terrorism Act, an Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) and a Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) simultaneously in force. The PTA gives the British Labour government power to impose 'control orders', akin to the house arrests and 'banning orders' of apartheid South Africa, with the added ingredient of modern technology for tracking, surveillance and monitoring the every move of the 'suspected terrorist'. **NICKI JAMESON reports.**

The latest law was hurriedly brought in following the House of Lords judgment in December 2004 that the provision under the ATCSA that allowed for 'suspected terrorists' who were not British citizens to be detained indefinitely without trial was unlawful and incompatible with Britain's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (see FRFI 183 December 2004/January 2005).

The PTA was finally passed after a marathon parliamentary sitting involving both the House of Commons and House of Lords. The government had wanted to retain full executive power over the issuing of control orders while the Lords were adamant that responsibility for them should be judicial.

The government was also forced, much against its will, to agree to a requirement that the powers to make control orders will lapse unless renewed annually by a vote by both Houses of Parliament.



Despite the amendments forced onto this vicious illiberal government by the unelected but more democratically-minded House of Lords, the introduction of control orders into the state's armoury is a further blow to civil liberties in this country.

The Act creates two types of control

orders, described as 'derogating' and 'non-derogating'. This refers to the need for the government to 'derogate' from, or opt out of, Article 5 of the ECHR, which forbids detention without trial, if it is to impose house arrest.

For an order for indefinite house arrest to be imposed Parliament must

first agree a derogation order. This order will come into force immediately, but will have to then be debated and ratified by both the Commons and the Lords within 40 days. Once this is in place, the Home Secretary can apply to a court for an order that a named person must remain in a particular place at all times.

'Non-derogating orders' (appropriately nicknamed 'anti-terrorist ASBOs') do not require opting out of Article 5 so are easier to impose. They allow the Home Secretary to impose a wide range of conditions including bans on internet or mobile phone use; restrictions on movement and travel; restrictions on employment and leisure activities; restrictions on association or communication with named individuals or with people in general; a requirement not to leave home for a specified period of up to 24 hours; requirements to allow access to your home or other premises, for the place to be searched and items removed; requirements to be electronically tagged in order to monitor curfews and to permit the monitoring of your telephone calls.

In general, in order to make this type of order, the Home Secretary will have to apply for leave from a judge of the High Court. However in a situation deemed 'urgent' the Home Secretary can issue the order with immediate effect. However he must then refer it to court within seven days for confirmation.

As soon as the act was passed the ten men who had been imprisoned for four years in Belmarsh and elsewhere without charge under the ATCSA powers were released and subjected to 'non-derogating' control orders, imposed using the 'urgency' procedures.

Control orders can be imposed on

British citizens or foreign nationals, in contrast to the ATCSA provisions which were only applied to foreign nationals. All that is needed is for the Home Secretary to decide he has 'reasonable grounds' for suspecting that the person concerned is or has been involved in 'terrorism-related activity'. Such activity includes not only the 'commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism' and 'conduct which facilitates...such acts', but also 'conduct which gives encouragement...to such acts' and 'conduct which gives support or assistance to individuals who are known or believed to be involved in terrorism-related activity'. Potentially, the family, friends, lawyers, colleagues and comrades of any person considered by the government to be a terrorist suspect are therefore all targets for the imposition of further control orders, along with anyone who verbally supports but does not engage in 'terrorist activity'.

The government claims that the 'suspected terrorists' cannot be tried in court because, although there is compelling evidence against them, it is 'intelligence-based' and cannot be aired in court. Whatever the truth of this (and it appears increasingly that this 'intelligence' consists of information extracted under torture from detainees at Guantanamo Bay and Bagram Air Base) labelling individuals for harassment on the basis of little or no evidence sends a message to whole communities. The new PTA, like its predecessor, which for years was used to terrorise the Irish community away from showing active support for the war against British occupation, is a political tool. It is being used to intimidate Muslims in Britain and scare them away from active opposition to US/British hegemony in the Middle East.