

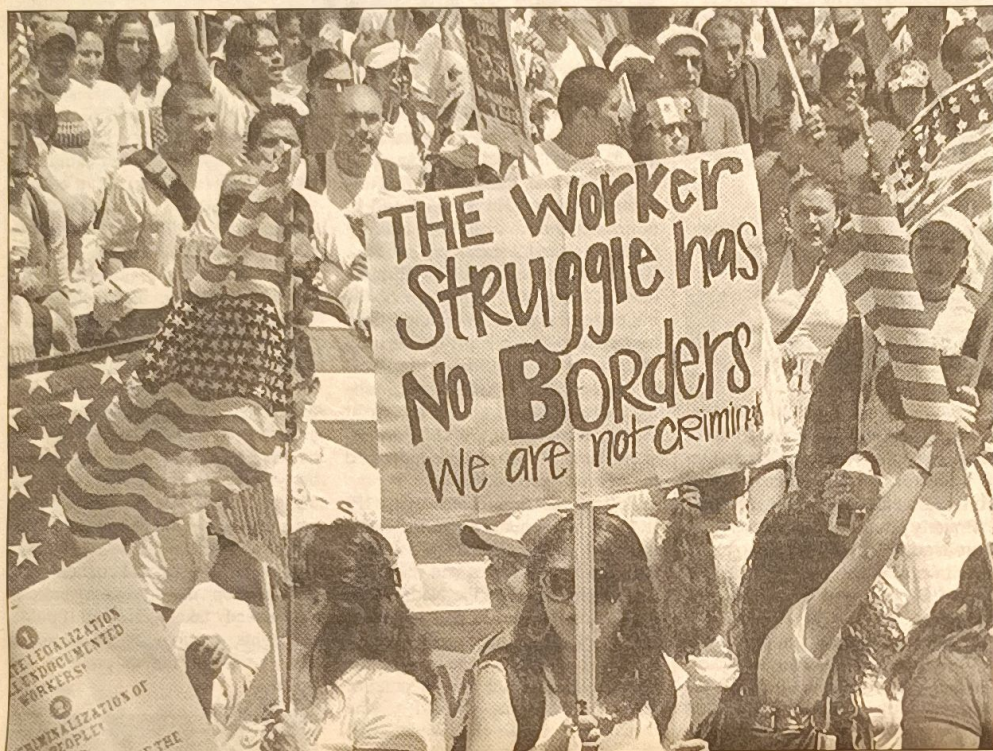
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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MILLIONS SAY

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH



LATIN AMERICA

The US and British invasion of Iraq, trapping US forces and helping to push up oil prices, has created a window of opportunity for Latin America's revolutionaries and long oppressed masses. Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia are opening the road to profound social change for millions of people, and by so doing they are challenging US hegemony on the continent.

The Honduran elections in November 2005 started a year of polling throughout Latin America. With a dozen presidential contests and 13 legislative elections, the class struggles throughout the

region present a new and major challenge to US and European imperialism. So far this challenge has been either superficially portrayed by the European press as an electoral swing to the left, or misrepresented

as a destructive 'populism'.

Years of long and bitter struggles have been waged by the workers and peasants of Latin America to obtain basic democratic rights. Aggressive US intervention for over a century has had severely damaging consequences throughout the region, creating mass poverty and wholesale misery. More recently, from the mid-1960s to the 1990s, the US promoted state terror against the working class and peasantry in all these countries: imposing unserviceable debt and then demanding the subsequent privatisation of state assets as repayment. The accumulation of misery in Latin America and the Caribbean. Last year alone saw a rise in 'official' regional unemployment of 1.3 million – half the global increase – with 15-24 year olds three times as likely to be unemployed as adults. In Latin America 23 million workers have no jobs while 103 mil-



On 1 May, Bolivia announced the nationalisation of its oil and gas industry. Days later, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was given a rousing reception by supporters in London – see page 9.

lion work 'informally'. Workers, a high proportion driven from the land, end up as casual labour, in petty trading, crime, prostitution and despair. A huge, poverty stricken reserve army of labour constantly grows in size. This total of 126 million is expected to grow to 153 million in ten years.

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UNITED STATES

Millions of immigrant undocumented workers all across the US took to the streets to protest against proposed racist immigration laws.

Following the immigrant-led Haymarket Riots in Chicago in May 1886 that led to the eight-hour day and adoption of 1 May as international workers' day, Engels enthused:

'The way in which they have made their appearance on the scene is quite extraordinary: six months ago nobody suspected anything, and now they appear all of a sudden in such organised masses as to strike terror into the whole capitalist class.'

He was talking about the first explosion of the working class into US politics. *'I only wish Marx could have lived to see it!'* he said.*

What has happened?

Again as if from nowhere, on another May Day, the working class in the US has leapt dramatically onto the political stage in the form of a mass movement led by undocumented workers. Five million workers and their fami-

lies poured onto the streets of more than 150 US cities and countless smaller towns in almost every state. In Los Angeles, two marches totalling one million; 700,000 marched through Chicago's forest of sky scrapers; 100,000 stretched 15 blocks of San Francisco's Market Street; in New York, between half a million and a million working people swelled through Manhattan; in Atlanta, in Seattle, in San Jose, in Washington DC, in Denver in Boston...The vast tide rolled on and on and on. From Anchorage and Juneau in frozen Alaska, to the southern desert border crossing at Tijuana; from Honolulu, on the Pacific island of Hawaii to Miami, Florida, 'from Sea to Shining Sea', workers proudly stood up to oppose racist immigration legislation.

The millions of Latinos in *Las Megamarchas* have drawn in Chinese, Irish, Nigerians, Koreans, and Filipinos –

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Welcome...

'If I was an Iraqi person I would be resisting, I would be in the trenches, I would be with a rocket launcher, defending my people, defending the holy sovereignty of my country against the abuse and aggression of the empire...'
— Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, interview with Channel 4, London, 16 May 2006.

President Chavez is in the trenches, at the head of the Bolivarian Revolution spreading militant anti-imperialism throughout Latin America. This Revolution is arming: reclaiming national resources and wealth, reincorporating the vast majority of its populations who were left to rot by 30 years of neo-liberalism and globalisation, reintegrating with fraternal nations through the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (see pages 1 and 10). Shoulder to shoulder with Chavez is new Bolivian president Evo Morales who chose International Workers' Day to announce the nationalisation of gas fields which are daily milked by imperialist corporations and Bolivian elites (see page 9), and Fidel Castro, who can boast 47 years' experience of audacious resistance to US imperialism, and who celebrated May Day with announcements of significant economic developments in Cuba (see page 11).

Further north, the uprising is echoed in the belly of the beast, as millions of Latin American immigrants take to the streets in the largest demonstrations ever in the United States. Joined by other immigrants and workers who share their oppression, they are a potentially revolutionary force because they are crucial to the functioning of capitalism, turning the wheels through their sweated labour power. They demonstrated this potential when they stopped the wheels turning in a one-day strike on May Day (see pages 1 and 8).

The lesson from the Bolivarian Revolution and from the US immigrant movement is that it is time to stand up and be counted, time to organise resistance within our own communities. After years of capitalist abuse and exploitation they have raised the slogan: 'Under attack, we fight back!' Capitalism creates the conditions of its own demise.



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez with Bolivian President Evo Morales

This slogan has begun to be raised here in Britain also. Across the country asylum seekers and other immigrants have been organising in their own communities and demanding their right to stay and work in the imperialist nation which is so culpable for the human and economic disasters and violence they have fled at home. The Revolutionary Communist Group has always said that black people and immigrants have revolutionary potential as an organised opposition in this racist, imperialist country. They are mostly consigned to the poor and most oppressed sections of the working class. FRFI has been working with anti-deportation and asylum rights campaigns throughout the country (see page 16). We stand opposed to all anti-immigration legislation.

This work increases in importance as racism is on the rise in Britain. Racism is a distorting mirror that spirals down into the gutter as well as up to the government. In the gutter we have the British National Party (BNP) and their gains in the May local elections. In the government are the likes of Labour Minister Margaret Hodge who excused the white working class for turning to BNP racists by saying that they had been ignored by the mainstream parties. Since the elections, Prime Minister Blair and the Labour government have pandered to a racist witch-hunt of

immigrants, which reached fever pitch over the Home Office failure to track foreign criminals released from prison (see pages 3 and 13).

Poverty and alienation have increased among the working class in Britain, compounded by National Health Service and education privatisation (see page 3), and because the most oppressed are represented less than ever by traditional labour organisations. These organisations cannot confront racism or poverty because they are entrenched in the capitalist system which perpetuates oppression. When imperialism goes on the rampage abroad it is accompanied by a rise in racism at home. The British and US government's brutality against the people of Afghanistan and Iraq (see page 5) and their threats against Iran (see page 4) are reflected within Britain by a rise in racism. Once again immigrants are the scape-goats, in a false history conjured up by a nostalgic portrayal of white working class communities in the service of today's vicious racism (see page 12). It is not immigrants who are responsible for the rise in racism; this is rooted in imperialism.

The link between imperialism and racism is clearly demonstrated in the history of the foundation of Israel and the oppression of the Palestinian people (see page 7). Now those who scorch and blow up the world in the name of democracy and civilisation attempt to starve the Palestinians as a punishment for choosing Hamas to represent them in elections based on their model of democracy (see page 6). In Nepal the struggle for democracy pushes the country to the edge of revolution as the Maoists' fight against the feudal king explodes onto the streets of Kathmandu (see page 4).

Around the world people are organising, mobilising and building resistance. They are taking up their historical responsibility to fight imperialism. We in Britain are in the belly of the beast. We are closer to the levers of power. We too must take on our historical responsibility to destroy imperialism and the capitalist system which breeds it, from within.

Under attack? Join the fight back!

Contact us and get involved. Send us your contributions written and financial.

FRFI, BCM Box 5909,
London WC1N 3XX

25 years on from the hunger strike – Irish prisoners still resisting

On 5 May 1981, Bobby Sands, an IRA volunteer and elected MP, died in Long Kesh prison following 66 days on hunger strike as a result of Britain's refusal to reinstate political status for Republican prisoners. He had refused to concede to demands from visiting dignitaries to abandon his protest. Sands explained why the Republican prisoners of war were political prisoners: 'I believe and stand by the God-given right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence, and the right of any Irishman or woman to assert this right in armed revolution.' At his funeral in Belfast 100,000 people marched in defiance and solidarity.

Following the slow deaths of the 10 IRA and INLA hunger strikers, working class youth took the lead in battling the British forces and their collaborators. However, the National H-Block/Armagh leaders had adopted a 'broad support' strategy designed to appeal to prominent people in the South, which meant that in practice the campaign was tailored to the demands of middle class leaders who did very little to publicly support the prisoners. This and the lack of any effective solidarity movement in Britain meant that Margaret Thatcher could stick to her pronouncement that 'a crime is a crime' and refuse to concede that Republican prisoners were political.

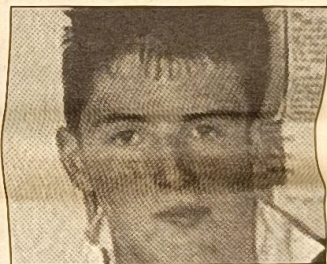
After the hunger strike was called off in October 1981, the British government quietly conceded some of the demands of the prisoners, allowing them to forego prison work, wear their own clothing, freely associate and engage in educational activities within their wings but without publicly granting political status.

Although the 1998 Good Friday Agreement effectively recognised the political status of Republican prisoners already in gaol, in order that their release could be part of the deal, this was specifically not extended to those arrested after the signing of the agreement. In 2006, Irish political prisoners are still being abused in British gaols.

Real IRA prisoner Aiden Hulme, currently held in Full Sutton in northern England, may have to have his leg amputated following deliberate neglect and the withholding of medical treatment by the prison authorities. Prison medics at Belmarsh recommended amputation but when Aiden's family obtained an independent second opinion their doctor said that his leg could be saved. Prison doctors in Full Sutton are continuing this cruel

punishment by withdrawing Aiden's painkillers claiming that his suffering is 'purely psychological'. Aiden is suing the Home Office for mistreatment and his supporters are campaigning for him to serve the rest of his sentence in Ireland. He has been on hunger strike and no wash protest in his fight to defend his rights.

The British prison authorities have shown a similar vindictive attitude in relation to the issue of the segregation of Republican and Loyalist prisoners from one another in British gaols in the Six Counties. Continuity IRA prisoners have accused the authorities of punishing those who had opted to go on the Republican wing in Maghaberry prison. Prisoners are on alternating days of 22 and 18-hour lock-up, are strip-searched at least once a week and have to eat meals in cells, which measure 8ft by 12ft and contain a toilet. Rooftop and no-wash protests have already taken place and if political rights continue to be removed there could be further protests and strikes.

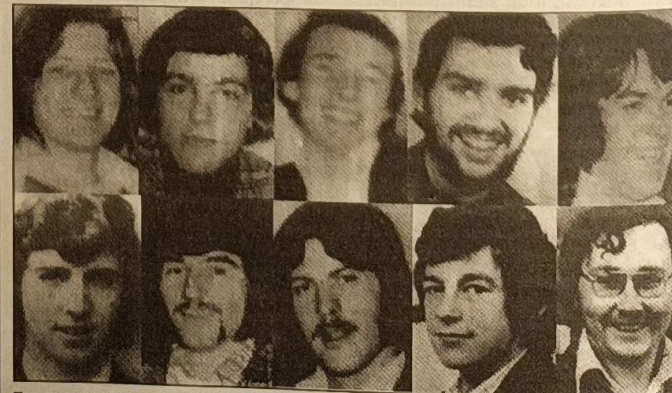


Michael McIlveen

Sectarian murder in Ballymena

The murder of Michael McIlveen, a 15-year-old Catholic youth, who was kicked to death by a Loyalist gang in Ballymena on 8 May, has highlighted the frightening situation faced by Nationalists who live in small enclaves in towns with a Loyalist majority. Michael was on his way home from the local cinema when he was set upon by a Loyalist gang wielding baseball bats and knives. The *Sunday Business Post* reported that life for Ballymena's Nationalist youth 'is punctuated by sectarian attacks and pervaded with a sense of despair, growing anger and resentment at their impotence in the face of sustained attacks'. In recent months, the attacks have become more organised, with Loyalists cruising in cars, armed with baseball bats and knives, on the prowl for Nationalists.

Jim O'Rourke



Ten men dead – the IRA and INLA members who died in the fight for political status

**e-mail: editorial@rcgfrfi.plus.com
www.revolutionarycommunist.com**

£10,000 fund drive: over half way there!

We are past the half way mark in our drive to raise £10,000 to expand the work of Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Donations and pledges over the past two months amounted to £3,061, bringing the total to £5,017. We now need a further £4,983 over the next two months to hit our target. Every pound matters in our efforts to develop our work in defence of asylum seekers, supporting socialist Cuba, and fighting the imperialist onslaught on Iraq and Palestine. The need to develop a strong anti-imperialist current in Britain is paramount, and FRFI and the RCG are crucial to this process. Please rush your donations to Larkin Publications: send to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

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Health matters

It is increasingly evident that the only way that NHS hospitals can balance their books is by cuts, closures and more privatisation. It is a vicious circle where hospitals will inevitably have to drop unprofitable services in order to survive while simultaneously people will be pushed further every day to pay for basic services. Against a backdrop of thousands of job losses, angry nurses heckled Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt as she spoke at the Royal College of Nursing conference in Bournemouth at the end of April.

The worst affected hospitals were those with the PFI agreements:

- University Hospital North Stafford with a £350 million PFI deal will lay off 1,000 staff;
- Worcestershire Acute hospitals struggling with a £95 million PFI will shed 720 staff and will need to save £20 million;
- County Durham and Darlington acute trust, paying off a £61 million PFI deal over 30 years will cut 700 jobs;
- Norfolk and Norwich hospitals will lose 450 staff.

To date, 13,000 job losses have been announced. Thousands more will take place as Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities are reor-

ganised. Inevitably waiting lists will lengthen and rationing of treatments will increase.

The Centre for International Public Health Policy (CIPHP) at the University of Edinburgh has reviewed a sample of eight PFI schemes and shown that the share of their annual revenue devoted to servicing capital costs rose from 4.5% to 16%. Two years after completion of the Norfolk and Norwich PFI project, Barclays, Serco, Innisfree and John Laing decided to refinance their joint working company Octagon. This allowed them to take an immediate gain of £115 million. They gave £34 million to the hospital trust and kept the rest, increasing their rate of return from 16% to 60%. According to the local MP, the trust would have to pay £257 million to terminate the contract early. To pay the PFI consortia, hospitals have had to cut beds by an average of 25% and staff by 15%.

It is not just PFI deals which are creating financial problems for the NHS, but the re-introduction of the internal market and 'payment by results' as well. This means that hospital trusts will be paid in arrears for any work they undertake. According to CIPHP head Allyson Pollock, the annual costs of operating the NHS market in England are approximately

£10-12 billion. That money is spent '...on invoicing, accounting for and auditing the accounts of millions of individual patients treatments, on making and monitoring thousands of contracts, on management consultants and financial "rescue" teams from the private sector at £2,000 plus per consultant per day, on marketing and advertising and on lawyers and communications, and so on and so on, as hundreds of competing NHS trusts each try to survive in the new marketplace'.

In the mid-1970s, the administrative costs of the NHS were approximately 5-6% of its total spending. Currently they are approaching 20%. This is inevitable for an increasingly privatised system. Even foundation hospitals are now feeling the pinch. Based on last year's budget, Homerton University Hospital Foundation Trust in East London needed £140 million for this year. Its forecast income is only £133 million. The £7 million deficit arises because the Department of Health has set the price increase for each treatment it undertakes at just over 1% when health inflation is running at 6.5%. The Homerton will lose 100 of its 2,000 posts, which is 5% of the workforce. Expect further market-induced chaos in the NHS over the coming months.

Hannah Callier

Education Notes



Gone and best forgotten – Ruth Kelly

Goodbye Kelly, hello Johnson

Ruth Kelly exits right and Alan Johnson becomes minister of state for education in Blair's springtime shuffle. He inherits a system that is increasingly fragmented, chaotic and privatised. The Labour government makes serious claims for its 'Every Child Matters' agenda but still the best guarantee of doing well in school is to be born wealthy. Recent research shows that only 5% of pupils in the country's top 200 schools are from poor homes compared with a national average of 15%. Currently 59% of better-off children gain five good GCSEs compared with 30% of poor pupils.

In the 'in' tray

Immediate business for Alan Johnson includes the following.

1. To steer an education bill through parliament that has more support from Tory than Labour MPs.
2. To make sense of the aforementioned bill and its contradictions. Schools must be independent, yet collaborate; local authorities must provide children's services but through privately-run institutions; parents must be empowered but are not allowed to be school governors.
3. He must get the sponsors to hand over the cash. Only four out of 27 schools in the flagship programme have so far received the full £2 million payment from the new 'owners' of the schools.
4. To get head teachers to apply for Trust School status. At present only 26 out of 26,000 schools have shown an interest in breaking away from local education authorities to be-

come independent, autonomous state schools.

Head teachers in interesting times

How exciting to be a head teacher at this moment. Des Smith was arrested in the early hours of Thursday 12 April on suspicion of being in breach of the 1925 Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act. Smith, head teacher and adviser to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) had boasted to an undercover reporter (see FRFI 189) that a £10 million sponsorship of a Trust or Academy school could result in a seat in the House of Lords. Others have been fingered: Sir Cyril Osborne the wealthy businessman chair of SSAT, Andrew Adonis, schools minister and David Miliband, previous schools minister. We are informed that police visits have been made to 10 Downing Street and investigations continue.

Meanwhile there were fireworks at the annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers in April. No government ministers or civil servants attended so the heads sent out the message, 'Please inform the chief puppet master our strings are no longer for the pulling'. They pledged to end league tables for 11-year-olds by guerrilla action, namely asking parents to keep the kids at home on the day of the SATS exam. They took a stand on learning methods, 'Cohorts of clones reciting synthetic phonics ignores the different ways children learn'. Watch out, Alan Johnson, the head teachers are really fed up.

Susan Davidson

No vote for Labour racists

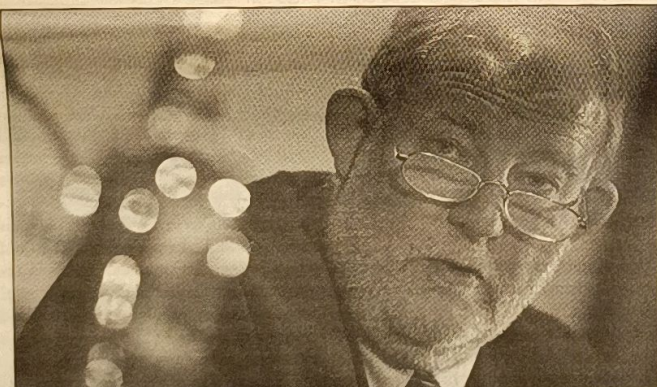
The last month saw the Labour government come closer to meltdown as the exposure of ministerial incompetence and incontinence coincided with local elections on 4 May. Predictably, after months of bad press, Labour did badly at the polls. Prime Minister Blair had to wring a few ministerial necks to drive the election results out of the headlines. Nevertheless, Labour's declining vote is dominating its plans. It is this that is the impulse for new anti-working class and racist policies as Blair bids to rebuild his lead in the opinion polls.

The earlier months of 2006 were bad for Labour. Senior minister Tessa Jowells had to ditch her husband to avoid being linked to his corruption. A quick fix was not available when the 'peerages for sale' scandal broke. Labour had, allegedly, been offering places in the House of Lords to entrepreneurs, property-dealers and super-market supremos who greased Labour's palms with silver (secret loans of millions of pounds to party funds). This is now the subject of a criminal investigation. Matters were set to go from bad to worse.

Two jags, two jugs, many shags...

Crisis in the NHS meant that Blairite smoothy Patricia Hewitt, Health Minister, was booed by the nation's favourites – the nurses. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott was ousted by his diary secretary as an office Lothario – she was forced to accept a six-figure sum from the press to tell all to 'save her reputation'. Worse still, Home Secretary Charles Clarke had to admit gross incompetence – not treating foreigners badly enough. Many criminals who had served their sentences had not been considered for the double punishment of deportation.

Many would think it an extraordinary run of bad luck that all this became public in the weeks before the



Charles Clarke, promoted to Home Secretary when the scandalous affairs of his predecessor Blunkett were exposed, received a short sharp shock after the local elections

election. Not so. After eight years in power, Labour ministers have dipped their heads so deeply into the trough of high living and narrow self-interest that they scarcely ever look up. They do not expect to be caught.

The scandals set the scene for the local elections – a manifestation of Britain's fitful democracy.

The chickens come home to roost

This year the local elections included the metropolitan and unitary councils in England, in other words, many big cities. Indeed, 40% of the contested seats were in London. The projected overall percentage of the vote at a general election from these elections would be: Conservatives 40; LibDems 27; Labour 26; Others 7. Labour was back in third place. Overall turnout of registered voters at elections has been dropping steadily since the Second World War and reached an all-time low for the last two general elections (below 60%). For local elections the turnout is even lower, but this time the average of 39% does not tell the full story. In some inner London boroughs – scenes of a tiresome contest between Labour and the LibDems about who would promise to issue the most

ASBOs, 'name and shame' the most working class children and put the most police on the streets – the turnout was 25%. In other areas where the votes of the labour aristocracy and middle classes were at issue, the turnout rose sharply to 50%.

In the North West, Manchester Evening News reported a 'storming victory' for Labour. The reality, however, is that the vast majority saw no reason to vote in another charade. In Manchester itself the turnout was 28%; Labour's 'storming victory' consisted of only 16.97% voting for Labour councillors. The story was the same across the North West, with the overwhelming majority of turnouts lower than the national average.

The general pattern is the poorer the community, the less likely it is to vote. Manchester is a prime example. According to the government's Indices of Deprivation 2004, Manchester is ranked as the second most deprived out of 354 local authorities in England. 34% of 16-24-year-olds in the city have no qualifications and only 33% are in full time work. Add to this the facts of Labour's attacks on working class youth – Manchester is the ASBO capital of Britain, with over

1,000 orders issued – it is little wonder that 72% of the city's population feels left out of local 'democracy', Labour has made sure of it.

Although Labour managed to hold on to the northern cities, it was trounced in the south. The Conservatives have a new leader who can match Blair, spin for spin, even if nothing distinguishes their politics one from the other. Like a shot of Viagra, Cameron restored Tory fortunes in the Home Counties where they gained 300 council seats from Labour. It was left to the smaller parties to inject some political 'fizz'.

In the London borough of Tower Hamlets the election was held against a backdrop of court actions and fraud allegations. Special Branch are investigating accusations of gerrymandering in seven wards. Echoing similar events in Birmingham, whole streets and blocks of flats found they couldn't vote because of postal vote fraud.

Respect, George Galloway's party, claimed success by gaining 16 seats nationally: 12 in Tower Hamlets and three in Newham in London and one in Sparkbrook, Birmingham, repeating its strategy of standing in predominantly Muslim areas on an anti-Iraq war platform. While Galloway has made it clear that Respect is a united front for anyone opposed to Tony Blair and New Labour, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) sees Respect as a socialist vanguard and none of the SWP leading members, including John Rees, who stood as Respect councillors won their seats.

Playing the race card

In Barking and Dagenham, where the turnout was 50%, the British National Party (BNP) gained 11 of the 13 seats

it contested, standing on an openly racist platform. However, it is not BNP success that is significant, but the response of the local Labour Party. Many blame the BNP's gains on local Labour MP Margaret Hodge who announced publicly during the election campaign that eight out of ten voters were considering voting BNP. 'My aim,' she explained after the election, 'was not to give the BNP publicity, but to raise awareness of the issues ...I think we must have a much more open position on the issue of race'. Margaret Hodge is not the sharpest pencil in the box, but what she was arguing was that Labour must address the concerns of white racists if it is to win their votes at the next general election.

It is this necessity to win back the votes of the labour aristocracy and the middle classes that Tony Blair has addressed in the weeks since the local election results. Clarke was sacked as Home Secretary and replaced by John Reid who has a remit, according to Blair, to deport foreign prisoners automatically at the end of their sentences, regardless of the situation in their country of origin. The Human Rights Act – which Labour introduced – has been deemed to be as foreign as the ex-prisoners, and Blair has promised to rewrite it to remove the rights. Core British values of racism, self-interest, complacency and greed will be taught in all schools. More attacks on asylum seekers are brewing. Blair's lady ministers Hewitt, Blears, Jowells have survived the cull to do more harm to the working class, and Prescott... well John, who still has his salary, houses and cars, is now so completely in the trough he cannot get out.

Louis Brehony, Carol Brickley, Jimmy German

NEPAL – the King bows to the people

ANDREW ALEXANDER

On the 18 May 2006 Nepalese MPs unanimously approved a plan to drastically curtail King Gyanendra's powers and remove his control over the army. The King has also lost his title of supreme commander-in-chief of the military. This is a result of over a month of violent mass protest against the King's autocratic rule.

In February 2005 Gyanendra staged a coup and dissolved parliament (see FRFI 184), making himself absolute ruler of the country. This curtailment of democracy and basic human rights lent weight to the already eight-year-long countryside rebellion led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) CPN(M). The toughening conditions for the Nepalese workers and the disenfranchisement of the bourgeoisie resulted in unification between the CPN(M) and the seven main political parties based in the towns and cities. Out of this 'seven party alliance' (SPA) came a two-pronged attack against the monarch that reached a crescendo in April 2006. A prolonged blockade of the capital Kathmandu by the Maoists combined with a three-week strike by workers and students. By mid-April open rioting and defiance against the King broke out onto the streets where protestors were brutally met by riot police. At least 15 protestors were reported killed in Kathmandu, and several others in other towns where there were also mass demonstrations.

With the Royal Palace under siege, Gyanendra reluctantly conceded that his time was running out. After a visit from the Indian Foreign Minister and pressure from imperialism, the King made a statement that he would be willing to sit down and negotiate a timetable for the possible recall of parliament. His 'offer' was swiftly rejected by the SPA and the demonstrations intensified. Two more days of violent unrest followed as the Nepalese people refused to be sold out or intimidated by riot police.

On 23 April over 100,000 people broke a 'shoot-on-sight' curfew to demonstrate against the King. On 24 April Gyanendra backed down and bowed to the pressure for the immediate restoration of parliament. This time the SPA accepted his offer, but the CPN(M) initially rejected the deal, believing that the momentum had been created to remove the head of state for good. However, on 27 April the CPN(M), reluctantly, declared a three-month ceasefire (it will not be handing over any arms) in order to sustain the links made with the political parties and further the political process as far as it can go. Parliament was reinstated on 29 April, with the Congress Party Leader, G P Koirala, heading the swearing in ceremony. On 18 May the government ceased to be known as His Majesty's Government.

Imperialism appeared to be against the King's absolute rule and its leaders criticised the brutal clampdown against protestors. However, they and the Indian government were more concerned about Gyanendra's dictatorship fuelling support for the revolt, than they were against killing Nepal's people.

At the beginning of the recent unrest the US Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Richard Boucher, met with the Royal Nepalese Army chief, Pyar Jung Thapa. On 3 April Boucher said, 'I think that the army is going to have a very important role to play. The army has to help defend the nation; it has to help defend the nation against threats. They also have to be able to implement the ceasefire, and carry it out. So I wanted to check with the army and see, first of all, that they were supporting the political process, that they were supporting the civilian leaders in Nepal, and second of

by India, which desperately tries to keep a grip on its own Maoist revolt. Though politically independent, Nepal is essentially an economic sub-state of India. It is in the context of imperialism and revolution in India and South Asia that the importance of the Nepalese struggle should be seen. That is why imperialism is showing such an interest in the world's third poorest country.

It may appear that the Nepalese people have been sold short by opportunist elements within the SPA and that the revolution is back to the stage before the King's coup. This is not necessarily so and there is cause for optimism. The whole revolutionary movement within Nepal has grown and matured and the recent uprisings have created a necessary closer unity between the working class and the peasantry. Any sympathy or support for the King has now vanished completely (except from loyal generals in the army) and the experience of struggle itself has raised the level of consciousness of the Nepalese people. Prachanda, leader of the Maoist People's Liberation Army, said the ceasefire was intended 'to express deep commitment to people's desire for peace'. Influential elements in the parliamentary forces may attempt to disentangle themselves from their alliance with the CPN(M) and



The Nepalese people refused to be sold out or to be intimidated by riot police

all talk to them about how they saw their job in the days ahead, and how, when a civilian leadership wanted us to, we could support them in the future.' This statement essentially sums up imperialism's position: defuse the revolution by going back to limited political reform and back up such reform with the brutality of an army which, according to Amnesty International, has been responsible for more disappearances than any other army in recent times.

The imperialists' position is shared

a possible split between the bourgeois parties and the revolutionaries may occur.

Whatever happens will be dictated by the will of the people. They have been forced to spill their blood to get the King to back down. Now the parties who claim to represent them will have to begin to deliver the goods or the newly awakened Nepalese people will take to the streets again – not just against the King, but against all those who seek to keep them in poverty.

Imperialists move to attack Iran



Iranian President: 'We intend to continue our activity... until we manage industrial-scale production of nuclear fuel for our atomic power stations.'

YEHYA AYESH

Britain, the US and Israel have continued to intensify their pressure on Iran. Not content with trying to install a puppet regime in Iraq and undermine and isolate the democratically-elected government in Palestine, the imperialists are also planning an attack on Iran.

In an obvious mockery of their insistence that they want a diplomatic rather than a military solution to the so-called Iranian nuclear crisis, Britain and the US have taken part in a war game that simulates an invasion of Iran. The war game, codenamed Hotspur 2004, took place at the US base of Fort Belvoir in Virginia in July 2004. The disclosure of Britain's participation coincided with a US report that the White House was contemplating a tactical nuclear strike and Tehran defying the United Nations Security Council.

The website of the MoD's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, which helped run the war game, described it as the main analytical event of the year for the UK-US Future Land Operations Interoperability Study, whose purpose is to ensure that both armies work well together. The study was extremely well received on both sides of the Atlantic. Plans are being carried out by US Central Command which is responsible for the Middle East and central Asia area of operations, and by Strategic Command, which carries out long-range bombing and nuclear operations.

William Arkin, a former army intelligence officer who first reported on the contingency planning for a nuclear strike against Iran in *Washington Post Online*, said 'The United States military is really, really getting ready, building war plans and options, studying maps, shifting its thinking.'

In addition, *Jane's Defence Weekly* has reported that the US will conduct a high-explosives test in June this year at the U16B complex on the Nevada Test Site to determine how effectively a massive conventional bomb would perform against underground targets. Fortified and deeply buried targets are used to conceal and protect command-and-control facilities and store non-conventional weapons. Recent satellite imagery shows that Iran is defending its 16m-deep uranium enrichment facilities at Natanz from attack by burying them under 25m of dirt and concrete. Codenamed 'Divine Strike', the test will not involve a conventional bomb as such, but will detonate a vast pile (amounting to 700 tonnes) of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil (ANFO) with 136 kg of C-4 explosive – the US equivalent of Semtex – as the initiator. As part of a series conducted by the Defence Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), the explosion will be equivalent to more than half a kiloton or 500 tonnes of TNT, the largest conventional explosion to date.

Although Iran is at least five years away from developing a nuclear bomb (some experts put the estimate at ten years), the imperialists are also engaged in a fierce propaganda war similar to the one it conducted against Iraq in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion. The US and Britain would like us to believe that Iran is an evil regime, which supports terrorism and which, with access to Weapons of Mass Destruction, would not hesitate to wipe out the so-called 'free world'.

Iran has every right to develop its own nuclear energy programme, but this right is an irrelevance to imperialism. The US, Britain and France have been keen to show how Iran is breaching UN agreements, especially the voluntary Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to force the UN to impose sanctions. In response Iran's parliament has recently threatened to force a withdrawal from the NPT. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, speaking at a summit of mainly Muslim states in Azerbaijan, said that certain bullies were insolently trying to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries: 'We intend to continue our activity... until we manage industrial-scale production of nuclear fuel for our atomic power stations.'

The Iranian parliament statement came in a letter to the UN a day before key UN members discussed a tough draft resolution on the issue. Both Russia and China oppose the draft, which could lead to sanctions or even military action if Iran does not comply.

An imperialist attack on Iran would be another act of terror and criminal aggression, which will cost tens of thousands of innocent lives and will have devastating consequences not only for the region but also for the world. We need to unite with the Iranian people and mobilise our movement now to oppose any sanctions or attacks on Iran.

Turkish state attacks Kurdish freedom fighters

PIRO GABAR

First, it was Winston Churchill in 1924, then it was Saddam Hussein in 1988, and most recently it has been Turkey in 2006 that used chemical weapons on the Kurdish people. Unlike Saddam Hussein, the Turkish Republic has yet to be punished and has not been condemned by the West for possessing 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' or using them against Kurdish freedom fighters.

The Turkish army staged an operation against the Kurdish guerrillas in Northern Kurdistan between 24 and 26 March 2006. On the last day of the operation 14 guerrillas were massacred with chemical weapons after the army had failed to eliminate them using conventional weapons. This has in fact been the pattern since 1992: the Turkish army has intermittently utilised chemical weapons against members of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) when it fails to stop their advance by conventional methods.

In an attempt to cover up this atrocity, the Turkish state approved legislation overnight that enabled the army to bury the guerrillas in the rural spot where they were killed. However, six of them were citizens of Syria, Iran and Iraq, and their bodies were not handed over to the guerrillas' families in order to ensure that they

were not subjected to an independent post-mortem in another country. This was all done by the pro-Islamic government even though Islamic traditions and rules order otherwise.

Kurdish youth were not prepared to put up with yet another crime against humanity, and Serhildan (uprising) took place across Kurdistan, especially in Amed where over 100,000 people chanted slogans in support of their martyrs and their leader Abdullah Ocalan.

A total of 16 people, including four small boys and one journalist, were shot dead when security forces opened fire and used tear gas to disperse the crowds, who attacked the police with Molotov

cocktails, set fire to banks and vandalised public buildings and shops.

As a consequence of this uprising, more than 500 people were injured and more than 1,000 people gaoled. Eighty minors aged between 12 and 18 were among those arrested and charged by the state. They face prison sentences of up to 24 years.

In response to these developments, the Turkish army has deployed 240,000 troops in Kurdistan in order to prevent PKK guerrillas entering Turkey from Iraqi Kurdistan. On top of this Iran and Turkey are jointly attacking the guerrillas from either side by bombing their camps in Southern Kurdistan.

Iraq and Afghanistan

No progress and no way out for imperialists



Imperialism's latest hope to defeat the insurgency: the new Iraqi government

Visiting Iraq in April, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised the 'progress being made towards stability'. This was, of course, just another layer on the blanket of lies spread by the imperialist governments to camouflage the pit of devastation and carnage into which they have thrown Iraq. First there was the capture of Saddam Hussein in 2003, then the establishment of an interim Iraqi government in 2004, then the agreement on a new constitution and the elections of 2005; all were sold as signs that 'normality' was returning to Iraq. The Iraqi people do not agree. By the end of 2005, even before the upsurge in sectarian violence, less than half of them thought the country was heading in the right direction and over 80% of Iraqis wanted the imperialist forces out of their country. The new puppet government announced on 20 May does not change anything. **JIM CRAVEN** reports.

Situation critical

A report from the US embassy in Iraq issued on 10 April comes a little closer to the truth. It admitted that in six of the 18 Iraqi provinces the security situation was 'serious' and in one it was 'critical'. 'Crime, intimidation, assassination and smuggling' were 'commonplace and getting worse'. Only six provinces were considered stable with local government operating in five of them, and economic development taking place in three.

Rice's visit to Iraq, along with a visit from Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld, was to meet Jawad Al Maliki, new Prime Minister designate of the Iraqi puppet government. Having seen their own favourite for the post, Iyad Allawi, overwhelmingly rejected, the imperialists put pressure on the Shia majority in the new parliament to replace their candidate, standing Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Jafari. The new man is considered more likely to create the sort of united Iraqi government the imperialists would prefer, tying in some of the Sunni groups in order to weaken the resistance to occupation. On 25 April Al Maliki boasted that he would create a cabinet within two weeks and would bring the maverick Interior Ministry, responsible for many of the attacks on the Sunni population, under the control of the Defence Ministry. It took nearly a month to set up a government and, as we go to press, there is no agreement on who should head the Interior and Defence Ministries. The new puppet government will only be the government of the Green Zone, the heavily fortified reserve within Baghdad from which imperialist officials and their Iraqi stooges rarely emerge. Iraqi ministers are so afraid of their own people that they often do not even visit their ministries but have documents sent to them within the Green Zone. Government officials outside the zone are more committed to their religious or local leaders than central government.

Slaughter and misery

In the real world outside the air-conditioned cloisters of the Green Zone at least 100 people are being killed in Baghdad every day. Killings in Basra average one an hour. Iraq Body Count reports the verified number of Iraqi people killed since the start of the war at between 38,000 and 45,000. The number of unreported deaths would push the total much higher. Even Jack Straw, then Labour Foreign Secretary, was forced to admit there is 'a high level of slaughter in Iraq'. Over 70%



Burning the US flag

of Iraqis do not have regular access to safe, clean water. Unemployment remains around 40%. Electricity supplies average 10 hours a day, half the pre-war figure. Oil production has fallen by a third since the start of the war and revenue from oil exports fell by a third between September 2005 and January 2006 despite rising oil prices. A quarter of Iraqi children suffer chronic malnutrition. The Iraqi government is effectively bankrupt economically and politically. This is what Rice would have us believe is 'progress towards stability'.

Afghanistan

However, Rice managed to surpass this brazen deceit when she recently stated 'the transformation of Afghanistan is remarkable'. The truth is that 70% of the Afghan population suffer malnutrition and the incidence of malnutrition among Afghan children is the worst in the world after that of sub-Saharan Africa. Six million of the 25 million people in Afghanistan rely on food aid. One in seven babies dies before its first birthday. Life expectancy averages 42 years. At least 75% of the population is illiterate and very few girls receive any schooling at all. There is virtually no industry in Afghanistan and unemployment in Kabul stands at 70%. The government is largely reliant on aid. Only the opium industry flourishes, providing 90% of world heroin. There are four million Afghan refugees living in Iran and Pakistan and with two million Af-

ghanis uprooted in their own country, Afghanistan has the world's worst refugee problem.

The Afghan puppet president Hamid Karzai is powerless and has to be protected by 40-50 US-paid bodyguards. Half of the local security forces are involved in the drugs trade. Warlords and ex-Taliban fighters form the majority of the Afghan parliament. Large areas of the country are again under Taliban control. CIA agents have used Pakistani intermediaries to offer Taliban leader Mullah Omar an amnesty. So much for Bush's promise, 'We shall never bargain with terrorists.'

Imperialists encourage sectarian attacks

On 7 April 79 Iraqis were killed and over 160 injured by three bomb blasts at the Shia Buratha mosque in Baghdad. The previous day 13 were killed at the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf. The US military claim 1,313 people were killed in the upsurge of sectarian violence in March. The true figure is probably at least twice as high since many victims are buried or thrown into rivers. More than 100,000 Iraqis have fled their homes because of the violence. The imperialists are content to allow sectarian hostilities since they divert attacks from the occupying forces and help prevent the development of a united resistance movement. There is considerable evidence that the occupying forces have provoked sectarian violence. As reported previously in FRFI, the occupying

forces have often stood aside and allowed sectarian attacks to proceed and on at least two occasions British troops have been discovered planting bombs near holy shrines. Now there are reports from Syrian security services that US forces have used Iraqi police recruits as unwitting stooges to detonate car bombs.

It was the British Army which first invited the Shia militias, responsible for many of the attacks on the Sunni population, to join the Iraqi security forces. Supporters of the Badr militia now control the powerful Iraqi Interior Ministry, which has more men under arms than the Defence Ministry. Whilst they have been happy to see the Shia militias attack Sunni supporters of the resistance, the imperialists are losing control. At the beginning of April, Bayan Jabr, the Interior Minister, refused to deploy Iraqi police recruits trained by the US/UK Civilian Police Assistance Training Team. This led Rice to insist, 'One of the first things... is that there is going to be a reining in of the militias... It's got to be one of the highest priorities'. Emphasising the essence of bourgeois states she went on, 'You have to have the state with a monopoly on power.' The imperialists are aware that while the Shia leaders have mostly gone along with the political process, there is increasing irritation with US and British interference. It would only take a word from some of those leaders for the militias and Shia population to turn their weapons against the occupation.

British troops under siege

Indeed, the Mehdi militia of Shia leader Moqtada al Sadr has continued to attack the occupying forces. Moqtada claimed it was his fighters who brought down a British helicopter in Basra at the beginning of May, killing five of the British forces. British troops who went to the scene were involved in a gun battle with resistance fighters and the local population attacked them with rocks and petrol bombs shouting, 'We are all Moqtada's fighters.' Such is the seething hostility to British troops in Basra province that all but essential military flights have been stopped, road movements have been restricted to avoid roadside bombs and troops only leave their heavily fortified base when absolutely necessary.

The average number of resistance attacks on the occupying forces increased from eight per day shortly after the invasion to 75 per day at the beginning of this year. By mid-May 112 British and 2,400 US troops had been killed, with seven British and 44 US deaths in the first half of May. 16,000 US troops have been injured. The US organisation, Veterans' Affairs said that up to a third of 40,000 US troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffered mental health problems.

Imperialist priority - military power

With little prospect of subduing the resistance or achieving a political settlement in Iraq some sections of the US ruling class favour abandoning any attempt to achieve stability and

reconstruction. Most of the \$28.9 billion the US programmed for reconstruction and security has been used; much of it squandered by corruption. The US has not allocated any further aid. The US ruling class will, however, expect to achieve its main priority for the invasion. This was not simply access to Iraqi oil but military domination of the region as part of its wider global strategy to deter potential competitors to US hegemony such as the EU, Russia and China. The US is establishing four huge military bases in Iraq. These will form part of the chain of US bases stretching from the Balkans, through Central Asia and Afghanistan and down into the Gulf states. To support the Iraqi bases the US government is building a huge new embassy in the Green Zone, the largest of its kind in the world. It will be the size of Vatican City with the population of a small town and will be totally self-sufficient for power and water and completely independent of local Iraqi utilities.

In Afghanistan, the imperialists never made any serious attempt at reconstruction. But there too they are determined to secure their military fortress. Over 5,000 British troops and government personnel are now established in the south of Afghanistan at what will be the biggest British military base since the Second World War. In addition, the NATO Rapid Reaction Corps started operations from Kabul at the beginning of May. This includes 14,000 US troops. The whole operation will be under the command of British General David Richards, the first time since the Second World War that US troops have been under British command.

Ruling class divided

The divisions within the US ruling class created by the problems in the Middle East surfaced again during the spring. Former US commander in the Middle East, General Anthony Zinni, called the US bases in Iraq a 'stupid' provocation to Iran and said that 'the US had wasted three years in Iraq'. Other leading members of the US military attacked the government and in particular Donald Rumsfeld. Bush's performance rating on Iraq among the US population remains around its all time low of 37%, while 54% do not trust him to make the right decision on Iran.

A report from the Congressional Research Service at the end of April said the war on Iraq will have cost \$320 billion by the end of the 2006 financial year, and the war on Afghanistan a further \$89 billion. Even with an immediate reduction of operations they would cost a further \$371 billion over the next ten years. Joseph Stiglitz, the economics Nobel laureate, estimated the final total cost of the Iraq war, including such hidden costs as long-term health care, would be \$2 trillion. In the run-up to the war Rumsfeld had said the total would be less than \$51 billion. The average cost for each member of the US armed forces in Iraq is approximately \$350,000 a year - some 30 times the wage of a US worker on the minimum wage. Such are the priorities of imperialism. ■

Imperialism unrestrained: starving the Palestinians into submission

Imperialism is intent on punishing the Palestinian people for their audacity in democratically electing a Hamas government, even if it means starving them into submission. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

The Quartet of the US, EU, UN and Russia is leading the imperialist campaign of economic sanctions. On 9 May, the World Bank reported to the Quartet that its estimates that withholding aid would raise poverty levels amongst the Palestinian people to 67% and unemployment to 40% were now too low. It said that 'if the Palestinian Authority (PA) remains unpaid or minimally paid for several months...the ensuing institutional damage may be irreversible and could lead to a situation in which the West Bank and Gaza become ungovernable'. The Egyptian, Jordanian and Saudi Foreign Ministers, who were at the meeting, said that the political outcome of such a collapse would not be fresh elections with a defeat for Hamas but a 'civil war'.

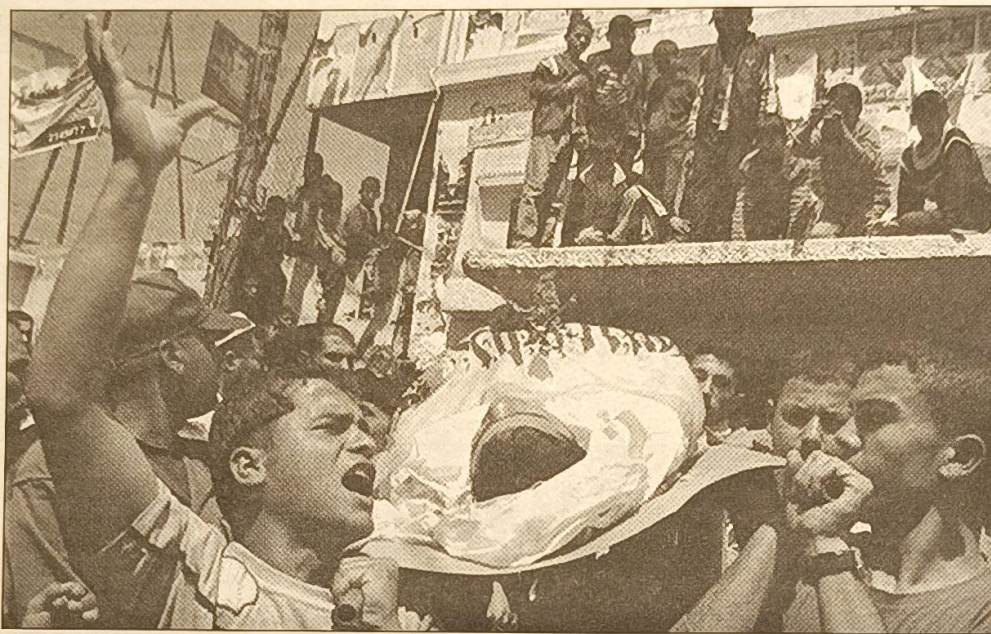
The Quartet responded by agreeing to channel funds via the office of PA President Mahmoud Abbas in an effort to restore his political position and to alleviate some of the worst effects of its policies. It is intent on keeping up the pressure on Hamas in an effort to get the Palestinian government to capitulate to the Zionists. Abbas is a willing partner in this game, joining the imperialists in demanding that Hamas recognise Israel and stand by the previous agreements made between Fatah and the Zionists. Abbas is also being encouraged to develop the role of the 2,000-strong Presidential Guard as a military counterweight to the security forces under the control of the Hamas Interior Ministry. It is now reported that he has bypassed the PA and deployed 150 of the Guard to supervise the Rafah border crossing.

PA employees had still not received their March or April wages by mid-May, even though Hamas had raised enough money and had announced that it had guarantees to cover subsequent months with funds deposited in the Arab League Bank. However, the US had stopped the transfer of funds to the PA and had also prevented the bank from paying wages directly into the accounts of individual PA employees.

The Zionists have also imposed their own economic sanctions. As soon as the newly-elected Palestinian Legislative Council held its first post-election meeting, Israel stopped the payment of the customs duties it collects on behalf of the PA and which are used primarily to pay the wages of

'Around 55,000 refugee families in Gaza rely on a PA salary as their sole income. Unpaid for two months, families are turning in ever-larger numbers to over-stretched UNRWA relief centres for assistance.'

the 165,000 PA employees.* Then, on 29 March, when the new Hamas cabinet officially took over the running of the PA, both the US and Canada announced they were cutting off aid. Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar condemned the US's hypocrisy in continuing to give the Zionists '\$3 billion annually to expand settlements and to



Gaza: during the month of April, in the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli occupation forces killed at least 37 Palestinians, including six children.

confiscate our rights and our land'. The next day the Quartet demanded that the Hamas government 'commit to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations' stating that 'future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to [these] principles'. On 10 April EU Foreign Ministers also formally agreed to cease financial aid.

On 5 May John Ging, director of operations for UNRWA in Gaza, spelled out the consequences: 'two weeks ago we were counting down to a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, today that crisis is on our doorstep...there are now shortages of medical supplies in the public hospitals in the Gaza Strip and UNRWA has seen a large increase in the number of refugees coming to its centres seeking food aid and cash assistance'.

Medical shortages now mean that kidney patients on dialysis have had their sessions cut from three times to twice a day; this has caused the death of at least four patients, while cancer patients are now no longer able to receive chemotherapy treatment.

Around 55,000 refugee families in Gaza rely on a PA salary as their sole income. Unpaid for two months, families are turning in ever-larger numbers to over-stretched UNRWA relief centres for assistance. Ging also reported that UNRWA is having to pay \$78,000 a month in surcharges for empty food containers unable to leave Gaza because Israel has closed the Karni border crossing, the major route for food supplies into Gaza and for Palestinian exports of fruit produce.

Imperialism's ruthless and unrestrained assault on the Palestinian people is virtually unreported. It is a war led by the rich on the poor, on a people denied every basic right. We must mobilise in defence of the courageous stand taken by the Palestinian people and to expose the support the British government has given to the Zionists.

Cuban and Venezuelan support for the Palestinian people

High level government delegations from Cuba and Venezuela attended the Third International Conference on Al Quds and Support for the Rights of the Palestinian People between 14 and 16 April in Tehran. Hugo Chavez invited Hamas to visit Venezuela. The Cuban delegation was led by the President of the National Assembly of People's Power, Ricardo Alarcon, and included Kenia Serrano Puig who came to Britain in 2002 on a Rock around the Blockade national speaking tour.

Interviewed by the Iranian National News Agency, Kenia called for the right of return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland. She said Palestinians should be supported in the defence of their rights not only by Muslims but by the international

community as well. 'We have to be mobilised to help the Palestinians and tell the truth regarding their plight', she said.

Cuba has a long and consistent record of support for the Palestinian people; it severed all diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973 and established diplomatic relations with the PLO in 1974. In April 2002, in the middle of Israel's offensive against the West Bank, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following statement: 'Cuba reiterates its full support for the heroic struggle of the Arab peoples, especially the Palestinians, against Israeli occupation and aggression and its solidarity with their resistance and rebellion.' That is a position which Cuba consistently expresses in all world bodies it has access to.

Israeli terror

Israel's economic blockade of Gaza has been accompanied by a daily artillery bombardment of its northern part. On 14 May the Israeli army announced that it had fired 5,100 shells into this area since 31 March. The Zionists justify the continued barrage as a response to the firing of rockets by the Palestinian Resistance from Gaza into Israel and claim they do not target civilians. In reality the firing of the shells is indiscriminate, their aim is to terrify and intimidate the civilian population and to undermine support for the resistance:

- On 10 April a nine-year-old girl was killed and 13 of her family were injured when a tank shell slammed into their home.
- A week later, a 16-year-old boy was killed when a tank shell landed in a playground; four of his friends were also injured.
- On 2 May two PA security officers

were killed when a tank shell landed on the building they were posted to.

- On 6 May a shell landed near the home of a farmer, killing him and injuring three others.
- The next day, another farmer in the same area was killed by the continuing shelling.

In April, in the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli occupation forces killed at least 37 Palestinians, including six children. 19 were killed in the week 4-10 April alone. In stark contrast to the imperialist media outcry over the Palestinian suicide bombing on 17 April which killed nine Israelis there was hardly any reporting, let alone condemnation, of the continuing Israeli terror.

On 4 May the new Israeli government took up office. The main parties in the coalition are Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima and Defence Minister Amir Peretz's Labour Party. One of Peretz's first acts was to

approve an air attack on a centre of the Popular Resistance Committees in the south of Gaza which killed five militants. On 14 May Israeli forces raided areas around Jenin killing six Palestinians and wounding 16, including seven children. The Israeli Defence Minister's office said 'Peretz personally approved the operation...and closely followed its execution'. Meanwhile Olmert reiterated his policy of redrawing Israel's borders by 2010, declaring in his opening speech to the Knesset that:

'The continuation of the scattered settlements throughout the West Bank creates an inseparable mix of populations that will threaten the existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish state...The Jewish settlement movement and its main blocks will be forever an inseparable part of the state of Israel'.

To meet his timetable he will need to complete the illegal Apartheid Wall and accelerate the seizure of Palestinian lands in the Jordan valley. The Israeli military was reported as saying that 42% of the Wall has now been built and their aim is to construct the rest within one year. There will be some withdrawal of settler outposts but only from those areas which will form part of the cantons or bantustans which will be left for the Palestinians. These, like Gaza, will remain at the mercy of the Zionists.

*STOP PRESS: As we go to press, Israel has grudgingly released a small proportion of this stolen money - £6 million.

Jack Straw: a good friend of Israel

FRFI sheds no tears at Jack Straw's dismissal from the Foreign Office. At every point he took the side of Zionists, condemning Palestinian resistance as 'terror' and ignoring the illegal character of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Until his departure he was in the forefront of the campaign to isolate the new Hamas government. It was Straw who alerted the Israelis to the fact that Britain was withdrawing its monitors from Jericho prison, giving them the green light to attack the prison and seize PFLP leader Ahmed Sa'adat and his comrades. Straw not only helped intensify repression against the Palestinians but also helped cover up the Israeli murder of three British citizens in Palestine:

• Ian Hook, who worked for the UN and was in charge of a house reconstruction programme in Jenin, was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers as he sat in his office in 2002. In December 2005 an inquest jury ruled he had been unlawfully killed, the victim of a 'deliberate killing'.

• Tom Hurdall, a 22-year-old student, who was shot in the head in April 2003 by an Israeli soldier in Rafah while trying to lead Palestinian children to safety, and who died a year later. In April an inquest jury found that he had been unlawfully killed and deliberately shot by the Israeli soldier 'with the intention of killing him.'

• Film maker James Miller who was shot and killed in Rafah in May 2003. In April 2006 an inquest jury found that he had been unlawfully killed. The coroner who heard the cases of both James Miller and Tom Hurdall announced that he would write to the Attorney General asking him to examine possible war crimes prosecutions of Israeli military commanders.

Straw and the Labour government have taken every step possible to prevent justice for the three families involved. James Miller's father, speaking of the British government, said: 'They've been totally supine and ineffective. At one stage they were as obstructive as the Israelis'.

Racism in Israel

20% of the population of Israel are Palestinians; there are about one million in all. In March 2006 a poll for the Centre for the Struggle Against Racism, founded by Arab-Israeli academics, revealed that more than two-thirds of Jews would refuse to live in the same building as an Arab. Nearly 50% would not allow an Arab in their home and 41% want segregation of entertainment facilities. The survey also found 40% of Israel's Jews believe 'the state needs to support the emigration of Arab citizens', that 63% of Jewish Israelis consider their country's Arab citizens a 'security and demographic threat to the state' and that 34% agreed with the statement that 'Arab culture is inferior to Israeli culture'. In other words, a substantial minority of Israelis would support a policy of 'transfer' or ethnic cleansing, and a majority are explicitly racist towards the Palestinian population. BARNABY MITCHEL reports.

During the recent elections to the Knesset [Israeli parliament], the Yisrael Beiteinu party advocated redrawing the border to place about 500,000 Israeli Palestinians inside a Palestinian state. Theodore Herzl, considered the father of Zionism, talked about 'spiriting' the native Palestinians out and across the border. Discussion of 'transfer' was common among the Zionist leadership in Palestine in the 1930s. In the Knesset, the idea of 'transferring' the Palestinian population by encouraging them to leave Israel is now openly debated and prominent politicians have argued for loyalty oaths and related schemes to revoke the Palestinians' status as citizens. The racism among the Jewish population against Palestinians is flagrant and open. Shouts of 'Death to the Arabs' are frequently heard at football matches when Arab and Jewish teams play in Jewish areas.

Israel: founded on ethnic cleansing

The Israeli state was founded in 1948 to the accompaniment of the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians who fled their homes in terror at the series of massacres such as Deir Yassin. From that date until 1966, Palestinians within the pre-1967 borders lived under formal military rule and were subject to a different set of laws to the Jewish population. The Defence Regulations of 1945 were introduced by the British colonial administration and inherited by the Zionists. Under these laws the army could uproot entire communities and either transfer or deport them, imprison people without trial, create special security and closed military zones, restrict Palestinian freedom of movement and expel them from their native land. The only redress for Palestinians, through a military court, was pointless. After this military rule was lifted, a new set of discriminatory laws and practices was created and the Palestinians resident in Israel experienced little social, political or economic advancement.

From the outset the Zionists created a racist myth that Israel was 'a land without people for a people without land.' Former Prime Minister Golda Meir declared that there was no such thing as a Palestinian people. Excluding the native population, by any means necessary, was essential for the realisation of the Zionist project. Racism is therefore fundamental to the colonial settler mentality in order to justify the stealing of the land of a native people. Zionist settlers share a similar racist viewpoint to British colonialists during the British Empire or Boer settlers in South Africa, primarily that they are bringing a higher civilisation to the indigenous population.

A 'State of the Jewish people'

Israel is defined as the State of the Jewish people. It is not a state for all its citizens or of all its nationalities; non-Jews are excluded from the Jewish state. It is built on fundamentally racist principles and a structure of sys-

tematic racism and discrimination against its Palestinian citizens, who make up 20% of the population. Zionist double-speak constantly emphasises the democratic nature of Israel whilst simultaneously discriminating against non-Jews. Whilst Palestinians may have individual citizen's rights, these are always circumscribed or undermined by an absence of collective rights which exist only for Jews. Palestinians in Israel are defined as an ethnic and religious minority, not as a national or indigenous minority. Calling them Arab Israelis is an expression of this. The

which in Israel is defined on the basis of religion. The Israeli Supreme Court has dismissed virtually all cases which dealt with equal rights for Arab citizens. One example of such discriminatory laws is the Nationality and Entry into Israel law, enacted on 31 July 2003. This law prohibits the granting of any residency or citizenship to Palestinians from the 1967 Occupied Territories who marry Israeli citizens. It applies only to Palestinian spouses and is based on their national origins. As a result hundreds of families are separated. On 15 May 2006 the Israeli Supreme Court



'The Israeli state was founded in 1948 to the accompaniment of the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians who fled their homes in terror at the series of massacres such as Deir Yassin'

issue of definition is crucial since it underpins the limits to economic, social and cultural rights given to the minority. In 1998 the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reported that Israel's 'excessive emphasis upon the State as a "Jewish state" encourages discrimination and accords a second-class status to its non-Jewish citizens'. Yet this is essential to sustaining a Jewish majority.

Under Israeli law, Jews from anywhere in the world have the right to settle in Israel and automatically receive full citizenship, regardless of their nationality. Palestinian refugees who were driven from their land in 1948 by Israeli terror do not have the right to return to their homes inside Israel, even those who are internal refugees. Every Israeli citizen carries an ID card which states whether a person is Jewish or an Arab. This definition is now in the form of a code. In 1975 the UN passed General Assembly Resolution 3379 which determined that, 'Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination'. In 1991, under huge pressure from the US, the UN revoked this resolution.

According to Adalah, an Arab rights organisation, today there are at least 20 laws that specifically provide unequal rights and obligations based on what the Israelis call nationality,

upheld this law against petitions submitted by Adalah and other human rights organisations. This ruling contravenes international human rights treaties to which Israel is a signatory.

Under a National Insurance Law, Israel voted for a 25% cut in child allowance for families without a member serving in the army. 90% of Arabs do not serve in the Israeli army. In all, Arab families were slapped with a 37% cut in child allowances.

The Incitement Law forbids Arabs in Israel from supporting or sympathising with the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories who are resisting the Israeli occupation. Under this law, anyone who supports acts of violence or terror against Israel will be sentenced to five years in prison. Anyone caught with material considered hostile to Israel can be sentenced to one year in prison. The law undermines freedom of speech and any attempt by Israeli citizens to challenge the government's military occupation of the Palestinian territories.

It was not until 1980 that Palestinians in Israel were allowed to form their own political parties. Under Israeli law, any person or party that directly or indirectly denies that Israel is a democratic Jewish state and a state for the Jews will be barred from running for the Knesset.



Palestinians demonstrate at the Al Ram checkpoint

92% of the land in the state of Israel is 'held in perpetual trust for the Jewish people'. Article 3 of the constitution of the Jewish Agency provides that: 'Land is to be acquired as Jewish property and subject to the provisions of article 10 of this agreement, the title to the lands acquired is to be taken in the name of the Jewish National Fund, to the end that the same shall be held as the inalienable property of the

According to the Israel National Insurance Institute 2004 annual survey, 49.9% of Arab Israeli families live below the poverty line, compared with 20% of Jewish families; 60% of Arab children live below the poverty line. This is due primarily to high unemployment among the Arab population. While 87% of Jewish men aged between 45-54 are employed, only 36% of Arabs have work. In the 55-64 age group, 70% of Jewish men are employed compared with 40% of Arab men. In the female workforce, 54.6% of Jewish women are employed, compared to 23.4% of Arab women. More than half of the employed Arabs work in construction (37.2%) or as unskilled labourers (14.7%) compared with a fifth of employed Jews who work in these sectors. The academic, professional and management fields, all of which require more extensive higher education, employ some 20% of working Arabs compared with 38% of working Jews. Only 5% of civil servants are Arabs and in the Foreign and Finance Ministries there are fewer than a dozen Arabs employed.

There are also huge disparities in educational spending. The state does not allocate 20% of its budget to Arab sectors, in proportion to the population. There are no Arab citizens in the organisations that draw up the education ministry policies and members of Israel's security organisation (Shin Bet) sit on teacher selection boards. The curriculum in the Arab schools emphasises Jewish and Zionist values and denies and ignores Palestinian culture, history and literature. In 2002, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, only 3.2% of Arab two-year-olds could get a place at nursery compared with 39.7% of their Jewish peers.

The exclusion of non-Jews is therefore built into the structure of Israeli society. Created by imperialism, Israel still relies on material backing from the US to the tune of \$3 billion a year in financial support. Total US aid to Israel is approximately one-third of the US foreign aid budget, even though Israel comprises just 0.001% of the world's population. With a per capita income of about \$14,000, Israel ranks as the sixteenth wealthiest country in the world; Israelis enjoy a higher per capita income than the people of oil-rich Saudi Arabia. In the West Bank settlers enjoy swimming pools and water-intensive agriculture while Palestinians are forced to queue for contaminated water. The Israeli economy alone could not sustain this standard of living, essential for continued Jewish immigration from the imperialist world. Hence the continuing need for imperialist aid, and the simultaneous exclusion of non-Jews from these material benefits. It is therefore Israel's dependent relationship with imperialism which underlies its fundamentally racist character.

UNITED STATES

'The US economy, superficially healthy, keeps itself afloat through ballooning debt and relentless attacks on the workers.'

continued from page 1

every nationality. The youth were dragged in, awakened from the anaesthetic nihilism of Gangsta culture, angered that their parents are threatened with arrest and deportation. In Los Angeles, 72,000 school students banded off; in San Francisco, more than 12,000 – 20% of the public school population.

These are the largest protest marches in United States' history ever – not the US labour struggles in the 1930s, not even the civil rights movement in the 1960s, nor the anti-war movement in the 1970s were this big. The enormous significance – of this development absolutely must not be underestimated. When the post-capitalist histories of this period come to be written, this will be remembered as the first hammer-blow within North America in the 21st century, which will nail shut the coffin of US imperialism.

We are entering what will be an extraordinary period in the politics and history of US imperialism. The US economy, superficially healthy, keeps itself afloat through ballooning debt and relentless attacks on the workers. Internationally, it faces unprecedented strategic challenges from the rival proto-imperialism of Chinese capitalism as well as European imperialism. Dependent on the Middle East for its oil, riveted to the Zionist regime and the archaic and reactionary regime in Saudi Arabia, US imperialism is forced to face directly the hostility of the masses in the Iraqi insurgency and the Palestinian Intifada. Internally, the US ruling class is deeply riven: the most recent example is the extraordinary spectacle of retired generals speaking out against, and trying to restrain, an increasingly rabid and out-of-control civilian administration. And now the most oppressed section of the working class has stood up and dusted itself off. Thoroughly proletarian, instinctively internationalist (for Latinos, 'the Americas' stretch from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego), with the vivid and familiar examples of the Cuban, Venezuelan and Bolivian anti-imperialism to hand, declared by imperialism to have no country, these workers have nothing to lose but their chains. The deepening of these contradictions – in US capitalism, in its imperialism, in the ruling class's ability to rule and in the activity of the masses – is what leads to a revolutionary situation – not immediately, maybe not for years, but inevitably and irreversibly.

The highest point in struggle previously reached in the US in recent years was by the anti-war movement during the San Francisco protests in March 2003 (see FRFI 172). Although it forcefully showed the world that there was principled opposition within the US to the Iraq war, and although that movement included sections of advanced workers – native and immigrant, it failed to build the truly deep connection needed with the broad masses of the proletariat, and exhausted itself, inflicting only pinpricks and bruises on US imperialism.

A year ago, analysing the reasons behind the Bush election victory of 2004, we wrote that it was a 'futile past reliance on a declining pro-imperialist labour aristocracy that brought us to where we are today... Real change requires finding a section or sections of the US working class,

uncompromised by, and uncompromising with, imperialism' (FRFI 184). Well, here it is.

Where did this come from?

Latino workers have been struggling to organize and defend themselves for decades. Back in the 1960s the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), led by the legendary Cesar Chavez, waged a heroic struggle among the ruthlessly exploited Latino farm workers in California's vast and fertile Central Valley. As US imperialism ravaged and brutalized Latin America throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it forced working people to emigrate through the porous US-Mexican border in search of work. Now there are more than 40 million Latinos in the US. Half of all births in the US are to Latinos. By 2050, whites will be a minority in the US as they already are in California.

This movement is not simply an immigrant movement, but a workers' movement as well. Forced into the least-skilled, poorest paid, most exploitative jobs, it was inevitable that these workers would organize themselves. Starting in the early 1990s, they have begun to rebuild the rotten, crumbling US trade union movement from the ground up, beginning with the massive Los Angeles hotel workers' strikes in 1992 and strikes in the fashion sweatshops there. These trem-

a rank-and-file rebellion that resulted in general strikes in Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco the previous year.

The current split, by contrast, comes amid the lowest ebb in strike activity since the late 1940s.'

(Socialist Worker, 5 August, 2005)

The laughable absurdity of this remark is self-evident when measured against the massive working-class self-activity – directly political activity – represented by *Las Megamarchas*. This was not a split imposed upon the workers' movement by a fractious bureaucracy: it was a split forced upon the bureaucracy by the objective development of the division, created by imperialism, within the working class.

The 'old' section of the AFL-CIO represents the relatively privileged section of US workers in declining industries – for example, autos and steel – earning \$30-\$50 per hour, fighting to hang onto their disappearing jobs and the attendant benefits of health insurance and retirement plans. Largely Anglo and white, that section is conducting a defensive struggle to preserve its privileged position. It has the money needed to sit and play at the Congressional political table: it can afford lobbyists, can buy influence and sway elections through the purse strings.



ors toppled the old AFL-CIO leadership in 1995 when the 'Committee for Change' threw out pro-imperialist Lane Kirkland and his clique. These advances have steadily continued. In 2003 the leaders of five unions with major immigrant membership – the 'New Unity Partnership' – announced the retirement, in 2005, of Kirkland's successor, John Sweeney. At the 2005 AFL-CIO convention, these unions led a split away from the old trade union movement, under the banner 'Change To Win'. They include the SEIU (Service Employees International), UNITE-HERE (textile, hotel and restaurant employees), the Carpenters' (construction workers), the Laborers' International Union, and the UFW. This split bewildered the US Left who either decried the 'disunity' or dismissed it as just a manoeuvre by union bureaucrats.

According to the International Socialist Organization (ISO), US equivalent of the British SWP:

'Some have likened the Change to Win breakaway to the militant Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s, which organized in the mass production industries. But ... [t]he CIO, after all, was launched by dissident AFL leaders in 1935 as a means to put themselves at the head of

The 'new' section of the union movement lives precariously on around \$10 per hour, rarely with any benefits, overwhelmingly drawn from immigrants, women and the black community.** Unlike the poorest sections of the working class in other imperialist countries, this section of the working class is near-destitute, living hand-to-mouth, with no health insurance or retirement plan to defend, no 'welfare state' to fall back on and has no choice but to wage an offensive campaign largely outside established bourgeois politics.

The union activists whose struggles changed the union movement are also, at the same time, community activists. When they leave work, they go home to communities where they have to fight drug-dealing, decaying public schools and environmental waste dumps. Police helicopters clatter overhead all night; children sleep on the floor hoping to avoid stray shots from the incessant nightly gunfire which pervades the ghettos. It was not the union leadership, but its activists who organized *Las Megamarchas*, uniting organized workers with the unorganized domestic workers and day-labourers. SEIU, UNITE-HERE and other CTW union banners filled the marches.



'These are the largest protest marches in United States' history ever – not the US labour struggles in the 1930s, not even the civil rights movement in the 1960s, nor the anti-war movement in the 1970s were this big.'

Where is this going?

None of this is to suggest that a fully conscious and united proletarian anti-imperialist movement has arrived overnight in the United States. The leadership and direction of this movement are still in play: religious leaders want to see it off the streets, in their churches, safely on its knees; union

democratic movements of the radical petit-bourgeoisie – against environmental degradation, to defend abortion rights, for peace, for example. But these are just currents in what must be a broad movement and can only be successful when joined with the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The petit-bourgeois self-styled 'left' occupies two extremes. One is crass economism, exemplified by the ISO, which cannot connect the class struggle with the struggle against imperialism, dismissing Cuba and the Venezuelan struggle. The other is Third Worldism, which celebrates the struggle against imperialism without being able to connect it with the struggle against capitalism inside the US and which sneeringly dismisses the US trade union movement. There are small sections that work consistently to unite the struggles against racism, imperialism, capitalism, and for socialism – such as Workers World Party and Party for Socialism and Liberation. They not only support important workers' struggles such as the recent New York Transit strike, they also fight racism, defend immigrant workers, oppose imperialism in the Middle East and support the Cuban and the Bolivian and Venezuelan struggles. Although they have had great success giving anti-imperialist leadership to the anti-war movement with ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism),† this latest eruption of the working class is on a much more massive scale. They will be forced to confront their political, organizational and ideological weaknesses if they are to help this movement find its true direction. It will only be the unity of this mass proletarian movement with revolutionary socialist, anti-imperialist politics that will finally put an end to the monster of US imperialism.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

* Engels to Florence Kelley Wischniewsky, June 3, 1886.

** See, for example, Barbara Ehrenreich – Nickel and Dimed; Beth Shulman, *The Betrayal of Work*; Susan Sered and Rushika Fernandopulle, *Uninsured In America* which expose the true condition of the US working class.

† www.answercoalition.org



LATIN AMERICA

Bolivia challenges imperialism

In a move that stunned the imperialist world on May Day, President Evo Morales announced Decree 28701 nationalising Bolivia's oil and gas industry. Whilst tens of thousands of demonstrators poured through the streets of La Paz with placards declaring 'Nationalisation of hydrocarbons now' and 'Out with the looting transnational corporations', Morales was in San Alberto gas field in Tarija province in the south east of the country, reading out Decree 28701.

In a simultaneous operation, troops entered 56 gas installations throughout the country and took over the offices of the principal foreign companies. Their purpose was to prevent key documents being removed by the multinationals in advance of any government audit of their accounts. Bolivia's gas reserves, some 50 trillion cubic feet, are the second largest in South America and are worth an estimated \$70 billion. Control of these resources is essential if they are to be used for the benefit of the Bolivian people: nationalisation is expected to increase the state's income by \$720 million per annum.

Since coming into office in January, Morales and his MAS government had not explained how they were going to implement key election promises. Indeed there were signals that they were prepared to consider a limited extension of public ownership and a more onerous tax and royalty regime for the oil and gas industry. However, as FRFI has pointed out, there are other forces at play.

Any hope of negotiating a deal with imperialism in Bolivia's interests were dealt a mortal blow with the announcement that Peru and Colombia had agreed bilateral trade deals with the US, one provision of which would open up their markets to cheap, heavily-subsidised US exports of soya beans. This amounted to a declaration of economic war on Bolivia since both South American countries were key markets for Bolivia's soya bean exports, worth \$500m a year; Colombia alone took 60%. However, simultaneous negotiations between Bolivia on the one hand, and Venezuela and Cuba on the other, resulted in Bolivia formally joining the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA) on 29 April. One part of the deal was that Bolivia will now be able to sell its entire soya bean production tariff-free to Cuba and Venezuela. Venezuela will pay in oil, and Cuba will provide medical professionals and teachers.

Morales' announcement therefore was a response to escalating imperialist opposition on the one hand and the demands of a militant electorate determined to see the restoration of sov-

eighty over one of its crucial natural resources on the other. The agreement with Cuba and Venezuela is critical: it gives the Morales government economic support and neutralises for the moment his main political opposition, the ruling class in Santa Cruz province where soya production is located.

The terms of the nationalisation decree require all petroleum and gas companies to hand over their entire production to YPFB, the state-owned company, from 1 May. The two largest gas fields, owned principally by Petrobras (Brazil) and Spain's Repsol YPF, will have to pay an 82% tax on production while contracts with the companies are renegotiated over a 180-day period. If negotiations fail, the companies will be required to leave the country. The taxation on smaller operations will remain at the 50% level agreed by the previous government following extensive protests in May 2005. Meanwhile YPFB will be restructured to take control of the entire industry from exploration to marketing. The Bolivian state will also buy a 51% stake in the country's two principal gas refineries, both owned by Petrobras. Petrobras itself presently owns some 45% of the Bolivian oil and gas reserves, Repsol YPF a further 25%.

Howls of protests from the imperialists and their South American allies greeted the announcement. The Spanish government voiced its concern and President Lula called a special cabinet meeting to protest at the action. With no Bolivian concessions, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim threatened the withdrawal of the Brazilian ambassador from La Paz unless there was compensation, perversely blaming Chavez for the events. EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana expressed the imperialists' standpoint when he declared that 'We have to keep on talking, we have to keep on trying to influence the behaviour of countries...[about] the basic rules of the international economy'. The *Times* thundered about 'this petulant display of nationalism' declaring 'Even Hugo Chavez, the egotistic Venezuelan leader whom President Morales sees as a role model, has trod-

den with great skill'. Meanwhile Tony Blair spoke of his 'concern', saying 'the most important thing is that everyone uses the power they have sensibly' and warning that 'people are worried about energy supply in the future...what countries do in their energy policy...matters enormously to all of us'.

Arriving at the Vienna summit of European and Latin American countries on 12 May, Morales rejected imperialist demands that he should have negotiated with the multinationals beforehand 'There is no reason why I should have to ask and consult about a country's sovereign policies', he declared. Centre-right MEPs boycotted his speech to the European Parliament on 15 May, on the grounds that the nationalisation proposals violated human rights! Morales has said that companies will not be compensated if they are deemed to have already received an adequate return on their investments, a stance which echoes that of Chile's Allende government which refused to compensate US mining companies in 1971 when the copper industry was nationalised.

Morales has promised to start a programme of land redistribution involving 54,000 square miles in Santa Cruz province which were handed by former President Hugo Banzer to his cronies in the 1970s. The area is approximately 10% of the Bolivian land mass and is at present uncultivated. There have been constant struggles by landless farmers and indigenous people against the large landowners. Morales has also told the Bolivian people that the nationalisation of gas and oil is 'just the beginning... tomorrow it will be the mines, the forests and all the natural resources'. It is not surprising that his personal approval ratings stand at over 80%.

On 15 May the Bolivian government ordered Spain's BBVA and Switzerland's Zurich to hand over state-owned shares they were managing in three energy companies, worth \$1.5bn. This followed a period of non-co-operation by the companies involved. These energy companies are Andina SA, a subsidiary of Repsol, Chaco SA, owned by BP and BG (the former British Gas) and Transredes, owned by Shell. Both BBVA and Zurich had resisted the Bolivian government, shamelessly demanding compensation for assets they did not own. Now they are threatening legal action. Petroleos de Venezuela meanwhile has promised to invest \$1.5 billion in support of YPFB. The confrontation continues.

Robert Clough

The Bolivarian Revolution resonates in London...

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez swept like a refreshing revolutionary breeze into London between 14-16 May, returning from the EU-Latin American Summit in Vienna. The Bolivarian socialist lit up the rainy British capital with his sparkling denunciations of imperialism resonating in the belly of the beast.

In 2001, Chavez came to Britain on an official visit, meeting the Queen and the Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. Since then, Chavez has condemned Blair as an ally of Hitler (US President Bush) and a 'pawn of imperialism'. In February 2006, Blair criticised Chavez in the House of Commons for not abiding by 'the rules of the international community' and for his close relationship with Fidel Castro and Cuba. Chavez reacted by demanding that Britain return the Malvinas Islands to Argentina and added: 'Tony Blair, you have no moral right to tell anyone to respect international laws, as you have no respect for them, aligning yourself with Mr Danger [Bush] and trampling on the people of Iraq...Do you think we still live in the times of the British Empire?'

During the Vienna Summit last week Blair issued a veiled threat to Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales regarding control and use of energy resources. 'What countries do in their energy policy...matters enormously to all of us', he warned. Both Morales and Chavez responded by rejecting neo-liberalism. 'Neoliberalism has begun its decline and has come to an end', declared Chavez defiantly. The 'final hours of the North American empire have arrived...Now we have to say to the empire: "We're not afraid of you. You're a paper tiger."'

Blair was reported to be enraged by Chavez's visit to London which was at the personal invitation of London Mayor Ken Livingstone who, paradoxically, is also a representative of Blair's Labour Party. Such is the reactionary nature of British social-democracy that Livingstone stands out as a 'radical', even while he remains a leader of the imperialist Labour Party.

Because of the need to remain 'respectable' whilst stepping out of line with the Prime Minister, Livingstone manoeuvred to limit the incendiary influence of the revolutionary President, restricting his audience and controlling entrance to a public meeting in London. Thousands of supporters were denied the chance to hear Chavez, spokesman for revolutionary change in Latin America.

In a press conference on 15 May, Chavez repeated his offer of fuel aid to poor Europeans who suffer because of heating costs in winter. Britain has the highest number of avoidable deaths due to winter cold in western Europe. Last year the organisation Age Concern predicted that more than 20,000 people over 65 would die between December 2005 and March 2006 from cold-related illness in Britain; victims of poverty. Given that reality, Chavez's offer could have a significant political and economic impact in Britain, a rich imperialist country marked by obscene wealth inequality. Chavez announced that already 100,000 poor US citizens are benefiting from cheap Venezuelan oil distributed through Citgo, the Houston-based subsidiary of Venezuela's state-owned oil company. Oil has also been donated free to some welfare centres, such as old people's homes.

Chavez went on to condemn the manipulation of the media, part of the weaponry of capitalism, mocking 'stu-



Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez

pid questions' posed by international media journalists and he warned the world to avoid 'the madness' of an attack on Iran, which would lead to more war, terrorism, more deaths and petrol prices doubling around the world. He outlined plans for a South American energy project with a 1,000km gas pipeline, which he called a project of social liberation, to secure cheap energy for 150 years and said the focus was on integration, solidarity and ending poverty.

Referring to the world's fuel crisis, Chavez said that the biggest consumers of energy, those in the north, had to take responsibility for more rational use of energy. 'In the last 20 years we have consumed more petrol than in the preceding 200 years. This is insane wastefulness! How many vehicles are on the roads in London, Vienna, Madrid and New York, and also in Caracas, although fewer? You know that 90% of those vehicles take one person, one person occupying three metres by two. This is stupid! An example of capitalism, the extreme of individualism. They go at a tortoise's speed, listening to music, spending two or three hours to go a distance of five kilometres, that walking would take them 20 minutes, or in a bicycle, bus, metro or tram. This model, called The American Way of Life, of extreme capitalism, it is going to finish us off if we continue down this path. This is why we have chosen another path that is called socialism', declared Chavez, adding that Venezuela was rejecting capitalism, with its individualism, egoism and destructive development.

Later that day it was announced that the US was banning all arms sales to Venezuela, on the pretext that Chavez had not cooperated in fighting terrorism. Chavez responded to the news dismissively saying 'this doesn't matter to us at all'. He pointed out that Bush and the US administration were supporting self-confessed terrorist Venezuelan citizen Luis Posada Carriles, who is at the centre of the Miami Mafia and the CIA and responsible for four decades of terrorism against the Cuban Revolution. The US is ignoring Venezuela's demand for Carriles' extradition to stand trial. Pointing an audacious, revolutionary finger back at the US, Chavez labelled Bush as a murderer, responsible for genocide in Iraq and a terrorist.

Helen Yaffe

The struggle against imperialism in Latin America

continued from page 1

Two opposed trends

Thirty years of imperialist plunder, an accelerating scramble for profit, resulted in a severe region-wide recession between 1998 and 2002. Fighting against the misery, new mass movements forced the ruling classes on the defensive. The political circumstances of each country differ but two distinctly opposite trends express themselves with increasing clarity. Either ruling elites have renewed their offensive against the workers by conniving with the US; or these elites are presently suffering defeats, being forced to yield political power to new political parties representing the ever more confident and class conscious masses.

Struggling between these two opposed paths we find most Latin American countries, each wracked by chronic class conflict, where the wealthy ruling groups violently defend their share of global plunder through their control over the region's resources and oppression of the poor.

The first trend, openly pro-imperialist, is seen most clearly in Colombia. After 1998 the murderous ruling class agreed to an even closer embrace by the US to secure itself against the rebellious poor and especially against the revolutionary organisations, the FARC and the ELN. The victory of President Uribe's party and allies in the legislative elections in March is witness to the propertied elite's continuous and open use of terror, financed by the US and the narcotics industry. Uribe's 'strong-man' agenda combines a rush to complete the 'free trade' pact with the US, imposing the IMF's new demand for a reduced minimum wage, whilst centralising control over the use of force against the rural and urban poor. Millionaires resentful of his sell-out to the US are his only effective legal 'opposition', but having fixed the law to allow it, Uribe will be re-elected President on 28 May.

The second, opposite, democratic revolutionary trend, we now see most clearly in Venezuela. After eight years a new, and since the December 2005 elections, dominant, political party – the MVR – has been built around the demands of the poor. It has forced the ruling economic elite on the defensive. Its leader, President Chavez, will be re-elected President in December 2006. He fights to transform the conditions of the masses through a break with US imperialism. Central to this process is a new radically democratic constitution around which are grouped democratic nationalists, anti-imperialists and socialists. In Bolivia, the demand for a constituent assembly was part of Evo Morales' landslide election victory in December 2005. In Peru it is central to Ollanta Humala's campaign.

President Chavez is making every effort to construct an alternative economic framework for the peoples of



'As part of the attack on US hegemony in Latin America, ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) presently made up of Venezuela, Cuba and, since April, Bolivia, has been established.'

Latin America, to end the unceasing interference of US multinationals. The importance of the Venezuelan workers' successful struggle against the privatisation of the oil industry became clear as Venezuela was shown to possess oil reserves at least as great as those of Saudi Arabia. As part of the attack on US hegemony in Latin America, ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) presently made up of Venezuela, Cuba and, since April, Bolivia, has been established. This mutual assistance programme aims to stop the continuous under-development and imperialist exploitation of Latin America. Amongst the dozens of new 'south-south' agreements initiated, Cuban expertise has helped 1.5 million Venezuelans to read in two years through Mission Robinson. Meanwhile, Cuba receives oil from Venezuela, denied for over 45 years by the vicious US economic siege. Bolivians have now joined this regional programme.

In April President Chavez declared the intention of Venezuela to withdraw from the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) because Peru and Colombia have decided to sign pro-US 'free-trade' treaties. Colombia will cease to buy 900,000 tonnes of soya a year from Bolivia, importing instead from the US. Colombia and Peru have thus broken the CAN integration agreements of 1983, and a common external tariff of 1995, signed with Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. Any

attempt to compromise with this defection would fail, and Chavez has no choice but to reject it. Venezuela's withdrawal will have a great effect on the other states, especially Colombia and is designed to dissuade Ecuador, Peru and Colombia from completing their negotiations with the US. The EU immediately withdrew its own offer of a Free Trade Agreement with CAN, to bring pressure on Venezuela.

Within the other Andean states the same historic struggle is unfolding, especially in Bolivia. In Venezuela and Bolivia the ruling elites have been unable to prevent the electoral breakthrough of the masses into the seat of state. Both have their first indigenous leaders. Che Guevara's portrait now hangs in the Bolivian Presidential office. On 1 May, Bolivia reclaimed its national right to the use of its hydrocarbon resources. The US immediately cut off 96% of its military aid to provoke the military against Morales. It also refused to sell any more arms to Venezuela. A sharp confrontation now exists between the masses, with their new leaders, and the local economic elite working for global businesses.

National independence or imperial servitude?

Torn between these two opposing trends, we see the political struggles of the other states. In Ecuador, despite dollarisation, the end of even a semblance of financial independence from the US, massive and widespread



Paraguay. Poverty and hunger are the result of US imperialism's exploitation of the entire continent

demonstrations by workers and poor peasants continue against the current Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the US, which unelected President Palacio will try to force through before the October 2006 elections. This May the US oil multinational Occidental was expelled from Ecuador in a government effort to appease the mass movement.

In the 1980s the criminal US leaders terrorised Nicaragua for ten years to force out the legitimate Sandinista government. It is now furious that Ortega's Sandinista Party is likely to win in November. It pleads for the two main opposition parties to unite, despite previous refusals, and has announced the withdrawal of all its current bribes to the Nicaraguan business class if Ortega wins.

In Peru, with run-off elections at the end of May, the ruling classes have shamelessly resurrected a corrupt ex-President, Alan Garcia (1985-90), to confront Ollanta Humala, who is appealing to the mass of the poor. When in office Garcia used 2.2 million % inflation over five years to starve the poor, and supervised the 1986 Lurigancho massacre of Sendero Luminosa political prisoners. Garcia has offered to create a regional front to oppose President Chavez's internationalism. The outgoing President, Toledo, has rushed to sign a 'free trade' pact with the US which will worsen the poverty endured by 60% of the people, while huge quantities of gold, silver, copper, tin and zinc are trucked out of the country.

'President Chavez is making every effort to construct an alternative economic framework for the peoples of Latin America, to end the unceasing interference of US multinationals.'

In Chile and Argentina, the workers were subject to the most notorious of the recent dictatorships, but their heroic struggles forced the national bourgeoisie to reassert a fragile political independence from imperialism. Each government firmly holds down its own working class, but in Argentina workers' protests have threatened the elite and President Kirchner has alerted the IMF to the dangers to imperialist interests of further pushing its financial demands. This has created his reputation for independence from foreign influence and the 'free trade' agenda. He directly addresses middle class concerns, for example redressing crimes of the dictatorship and exposing the particularly corrupt period of the Menem government to the courts, in order to check-mate his political opponents. However the state treats the dispossessed and especially the pickets' movement with an iron fist. In October 2005, 32 prisoners were killed in an uprising over visiting hours in a prison in Magdalena.

In Chile the military's crimes under

Pinochet are still ineffectively investigated. Profit remains in the driving seat. In the south the remaining indigenous peoples are robbed of their land for corporate profit. 'All the Lands Council' leader Aucan Huilcaman was forced off a plane at Santiago International Airport when he was about to fly to Bolivia to attend Evo Morales' inauguration ceremony. Signing a trade agreement with the US presents the country with the fate of Mexico – becoming a US economic province. Whatever the outcome of Mexico's July elections, the Congress will be split three ways since no significant mass struggle has arisen in the urban heartlands.

Since 2002 the EU has been busy in Paraguay consolidating its influence. Uruguay, pressed by the US, is on the point of breaking with Mercosur and negotiating a free trade agreement with the US. Left-wing parties that supported its election now oppose the Uruguayan government for failing to improve the workers' conditions. Although the minority Brazilian government re-established diplomatic links with Cuba, and has agreed, along with Argentina, to major contracts with Venezuela, this is only an attempt by the national bourgeoisie to face oil and gas shortages and moderate the influence of US imperialism over them. This tells us no more about socialism than does the willingness of Argentina and Brazil to sign \$20 billion of trade deals with China.

These states' economic development is avowedly capitalistic. In Brazil 40 million people suffer hunger. In Sao Paulo two million people live in slums, 15,000 sleep on the streets and yet there are 39,289 abandoned buildings. The conflict between Argentina and Brazil over water beneath their common border illustrates the antagonism of capitalistic development. Brazil has reacted negatively to Bolivia's reclamation of its own hydrocarbon resources.

Such behaviour contrasts with the goals and agenda of the Bolivarian treaty governments, which are socialist and repress the market mechanism. The western liberal notion that a 'pink' or social democratic trend is evident in Brazil or the other Mercosur countries (Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) is plain ignorance.

President Chavez has declared:

'Injustice and inequality are losing: it is now up to us to define the formula of unity for victory. We need unity of all our currents. While respecting the right to autonomy of the movements, including the green movement and the various political and national movements, all of us should get together in a victorious offensive against imperialism... Time is short. If we do not change the world now, there may be no 22nd century for humanity. Capitalism has destroyed the ecological equilibrium of the earth. It is now or never!'

Alvaro Michaels

May Day in Havana

Cuba's economy on the march

1 May in Cuba was once again striking for the joy and unity with which seven million Cubans took to the streets to celebrate International Workers' Day. One million of them were in Havana, where Revolution Square was already packed by 6am as we 'habaneros' painted the square with the colours of our flag. Facing the crowd, our Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz made the Square vibrate with his announcement of the accelerated rhythm of economic growth. From Havana, DANIESKY ACOSTA LINARES reports.

Despite the brutal blockade imposed by the government of the United States the Cuban economy grew by 12.5% in the first three months of this year, greater than the growth reached at the end of 2005 – already an impressive 11.8%. In most countries economic growth means little more than statistics because of inequality and private ownership. In Cuba, because we live in a socialist society, this growth means a direct rise in the standard of living for the entire population. That is why we concentrate with excited anticipation when the government explains the concrete results of such developments. We are moving away from the hard times of the Special Period. On May Day, Fidel spoke for over three hours, detailing the programmes being carried forward by the Revolution, the achievements made in specific economic sectors and future investments. The good news rained down. For example:

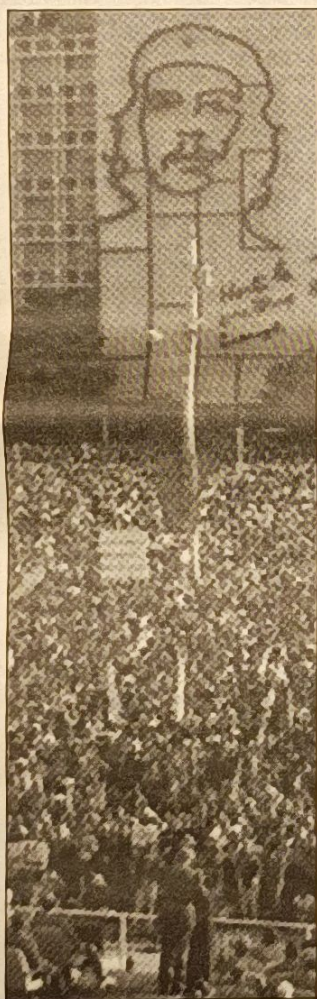
Transport grew 4.8% including extensive railway and cargo truck repairs, the purchase of over 20,000 new truck motors, and 100 train engines bought from China at \$130m.

Trade grew 30% due to the free and subsidised sale of electrical domestic goods: more than three million rice cookers (one for every home); over 230,000 water heaters; nearly 2.5 million electric ovens; over 250 refrigerators and nearly 40,000 televisions.

This is the year of the Energy Revolution in Cuba and this is all energy-saving equipment so, along with the restoration of the country's electrical network, it has permitted a saving of 3.7% of fuel, despite the increase in electrical domestic equipment across the country.

Fidel asserted that if all countries were integrated into the Energy Revolution being carried forward by Cuba, the world's hydrocarbon resources would last twice as long as currently predicted. He talked about the hundreds of new and modern power generators installed in Cuba this year, with a huge kilowatt capa-

city, including 3,444 emergency generators to guarantee supplies to 827 medical and care centres and over one thousand production units, scientific departments and hotels. This is vital in the context of hurricanes and the



President Fidel Castro addresses the May Day demonstration in Revolution Square

threat of military attack.

Construction grew 15% As well as the construction of urgently needed housing, there were massive repairs to polyclinics and the building of operating rooms for new medical services. 52 new rural hospitals are being built, although Fidel, with his characteristic candour admitted that these works are behind. 'These are complex works, but there has been much disorganisation. Now we are overcoming these weaknesses, demanding responsibility from all the ministries implicated.'

The communications industry grew 12.9% and many other branches experienced significant growth; from machine construction to fishing. Medicine and pharmaceutical output rose markedly, as well as production of food stuffs such as eggs and milk, all of which immediately benefit the population. Concerning education, our Commandante pointed out that there are eight times more university professors today than there were university students at the triumph of the Revolution in 1959.

The sugar industry, which has dominated Cuba's economy for most of its history, had been all but written off, but this year's harvest was 1.1 million tons by mid-April, which means an additional \$200m income for the country.

Crude oil is being extracted from domestic wells, and production of national crude reached 124,000 tons in the first four months of 2006 whilst work goes on to open up 36 new wells.

The revolutionary leader moved on to harshly criticise the hypocritical policy of the United States, recalling US President Bush's recent arrogant remarks that all enemies of his administration will be either imprisoned or eliminated. Bush plans the assassination, using sophisticated weapons, of any political leaders who oppose him. Fidel added that no-one has the right to give such an order even if they are dealing with terrorists. He also denounced terrorist plans against Cuba which continue in the US, demonstrated by the recent confiscation of 1,571 weapons from the home of Cuban-American Robert Ferro in California. Ferro was a member of the US Special Forces and the Miami-based terrorist group Alpha 66, which has attacked Cuba's coast numerous times since the Revolution, bombing homes and attempting to land armed bandits on the island to assassinate Fidel, most recently in May 1983.

Fidel cited the *Los Angeles Times*

which quoted Ferro's own claim that the stockpile was part of an arsenal facilitated by the US government to do the same in Cuba as President Bush did in Iraq. While in California they prepare for aggression against our country, the Pentagon has a war fleet with aircraft carriers and a nuclear submarine in the Caribbean Sea, in order to intimidate Cuba, Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

Fidel recalled that whilst the Atlanta Court of Appeal had declared the legal process which had framed and imprisoned the Cuban Five invalid, they had not been released; rather the US government was concentrating its resources to ensure that they remain in prison awaiting a new judgment. The five are imprisoned for infiltrating anti-Cuban extremist groups to prevent terrorism. While they have suffered abusive treatment, been denied access to lawyers, family and documents, the terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, the most infamous criminal in the hemisphere, confessed

to enjoying privileges in prison where he is detained for illegally entering the country. Posada Carriles, who boasted about organising the bombing of a Cubana Airlines civilian flight in 1976, which killed 73 people, is arguing for his right to be naturalised in the United States. How is it that while the United States persecutes immigrants to force them to return to their countries, Posada can be granted an audience for six hours to try to legalise his stay on US soil? demanded Fidel.

'Nothing will hold us back. Our country or death! We will be victorious!' concluded the Cuban leader in the midst of enthusiastic applause. 'Viva Fidel!' we all shouted. And history will be witness that this has been a May Day that neither imperialism, nor its terrorist allies, could ever overcome.

PS: Thanks to all those whose tireless work makes the publication of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* possible, and for allowing my collaboration. May Day greetings, comrades.



Cuba news

More US dosh for tosh

Cuba has accused the US of increasing the funding for radio and television propaganda against the Revolution in order to induce an artificial crisis which will allow US forces to proceed with military actions against the island. In the financial year to 2006, the US government allocated \$37 million – \$10m more than in 2004 – to finance anti-Cuban broadcasts through its offensively-named Radio Marti and Television Marti operations. These broadcasts are beamed into Cuba from the US are beamed for a total of 2,107 hours a weekly on a range of frequencies, in flagrant violation of UN regulations governing international telecommunications.

Longer life under socialism

The latest year report (based on 2004 figures) of the World Health Organisation reveals that Cuba has the highest average life expectancy in Latin America at 78 years. It is closely followed by Chile and Costa Rica, Bolivia, with a life expectancy of 65 years, is the lowest in the region. Japan tops the world list at 82 years. Life expectancy is 55 in Iraq and 42 in Afghanistan. Africa fares worst, with average life expectancy in Zimbabwe only 36. Botswana, Angola, Swaziland, Central African Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Niger, Liberia and Somalia all have an average life expectancy of less than 44 years.

Vienna Declaration

The fourth European Union-Latin America/Caribbean Summit took place in Vienna in May. While, as Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage pointed out, its conclusions were limited by the fact that the EU's main ally is the US, the Vienna Declaration is a victory for Cuba. It acknowledges that there is no single model of democracy, that each country must determine its

own political, economic, social and cultural systems and that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination of all nations must be respected. There was also a statement against the US blockade of Cuba: 'We firmly reject all unilateral coercive measures with extraterritorial effects that are contrary to international law and the regulations commonly accepted under free trade...we reaffirm our well-known positions on the application of extraterritorial regulations of the Helms-Burton Act.' The final declaration opposed financing and support for terrorist actions, appealing to governments to cease giving shelter to those guilty of terrorist actions and to either take to trial those accused of such crimes or to give immediate attention to extradition requests. This is a clear reference to the US treatment of terrorist Posada Carriles who remains under US protection despite Venezuelan demands for his extradition to face trial.

Vote of support for Cuba

On 9 May, the UN General Assembly elected 44 of the 47 members of its new Human Rights Council (HRC). Africa and Asia each got 13 seats; Latin America and the Caribbean, eight; the US and Western Europe, seven, and Eastern Europe, six. In order to be part of the Human Rights Council, countries must receive at least 96 votes. For Latin America, those elected were Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. Cuba got 135 votes and won with a majority of more than two-thirds of votes cast, despite vehement campaigns by the US and its European allies to prevent Cuba's entry into the HRC. The HRC replaces the Commission on Human Rights, discredited because of its inclusion of governments accused of human rights abuses.

Hannah Callier

Marx alive and kicking in Cuba

The Third International Conference on 'The works of Karl Marx and the challenges of the 21st century' was held in Havana's Palacio de Convenciones from 3 to 6 May 2006. It stressed the vital importance of putting into practice Marx's view that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways: the point however is to change it'.

269 submissions were presented to an audience of 329 delegates from four continents – far more than those made at the Second International Conference in 2004. The submissions were presented via three commissions dealing with: Marxist theory and the challenges of social development in

the 21st century; class struggle, social movements and political parties; and Revolution, change and revolutionary power.

The conference has traditionally been timed to coincide with International Workers' Day on 1 May and the anniversary of Karl Marx's birth. The opening address was delivered by the President of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, who discussed the need for a deeper study of Marxism in relation to the reality of the world today. The closing speech was made by Armando Hart Dávalos, Director of the National Office for the study of the ideas of Jose Martí. He suggested that in this century social-

ism needs to take as its starting point the original ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin, especially now that a real state of revolutionary change exists in Latin America, making them ever more relevant to the times we live in. Throughout these movements the ideas of Martí, Bolívar, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro are essential through the unity of the revolutionary forces for a better world.

The fourth conference will take place in May 2008, marking the 190th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx and the 80th anniversary of the birth of Che Guevara.

Tatiana Martínez Hernández
Havana, Cuba

Resisting racism's apologists

■ **The likes of us: a biography of the white working class**, Michael Collins, Granta Books 2005, 274pp, £7.99 pbk

Michael Collins writes about working class life since the 19th century in and around the Elephant and Castle area of the London Borough of Southwark where he grew up. But the purpose of this book is not biography. It is a polemic written to make a political argument in favour of the white working class. Collins asserts that it has become impossible for white working class people to talk about race, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees without being accused of racism. Those who are responsible for this censorship, Collins claims, are middle-class do-gooders who not only silence the white working class but mock them for their consumerism, cultural standards and racist attitudes.

According to the author, today's middle class commentators are merely the latest in a tradition of 'social engineers' who viewed the working class as an object of interest or a project for social improvement. Wealthy young people like Virginia Woolf and Jessica Mitford came to Southwark in the 1920s and 1930s to 'slum it' and experience 'real' life. They were snobs and 'snob-Bolsheviks' says Collins. But, he boasts, the white working class was untouched by either right or left wing politics. Both the Soviet-inspired Communist Party and the fascism of Italy and Germany were regarded as alien creeds by the English working class and rejected on these grounds. There is no history in this book of the daily struggles of the Dockers' Union against poverty pay and casualisation, but rather a celebration of Londoners' love of King and Country and British patriotism. He writes:

'When Mosley's Fascist "black-shirts" marched to the Elephant and Castle and into Bermondsey in 1937 singing "the Horst Wessel Lied" and the hymn of Mussolini's fascist party, they were confronted by communists singing "The Red Flag". But all these voices were drowned by the collective renditions of "Rule Britannia" and "Land of Hope and Glory" from the majority of those living nearby who had turned out on the streets, or witnessed the event from windows and balconies. The march was diverted because the inhabitants had barricaded the streets with barrows and a water tank from a nearby factory. Eggs, door knobs, shoes, stones and oranges were tossed over the barricades at Oswald's army.'

At the heart of Michael Collins' book is Enoch Powell. Powell was a one-time Empire Loyalist who proudly supported the 1948 Nationality Act which granted the right of entry to 'the motherland' for all of the Crown's subjects in the British Empire. Following the independence of India, then Cyprus and the loss of the Suez Canal, Powell changed. He became a rabid supporter of 'free enterprise' capitalism. He opposed the trades unions and state intervention like an early Thatcher. His proudest achievement as an MP was the 1957 Rent Bill which ended rent control and the security it offered tenants. Powell boasted that the Conservative Party had set the landlords free from 'the ultimate evil' of regulation. This Housing Act adversely affected millions of working class people and was directly responsible for homelessness, overcrowding and a property boom. Yet Powell, like all racists, posed as the wise friend of the white working class.

Collins says that the white working

class came to the defence of Enoch Powell after he was dismissed from the Tory Shadow Cabinet. 4,000 dockers downed tools and 800 marched to Westminster, supported by Smithfield porters; while in Wolverhampton factory workers and the Transport and General Workers Union members signed letters of support. This wave of support was 'not entirely attributable to support for Powell's opinions, or the manner in which he expressed them, but for his right to air them'.

In fact, the demagogue Powell had jumped onto an already fast-moving bandwagon of racism. The year was 1968 and the place Birmingham when Enoch Powell MP made his infamous speech attacking immigration from the British Commonwealth into Britain. He declared, 'We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of 50,000 dependants...it is like a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre'. Significantly for today Powell claimed that white people are expected to be silent about their suffering from immigration by those who do not suffer. He said:

'The discrimination and the deprivation, the sense of alarm and of resentment, lies not with the immigrant population but with those among whom they have come and are still coming...The sense of being a persecuted minority which is growing among ordinary English people in the areas of the country which are affected is something that those without direct experience can hardly imagine'.

This claim about working class suffering and silencing on the issue of race and immigration has returned to prominence recently. Last year Trevor Phillips of the CRE (Campaign for Racial Equality) and Gordon Brown, Labour Chancellor, spoke of putting 'Britishness' back on top of the agenda and dislodging middle class multi-culturalism from its key role. In April 2006 Margaret Hodge, MP for Dagenham in Essex, said that the disaffected white working class may turn to the British National Party in the local elections because the Labour Party ignores them. Next a *Sunday Times* editorial accused Hodge and her 'politically correct' Labour Party of responsibility for demonising the white working class. A spiral of racism took off as media commentators and politicians adopted ever more racist poses in time-honoured fashion.

The white working class was documented by two books, both published in 1957, that have been used, usually wrongly, in today's discussion. Richard Hoggart's *The uses of literacy: aspects of working class life with special reference to publications and entertainments* is famously well-written. The sweep of his story takes in traditions, habits and attitudes inherited by three generations of English working class. Local customs differ in mining villages, dock workers' communities and factory towns, but Hoggart describes the shared everyday working class experiences of work and unemployment, poverty and better times, women and the household and 'them' and 'us'.

Family and kinship in East London by Michael Young and Peter Willmott became a highly regarded work of sociology, not least because of its methods of carefully sampled interviews and three years of 'field work'. It is a study of working class life both in the London Borough of Bethnal Green and a new estate built by London County Council after 1945 in the Essex coun-

tryside where many East Enders were rehoused after the war.

What is striking is that the problems of the white working class in 1957 are similar to the concerns of the entire working class today. How to get decent housing, employment, education and health services remain the ever-present problems. Race, immigration and foreigners do not get a single mention in either of these books, but all of today's working class issues are there.

1957 was a time of uncertainty and change when the working class felt its very identity was under threat from new and alien forces. The changes were certainly real. A postwar boom was taking off that would sweep away many of the old jobs and skills. The mass production and purchase of new consumer goods, furniture, clothing, televisions, refrigerators and cars changed lives. An extensive house-building programme saw the break-up of working class families, like those of Bethnal Green and the dispersal and the loss of communities. "It's like a strange land in your own country", said Mrs Ames on being settled on a new estate'.

Massive expansion of the Welfare State meant that many more children of the working class were needed to stay in education to become nurses, teachers and white collar office workers and passing exams became the key to financial success. Jukeboxes and juvenile delinquents were spin-offs from a revolution in the mass media that introduced a new commercialised youth culture. The working class once again in its history experienced new divisions within itself based on economic privileges as measured by pay, conditions and status.

Like today, sections of the working class felt more or less 'disaffected' with the government, even voting out the Welfare State Labour Party of 1945 in the general election of 1951 with those who had benefited most tending to vote Conservative. Almost the entire working class benefited from the gains of the post-war settlement but new upper strata of the working class gained more. Yet this is the period of time, the 1950s, that today's racist apologists and myth-makers conjure up when they talk of a white working class community living together with extended families and a shared culture before the arrival of mass immigration from the Commonwealth.

The so-called 'friends' of the white working class, like Oswald Mosley, Enoch Powell and the author Michael Collins, serve only the interests of the ruling class. In talking about the white working class they give only one side



After 1948, British governments encouraged black people from the colonies to emigrate to Britain to do the unpopular and dirty jobs

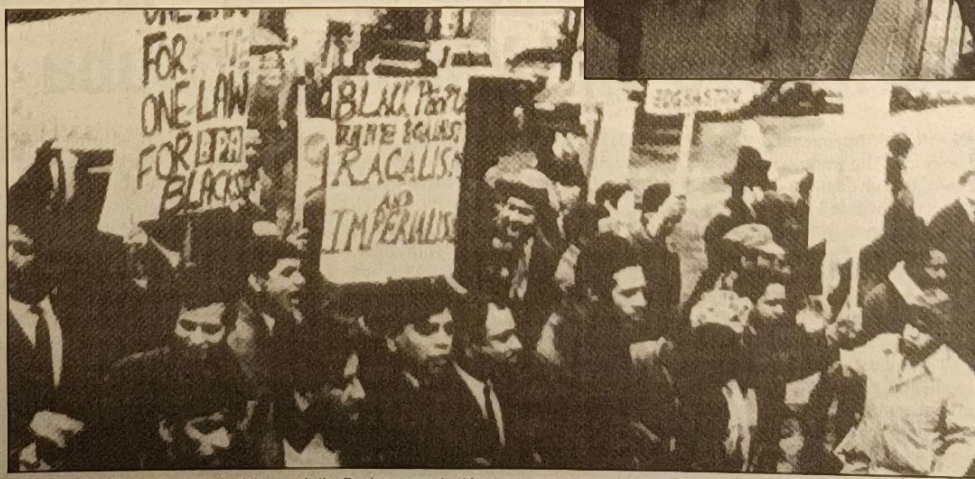
of the equation and this does not make for truth or honesty. For Britain is not just a nation, one among others. It had an Empire and millions of people around the world were British subjects. Over a million Commonwealth subjects had fought for 'the motherland' in British military units in the Second World War. Britain was near bankruptcy in 1945 and depended not only on US Marshall Aid but on a massive plan of extortion to wring wealth from its Empire. It was the sweated imports from Africa, Malaya and Indonesia that financed the building of the new British Welfare State. And it was the newcomers who settled in Britain to work in post-war construction who formed a new layer of the working class.

During the war years of WW2 a few hundred Jews arrived in Britain to escape Nazi persecution and about 65,000 Poles had settled by the end of the war. As the camps of Europe were emptied of their prisoners a further 345,000 European nationals were recruited to work camps in Britain for heavy duties. Despite this, the shortage of labour was still so great that Britain turned to the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent to employ workers who were cheap and available to labour in the new industrial sites and to service the new welfare infrastructure.

The labour and lives of these immigrants is inextricably bound up with the history of the white working class. The full story records that over the years

of imperial conquest more than a quarter of a billion white people had settled in the European empires, the homelands of the new immigrants. One half of the story is no story: it is racist bigotry. From his 1968 platform in front of a large audience in Birmingham Enoch Powell told about a persecuted old white lady who had excreta pushed through her letter box 'by grinning picanninies'. This was never substantiated but entered urban myth. Likewise Collins states as fact without footnote or reference, that mugging was a crime almost exclusively carried out by 'young black males on white victims, who were largely female and frequently elderly'. Racism is a distorting mirror that spirals down into the gutter as well as up to government. It must be resisted and its apologists must be resisted. The white working class cannot be defended by servants of the ruling class who yesterday applauded patriotism to Crown and Empire and today encourage loyalty to British multinationals, British arms manufacturers, privatisation and neo-liberal warmongering.

Susan Davidson



In response to Enoch Powell's racist speech the Dockers marched in support (inset). Over 50 black organisations united to form the Black People's Alliance which marched to Downing Street to protest against the racism of both the Labour government and Powell (main picture)

No to double punishment!

Britain operates a criminal justice system in which citizens and non-citizens are treated differently. When any foreign national is imprisoned, whether a court recommends that they are deported or not, and whether or not they have previously successfully claimed asylum or been given residence on the basis of marriage, the Immigration Service is informed about their situation and begins moves to deport them at the end of their sentence on the basis that their continued presence is 'not conducive to the public good'. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

It is indisputable that the lackadaisical attitude of the Home Office towards deporting overseas prisoners who have finished their gaol terms is scandalous. As a result of the Home Office's sheer incompetence hundreds of men and women from other countries who have completed their punishment languish for months in prisons and detention centres at the expense of the British tax-payer, waiting for the paperwork to be completed so they can be sent home. These are prisoners who are not seeking asylum and have no desire to do anything other than be deported. But this 'foreign prisoner scandal' is not the one which hit the press on 25 April and led to the exit of Home Secretary Charles Clarke.

Instead Clarke was forced out because over a seven-year period between 1999 and 2006, 1,023 foreign national prisoners who had completed their criminal sentences were not considered for deportation and were instead released as though they were British citizens. This meant that, instead of immigration investigation, they would have been subject to whatever level of probation supervision and hostel placement would normally have accompanied their particular sentence. Such supervision is itself extremely variable, leading on the one hand to weekly media outcries following murders and rapes committed by people supposedly under the supervision of the probation service, and on the other to a vast number of recalls to prison of people who have committed no further crime but have missed a probation appointment or changed address without permission.

The numbers concerned are in effect tiny – in the region of 90,000 people are released from prisons in England and Wales each year – and the danger to the public negligible, but it was more than enough for the government's opponents and the press. Just before the local elections, for papers like the *Daily Mail* the combination of bogeymen was irresistible. Every attack on terrorists, asylum seekers, benefit scroungers, out-of-control youths, drug addicts, paedophiles and generalised low-life scum came together in a mighty cacophony of outrage against 'foreign convicts' and the soft Home Office that had let them out.

The readers of such papers, espe-

cially those in middle England who never actually see any of the people they fear and vilify, have already been told repeatedly that sentences are short, the courts are soft, prisons are luxurious, illegal immigrants are everywhere and the government fails to deport anyone ever. So it would not have been hard to convince them that they were now under a new, terrifying kind of siege. And presumably they would not then have lost any sleep over the citizens of the countries to which these apparently dangerous people should have been sent instead of 'running around' in ours.

Goodbye and good riddance to Clarke

The writing was immediately on the wall for Charles Clarke, who hung on for a while, promising to sort the mess out, but was finally sacked on 5 May, and replaced by Defence Secretary John Reid.

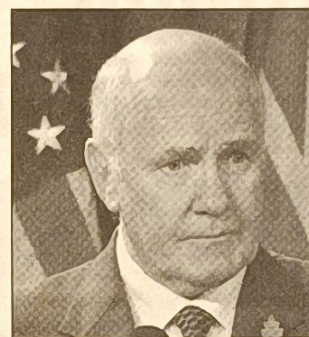
Clarke had become Home Secretary in December 2004 following David Blunkett's sudden exit after an investigation into the allegation he had fast-tracked a visa application for his married lover's nanny (probably the sole occasion on which he had assisted a low-paid overseas worker to come to this country). Blunkett had been Home Secretary since 2001 and conveniently left office on the day the House of Lords ruled that indefinite detention of suspected terrorists under his Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) was discriminatory, disproportionate and incompatible with the Human Rights Act. In comparison to Blunkett, Clarke has been depicted as somewhat soft, although a quick glance at the last 16 months shows this to be far from the case. Liberals were encouraged by a speech to the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) in September 2005, in which he emphasised the need for education, jobs and housing for released prisoners to prevent reoffending. Caught on the hop by Pauline Campbell (see article on Styal and New Hall pickets) at a Fawcett Society meeting on women prisoners he even admitted that prison doesn't work! But words are cheap and no action, legislation or cash backed them up.

Clarke's 'achievements' at the Home Office included:

- 1. Control orders** Following the House of Lords judgment, the ATCSA indefinite detention provisions were replaced by 'control orders'. A wide variety of restrictions can be imposed on individuals, ranging from the prohibition of the use of specified articles or substances, through a range of restrictions on association, communication, movement and residence, up to the obligation to remain at a certain place, including house arrest.
- 2. Immigration** Introduction of a five-point work-permit system and abolition of indefinite leave to remain for asylum applicants.
- 3. Detention periods** Although the government was defeated on its attempt to extend detention for terrorism suspects from 14 to 90 days, this period has still been doubled to 28.
- 4. Glorification of terrorism** Blair refused to back down despite opposition from all quarters and Clarke presided over a prolonged parliamentary wrangle, ending with the passing of legislation against 'glorifying' the actions of 'terrorists' in the past, present and future. How exactly this attack on free speech will be used remains to be seen.

Behind bars

At the end of February there were 10,625 foreign national prisoners in British prisons. In November 2004 there were already a record 9,000 in England and Wales, one in eight of the overall prison population, following an almost threefold increase in numbers over the previous decade. At The Verne men's prison in Dorset and Morton Hall women's prison in Lincolnshire foreign national prisoners made up half or more of the population; and in Belmarsh, Blundeston,



John Reid, the latest Home Secretary

Brixton, Coldingley, Cookham Wood, Downview, Drake Hall, Feltham, Highpoint, Send, Swaleside, The Mount, Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubs, a quarter or more.

A 2004 PRT report, *Going The Distance – Developing Effective Policy and Practice with Foreign National Prisoners* highlighted how foreign national prisoners were suffering because of lack of information, language barriers, isolation, mental health concerns, racism and lack of respect.

Prisoners from other countries face concrete difficulties with communications, not only because of language, but because of the expense of overseas telephone calls and because the Prison Service demands that all numbers phoned are first vetted; a process which can take weeks for numbers within the UK and becomes more difficult and lengthy when they are overseas.

Further, the procedures for dealing with foreign national prisoners' applications for parole, transfers to lower security prisons or release on temporary licence are different to those for British nationals, as the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) has to be consulted. Whatever your political view on the current 'scandal' there is no dispute as to the inefficiency of the IND and such applications can take months.

The backlash

As if all this were not enough, the current hullabaloo is affecting every pris-

oner who is not a British citizen, and some who are. Not to mention further exacerbating general racism towards foreigners and intolerance of ex-prisoners of all nationalities.

Open prisons have been instructed to send anyone who was not born in Britain to closed gaols, where their cases will be individually reviewed to see if they can be allowed back. Lawyers, the Prisoners Advice Service and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns have heard from scores of prisoners who have been suddenly moved in this way, including a large number of EU citizens and at least one person who has a British passport. Other prisoners who were anticipating moves from closed to open prisons have been told they are cancelled. FRFI has received a letter from Littlehey prison about a prisoner who was due to be released on 28 April but was told the day before that he would be kept in prison, despite having been granted parole and been given an order from IND that allowed him to be released on condition he reported regularly while his asylum claim was decided.

Double punishment

The real scandal at the heart of this situation is that non-British citizens are punished twice if they commit a crime. While many of the foreign national prisoners currently in gaol in Britain want to return home as soon as possible, a significant number have been living here for many years, have families, had jobs and were settled here; some arrived as tiny children and have no recollection of their country of origin and do not speak its language. For them, deportation is an additional and far worse punishment than imprisonment. In the wake of the current 'scandal' there is talk of tightening the law still further. Whatever additional measures John Reid decides to introduce, double punishment is already law in Britain. FRFI has always held to a position of opposing all immigration controls. We believe that in an imperialist nation they can never be anything other than racist. This is never more starkly demonstrated to be true than by a system in which British citizens convicted of a crime are punished once and foreign nationals who are convicted of the same crime are punished twice.

Don't expand Styal prison – close it down!



FRFI comrades in the north west of England have attended three recent demonstrations outside women's prisons. Those on 10 and 18 May were organised by Pauline Campbell, mother of Sarah Campbell who died at the hands of the prison authorities in Styal prison in January 2003, to protest at the deaths in New Hall and Styal prisons of 22-year-old Kelly Louise Hutchinson and 42-year-old Valerie Hayes. The demonstration on 8 April was organised by the No More Prison group to protest against plans to expand Styal to make it Europe's largest prison for women and to call instead for the prison to be closed. This event was attended by former prisoners Susan May and Sandra Gregory and three mothers, including Pauline, whose children had been killed by the prison system. Don't expand Styal prison – close it down!

For more information about No More Prison, write to Paul Mason, School of Journalism, Media and Culture Studies, Bute Building, Cardiff University, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3NB or visit the No More Prison website <http://www.alternatives2prison.uk.com/>

Horrific effects of immigration detention

Between 2 and 15 May 2006 five asylum seekers attempted to commit suicide in Colnbrook by jumping from the balcony or cutting themselves with razors.

On 2 May a young Afghan man attempted suicide. On 10 May, after being severely beaten by eight security officers, Iraqi Kurd Tariq Rashid attempted to kill himself by cutting his throat, stomach and chest, opening a six-inch gash from the left side of his neck down to his breastbone.

The next day, a Jamaican man tried to jump from the second floor, but other detainees managed to

restrain him, and an Iranian was found by his cell-mate hanging by a bedsheet from the door handle. He had earlier tried to cut his throat with a razor, but was locked up in solitary confinement, which aggravated his psychological state and led to a second attempt. On 15 May, Rashid's cellmate, Hiwa Abdullah, tried to kill himself by slashing himself with a razor, after being refused bail for the eighth time. The Home Office has admitted that in the year to 31 March 2005, 858 detainees attempted to self-harm. The following year to 31 March 2006, the figure increased considerably to 1,806. ■

FRFI ROUNDUP

Under attack – we fight back!

The Labour government is clamping down on the right to protest. Under the guise of fighting terrorism the government is creating the legal framework to stop demonstrations against war, racism and poverty. On Saturday 20 May, FRFI comrades were targeted under the same legislation which has removed from Brian Haw, the tireless anti-war campaigner, the right to demonstrate outside Parliament – the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA). Among other things this bans the use of a loudspeaker except by people 'in a position of authority', and bans demonstrations without previous authorisation within one kilometre of the Houses of Parliament. One of our comrades was violently arrested, and others assaulted by police as marchers reached Trafalgar Square during the annual Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) march.

An impromptu demonstration was held outside the police station until our comrade was released on bail – charged with using a loudspeaker 'for the purpose of encouraging the crowd to chant pro-Palestinian and anti-government remarks' – and summonsed to appear in court on the following Thursday. Unfortunately, PSC organisers stalled over announcing the arrest at their rally, apparently fearing they would be 'accused of incitement' if they urged marchers to go to the police station. A Palestinian comrade pointed out that in Palestine/Israel when someone is arrested the entire protest goes to the police station to ensure their release.

The PSC did eventually announce the arrest and invited our comrade to join them in an ongoing legal challenge to the SOCPA by five of their own members previously arrested. We appeal to all witnesses to contact us.

Whatever the harassment by police, FRFI activists and supporters will remain active on the streets, organising resistance to racism and reaction.

Free Palestine!

On Saturday 13 May, to commemorate the Nakba (the Catastrophe – ethnic cleansing of Palestinians before the founding of Israel), Victory to the Intifada organised a national day of action. Events were held in London, Glasgow, Newcastle and Manchester. In London, activists ignored police provocation and held a lively picket of Marks and Spencer – Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel – with drumming, singing, chanting and speeches. In Manchester the M&S picket included asylum seekers from Libya and the DR Congo. The usual middle class fascist Israel supporters came to attack the protest in their most violent display of racist contempt so far. The collusion of the police officers present with the Zionists was clear throughout the event. However, the picket stood its ground.

The London School of Economics FRFI Society held a successful meeting in May with two Palestinian students speaking about the recent elections, Hamas' victory and the role of British collaboration with Zionism. In Glasgow FRFI held a meeting on 16 May with the Glasgow Palestine Human Rights Campaign who spoke about their recent visit to the West Bank and showed powerful documentary footage. Contact victory_intifada@hotmail.com to get involved in our work on Palestine.

Support asylum seekers

On 10 April, London FRFI joined Crossroads Women's Centre outside Communications House, an immigration reporting centre in Old Street. In Newcastle our work with Ugandan refugee Mariam Nandawula led to the cancella-



FRFI contingent on 20 May PSC march before police attack

Victory for Onder Dolutas

On 8 May Bow Street Magistrates' Court threw out the Turkish state's attempt to extradite 28-year-old Turkish refugee Onder Dolutas to face trumped-up charges. Onder was arrested on 30 January at his home in London, and appeared in court on 14 March and 11 April. FRFI participated alongside Kurdish and Turkish left groups throughout the campaign to defend Onder, and at each hearing there were lively demonstrations in solidarity with Onder and against British collaboration with Turkish fascism. Onder told FRFI: 'I would like to thank everybody who supported me in this case. As we are all aware, we are in a period where our social and democratic rights are being taken away for the greediness of a handful of rulers. In such a period we must all stand together to oppose such attacks. This is not going to be the last case for me or any other political refugee. I would like to thank FRFI and its readers for their support during the case. They showed true comradeship.'

tion of her deportation in early May. Our work amongst impoverished asylum seeker communities in Newcastle, with Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR), is gaining momentum. On 29 April a TCAR contingent participated in the Tyne and Wear May Day march. The organisers had previously agreed to

allow a TCAR speaker on the platform, but a Communist Party of Britain organiser, Martin Levy, tried to stop this at the last minute, saying that a TCAR speaker had been called for earlier without response and that it was now too late. Levy was unrelenting despite pleas from many asylum seekers, communists, anarchists, trade unionists and other activists. So a TCAR speaker from Zimbabwe took the stage anyway, to massive support from the crowd.

Also in Newcastle an FRFI public meeting on racism in April was attended by residents from Woodlands Crescent estate, which had been boarded up pending demolition, but then opened to house asylum seeker families. Then on 20 May over 60 people attended a meeting on the Woodlands estate itself to begin the work of organising to defend the community.

In April Manchester FRFI and the Defend Eucharika and Timeyi Campaign (DETC) took part in a march against deportations. Refugees and activists from TCAR travelled to Manchester to join them. FRFI's Africa correspondent Charles Chinweizu spoke from the platform about British imperialism's role in plundering oppressed nations and attacking refugees who flee the violence this breeds. Support the DETC: defend_eucharika@yahoo.com.

On 1 May Manchester FRFI joined the Trade Unions for Refugees May Day march. During the rally, activists were shocked to see Labour Lord Mayor of Manchester and ex-cop, Afzal Khan,

invited as 'guest speaker'. As he spoke hypocritically about 'multicultural' Manchester, at least half the marchers joined in jeering at his record of complicity in Labour's racist attacks on asylum seekers. Next day the *Manchester Evening News* reported on the event under the title 'Protesters jeer Mayor on asylum', mentioning that protests were led by FRFI. Shockingly, the organisers of the event, including leading Socialist Workers' Party members Jeff Brown and Mark Krantz, signed a letter to the newspaper condemning the 'hecklers' and defending the Labour Mayor!

On 10 May Libyan refugee Abdullah Gawaan and his family were called to Dallas Court holding centre in Salford – a place notorious amongst asylum seekers who don't know if they will come back out – to 'prepare their travel documents'. FRFI and the Defend Abdullah Gawaan and Family Campaign quickly called a demonstration outside the centre. After two hours Abdullah and his family were released and told that they had 'six months to a year' before they will be deported. Support their right to stay, contact morady5@yahoo.com.

On Saturday 8 April, FRFI and supporters took part in the first march called in Glasgow by Unity, the new Scottish Union of Asylum Seekers. Most of the 400 or so protesters were asylum seekers, demanding an end to deportations and the right to work. We continue to support the weekly vigils outside Brand Street Immigration Centre in Glasgow and other protests in solidarity with asylum seekers.

Viva Cuba!

FRFI and Rock around the Blockade (RATB) continue to campaign in support of socialist Cuba and against the criminal US blockade. In Newcastle on 16 April there was a Marxist educational discussion on the state under socialism,

with reference to the Cuban Revolution. On 26 April, the FRFI society at LSE held a report back from Cuba with a student recently returned who discussed Cuba's current 'Energy Revolution'. To get involved in support for socialist Cuba and raising money for the next RATB brigade and sound system. e-mail office@ratb.org.uk

Close down Guantanamo!

Illegally-occupied Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is a concentration camp where the US holds hundreds of prisoners incommunicado. In March, at an LSE FRFI society meeting, Clara Gutteridge from the Coalition against Guantanamo and Eric Allison, *Guardian* prison correspondent, spoke about brutality in imperialist goals. On 6 May, FRFI London activists held lively demonstration, with protesters dressed in symbolic orange jumpsuits, hooded and chained, to call for the closure of Guantanamo Bay concentration camp. Other FRFI comrades joined the London Guantanamo Campaign in a street event in Willesden. Comrades have also been on the streets in Durham and Newcastle highlighting the illegal occupation of Guantanamo Bay and calling for solidarity with the prisoners on hunger strike there.

Oppose political bans!

Meanwhile in Scotland on 3 May activists staged a protest outside Celtic Park Stadium opposing Glasgow City's Labour Council by-laws banning political images outside football grounds. Deeked out in Che Guevara T-shirts, flags and even an apron, as well as Palestine and Basque flags, we called for unity against political censorship. The football crowds were very supportive and the campaign will mobilise before the next season to prepare legal and public challenges to the ban and to spread the campaign beyond the grounds. We aim to organise a 'Hundred For Che' at Celtic Park on the match night nearest to the anniversary of Che's execution in Bolivia in October 1967. These by-laws are a blatant curtailment of political freedom and must be opposed. How better to do that than have a hundred folk deeked out in the image of revolutionary Che Guevara! Send your pledges and support for the campaign to scotlandratb@yahoo.co.uk



TCAR on the march in Tyneside

Events

LONDON

Saturday 10 June 12-5pm
Latin America and Cuba: national liberation and the struggle for socialism
LSE FRFI society dayschool
The New Theatre, E171, East Building, London School of Economics (LSE), Houghton Street, WC2 (tube: Holborn)

Wednesday 14 June 7pm
Ama's children: film on Palestine followed by discussion
LSE FRFI society
H103, Connaught House, LSE, Aldwych

Wednesday 5 July 7pm
Celebrate the Cuban Revolution
LSE FRFI society with Rock around the Blockade
S50, St Clement's Building, Houghton Street, LSE

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada
Demonstration outside M&S
Marble Arch end of Oxford Street W1

(nearest tube Marble Arch)
Every Saturday 12-3pm
FRFI street stall

For details call 020 7837 1688 or 07815 617 746 email london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

NORTH EAST

NEWCASTLE
Wednesdays 14 June and 5 July
10.30am-1pm Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR)
Picket of North Shields Immigration Reporting Centre
Norfolk Street, North Shield

Thursday 22 June 10.30am-1pm
National Day of Action Against Reporting Centres
North Shields Immigration Reporting Centre

Saturday 24 June 11am-5pm
Anti-imperialist Tribunal
With speakers on Congo, Iraq, Cuba, racism in Britain and more. Venue to be confirmed

Every Wednesday 7pm
TCAR Public meeting

Downstairs at the Amnesty Bookshop, Westgate Road
Every Saturday 12-2pm
FRFI street stall in either Newcastle or Durham

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

MANCHESTER

Saturday 3 June 12-3 pm
Anti-deportation stall/protest
Market Street, city centre

Saturday 17 June 12-3pm,
North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) anti-deportation action
Tuesday 20 June, 7.30pm
NWASDG organising meeting
Mount Street

Thursday 22 June 12-3pm
Big Noise demol Close Down Dallas Court!
Dallas Court Reporting Centre, South Langworthy Lane, Salford.
National day of action against immigration reporting centres

Sunday 25 June 7-10pm
Defend Eucharika and Timeyi fundraisers evening with Nigerian food and music
The Basement café, Lever Street, Manchester

For further details call 07816 547066
email manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com
visit www.manchesterfrfi.5u.com
Contact NWASDG on 07779 189 794

SCOTLAND

GLASGOW
Wednesday 14 June 7pm
Film: Injustice
Lecture Theatre 1, Boyd Orr Building, University of Glasgow
(Meet outside main entrance at 6.45pm)

Every Saturday 10am-12pm
Protest outside the Home Office
Immigration Centre
Brand Street, Ibrox
(nearest tube Cessnock)

For details call 07779 785 529
email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

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

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

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

Name

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Letter from Yarl's Wood

I am a single woman in detention with two small children and have been locked up for three and a half months. I can't give my name for fear of discrimination. Immigration should stop the system of picking children and families in the middle of the night or early in the morning and detaining them without telling them what is going on with their cases. Most children have been affected by the system because they are taken from their schools and locked up for months and months in detention. Mothers are depressed and traumatised by the way they are treated by immigration officers and escorts when they pick them from their homes and take them to the airport. Moreover, the condition in detention is not good because of the bad food served and the poor health care, which doesn't have the material equipment to treat children. There is a lack of paediatricians, health visitors or social workers and most young children miss their jabs because mothers have been locked here for years.
Name withheld

Stop jailing troops who refuse to occupy

Rumours within the armed forces claim that the number of troops going absent without leave (AWOL) has risen three-fold since the start of the Iraq war. On 22 May, as FRFI went to press, the Armed Forces Bill 2006 went to the Commons. This is a major redrafting of military law. Within it are sections which will repress any refusenik movement against occupation within the armed forces. There is a deafening silence from the media and those Lib Dem and Labour MPs who said they were against the war.

Section 8, for example, raises the maximum sentence and gives a new and tougher definition of desertion. It also contradicts the Geneva Convention by legitimising occupation and pre-emptive military action. It states that troops who go AWOL and intend to refuse to take part in a 'military occupation of a foreign country or territory' can be imprisoned for life! Yet international law through the Nuremberg Principle (1950)* puts a

responsibility on individual soldiers to refuse to obey illegal or immoral orders.

The eight month prison sentence received by Flight Lieutenant Kendal-Smith is a warning to all soldiers who would side with legitimacy and humanity against imperialist barbarism in the Middle East, by refusing to go to war. This fascist government is so paranoid it even arrests young women who read out the names of dead soldiers at the cenotaph. It's a war memorial. Isn't that what it's for? Isn't reading out the names of dead soldiers what you do at war memorials? For more information go to www.atease.org.uk

THOMAS ATKINS
London

Nuremberg Principle no 4: 'The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law.'

Turning a blind eye to corruption

Reading your comment on Tessa Jowell's ignorance of her family income (at least to the nearest £350,000) impels the question of how she can identify her assets so that they can be covered by her ministerial blind trust. The 'blind trust' is supposed to ensure the public has confidence that the minister is not consciously gaining from policy decisions and their effect upon those investments. Of course, the former Paymaster

General Geoffrey Robinson cheerfully stated that he had to keep an eye on his blind trust, when it was discovered that the trustee happened to be his next-door-neighbour-but-one. This does not sound much like a blind trust to me, but perhaps one could say that Jowell's is a 'double-blind' (or doubly-blind?) trust.

D SHEPHERD
North London

Labour Party, war party

On 29 April London FRFI comrades were doing an anti-war stall in Stratford in east London. As it was shortly before the local elections we were using our megaphone to put across the message that any vote for the Labour Party, whether in local or national elections, was effectively a vote to support the war in Iraq. We knew that Labour councils were sensitive to this so were pointing out that those councillors who were trying to get re-elected by saying 'ignore national policy; judge us on local issues' were doing themselves no favours either way, as their national policy is war in Iraq and their local policy the selling off of council houses and privatisation or destruction of services.

A double-decker bus full of Labour councillors and supporters came past canvassing for the election. Waving to the public, they were shocked to be met with loud chanting of 'Labour Party! War party!' Some Respect supporters canvassing for their candidates joined in with us.

The bus moved off but a few minutes later its passengers came by on foot, bedecked in their rosettes, handing out Labour Party leaflets. I was on the megaphone speaking about Labour Party racism, warmongering, greed and corruption. A smartly-dressed



Labour woman marched over and demanded I stop using the word 'corruption' as doing so was 'actionable'. I paid no attention and carried on, pointing out over the megaphone that she seemed particularly sensitive about the suggestion of corruption even though I had not mentioned it in connection to any specific council, councillor, MP, Minister or even Minister's husband. Embarrassed by the commotion we were making and the fact that members of the public were either indifferent or antagonistic to them, the Labour contingent slunk off. It was only then I learned that the angry woman who had shouted in my face was in fact the local MP Lyn Brown: a Labour apparatchik who used to be a local councillor, has been in parliament for a year and has never voted against the government.

CAREN LINSTONE
North London

Victory for Chagossian people

On Thursday 11 May 2006 the Chagos islanders won an important victory against the British government through a High Court ruling that they could return to their land, 40 years after being secretly forced out by the British government. The Chagossians are descendants from slaves shipped to the Indian Ocean islands by the French in 1776. Britain took over the islands, administered as part of its Mauritius colony. When Mauritius gained independence in 1968, Britain kept hold of the Chagos Islands as it had already agreed to a 50-year lease of Diego Garcia by the US for the establishment of a strategic military base. As part of the deal, Britain removed over 2,000 islanders, splitting up families and resettling them in Mauritius and the Seychelles where they are treated appallingly. It was Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson who

approved the expulsion of the entire population from the islands in 1969 (see FRFI 176).

In 2000 a High Court ruling gave the Chagossians the right to return, although not to Diego Garcia. It ruled that a 1971 Immigration Ordinance banning people without permits from entering or remaining on the colony was unlawful. But this decision was later overturned by the Labour government in 2004 by an Order in Council, which allows ministers to make decisions without the approval of parliament. Ten members of the Chagossian community in London spent 36 days sleeping outside the Houses of Parliament to draw attention to their plight in October 2004.

In the recent ruling the High Court condemned the British government's action to prevent the islanders return to their homes as

irrational and unlawful. The government has 28 days to appeal, which they are likely to do given that Diego Garcia has been used to launch bombing raids on Afghanistan and Iraq. Even if they don't appeal, the Chagossians still face many obstacles. Their homes were destroyed and they received little if any compensation.

These courageous people deserve our solidarity. They have demonstrated their solidarity for others opposing imperialism, joining Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! campaigning in support of Palestine and in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.

Down with US and British imperialism! Victory to the Chagos islanders!

FAYE ELFHEN
London

Forced eviction in Glasgow

At 10am on 11 May I witnessed the most brutal indictment of housing stock transfer that I hope I ever will see. Tam Brown, of 63 Cumlodan Drive, Maryhill, was evicted by two magistrates, a Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) apparatchik, five cops and two council men with sledgehammers. Tam had been a tenant for 32 years and has borne witness to the GHA's policy of running high-value social housing into the ground in order to sell off the land to property developers. Cumlodan Drive has some of the finest vistas in Glasgow.

Tam started to withhold rent payments in 2001 in protest against neglect of repairs. Scaffolding was left standing outside his block for two and a half years, forgotten after a repair on an external leakage. A drain at the bottom of the close was sunk too low and has been overflowing with stagnant water for three years. Work to replace the roof has been ongoing

at sporadic intervals for a year. The flat has had no cooker for one year and the walls are infested with damp.

Worst of all is the toilet. The flats in Cumlodan Drive were fitted six months ago with cut-price lavatories that cannot handle toilet paper or much else. Tam's toilet is literally overflowing with shite and has been for the best part of six months. No one has been round to repair it despite incessant phoning. His downstairs sitting room is swarming with flies attracted by the foul stench from above. Pensioners and children in the block are forced to live with the same indignity and catastrophic health hazard. There is a 34-year gap between the average life expectancy of Glasgow's poorest and richest citizens.

Tam obviously has no desire to continue living in the sordid mess that is a privately owned 'social' flat in Maryhill, but had offered to pay back his £6,000 rent arrears at £20/p/w on principle - on condition

that the flat be returned to habitable status. The GHA of course refused and Tam is now obliged to seek homeless accommodation at far greater cost to the taxpayer.

Only four representatives of other Glaswegian residents' groups showed up to defend the flat against the sheriff's officers and one was taken into custody for refusing to budge in his outrage at the inhuman neglect of all basic norms of decency and justice. Locals gathered in the street below and hurled insults and jeers at the assembled lackeys of the ruling class. Folk who seriously think that Britain is a decent, humane country with sixty million fat and happy punters should wake up and smell Tam's toilet.

More information on the Glasgow housing struggle can be found at georgeschalkboard.blogspot.com

WULLAE WICKLOW
Glasgow

EDO injunction smashed!

The draconian injunction taken out against the Smash Edo campaign in Brighton a year ago has finally been overturned, after a year in which the sinister activities of EDO and the active collusion of the Sussex police has been increasingly exposed in court.

EDO MBM is a wholly owned subsidiary of EDO Corp, a US-based arms multinational. EDO's military products include bomb racks, release clips and arming mechanisms for warplanes. It has contracts with the UK Ministry of 'Defence' and US arms giant Raytheon, as well as supplying products to Israel.

Sussex police have, at EDO's behest, used increasingly oppressive tactics to attempt to destroy our regular protests outside the EDO headquarters and demonstrations in Brighton city centre, making extensive use of Section 12 of the Public Order Act. However, by December 2005 three activists who had been convicted of Aggravated Trespass had their convictions overturned.

Shortly before this, EDO's lawyer found himself facing charges for professional negligence and unethical ways of collecting information on protesters.

EDO's new lawyer, was forced to admit that EDO lacked evidence of harassment, and attempted to use the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act, arguing that interfering with business counts as harassment, although he was unable to explain how this could apply retrospectively to events that took place between March 2004 and May 2005. By January 2006, David Jones, EDO Managing Director, jumped ship and resigned.

In February 2006, another case was dramatically dropped because the Crown Prosecution Service did not want to disclose secret information to the defence, arguing for Public Interest Immunity, used to protect the security of police informers and undercover officers. But they were overruled, at which point the CPS dropped the case.

Smash Edo spokesperson Andrew Beckett asked 'What information could be so controversial that a case that has dragged on for nearly a year should be dropped as soon as it might be made public?'

With this the injunction finally collapsed, with EDO forced to pay £200,000 in costs for the defendants.

The CPS then admitted that prosecution was 'no longer in the public interest' in a further eight cases. The total number of failed prosecutions is 24. EDO's total legal costs have come to £1,000,000. Smash EDO! will continue to protest against this vicious arms company.

ROBERT FROST
Manchester

FRFI apologises to the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) for omitting the name of their organisation from the report on the jointly-organised fundraising meal for Cuba in FRFI 189

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

It is abundantly clear to asylum seekers that the oppression they face in Britain has its roots in the same imperialist system that forced them to flee their home country in the first place. FRFI spoke to Ntuntumuna Mavuala an asylum seeker from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

FRFI: Can you tell us about your current situation?

NM: I launched a fresh asylum application last year and I still haven't heard anything from the Home Office. This is my fourth year since first claiming asylum in 2002, and I have been destitute without NASS support since 2004. I have been dispersed to the South East of England while my family is in the North East, yet they wouldn't accept me as my wife's dependant.

FRFI: Why do you think it's important for asylum seekers to organise?

NM: I think it's important for asylum seekers to be organised because the government is using the issue as a political scapegoat. They manipulate asylum and immigration laws, which are already racist, according to their political need. They treat people just as numbers, not as human beings. So as the problem is political, we need to oppose it with a political solution as well.

FRFI: What made you decide to get involved with FRFI?

NM: I recognise my struggle and the struggle of my country in the work the RCG is doing. I fled the oppression in my country, which is caused by Britain and its allies through our government. I was a leader of the student union of the main university back home, organised lots and lots of protests and negotiations between universities and government. After university I ended up running a voluntary organisation against human rights abuses which were happening daily. I came to Britain for safety, but I find myself in another oppression as black, as an asylum seeker, and as a working class man. I don't have any other choice than to carry on with my fight. The RCG is the only place for me to materialise this fight. As long as I am still breathing, I won't give up the fight.

Support asylum seekers in London – demonstrate at Communications House!

In Glasgow, Tyneside, Manchester and elsewhere, regular pickets of immigration reporting centres are ensuring that anyone working or living nearby is made aware that these are places of fear for asylum seekers. However the central London reporting centre at Old Street goes mostly unnoticed. A few demonstrations have taken place there, organised by No Borders and others in 2004 and, most recently, Global Women's Strike in April 2006, but there is currently no regular presence. FRFI London has therefore decided to initiate regular monthly demonstrations from June until September, after which we will hold a meeting of everyone who wants to be involved to assess progress and decide on future action.

Protest at UK Immigration Service, Communications House, 210 Old Street, London, EC1V 9BR (nearest tube: Old Street) Mondays 5 June, 3 July, 7 August, 4 September 1-2pm. For further information phone 020 7837 1688 or email london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

Protests and hunger strikes against immigration detention

Asylum seekers in Britain's immigration detention centres face daily racism, constant moves and physical ill-treatment ranging from cuts and bruises to fractures, sexual abuse and serious head injuries. These are people who have committed no crime. Sick of endless detention (some asylum seekers have been held for five years) and empty promises to investigate the brutality, resistance has intensified. In April, a hunger strike in Colnbrook near Heathrow Airport spread to at least three other detention centres. This solidarity frightened the racist Labour government and its media allies who moved quickly to repress, isolate and censor the protests.

CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.

On 8 April 2006, a No Borders demonstration took place outside Harmondsworth and Colnbrook. In a vain attempt to prevent detainees from witnessing this display of solidarity, they were not allowed to go near the windows, denied access to the exercise area and, when they refused to comply, were locked in their cells and beaten up. A hunger strike ensued with 120 refugees initially refusing food and

some refusing water. That night after lock-up 15 guards removed one detainee, Pastor Etim, who was accused of leading the hunger strike, to an isolation cell after stripping him naked, then moved him to Harmondsworth. Less than 24 hours later, there were over 150 hunger strikers across all four wings of Colnbrook, yet the Home Office claimed to *The Guardian* that only two detainees were on hunger strike.



Manchester demonstration against deportations, 15 April 2006

Ninety-seven detainees signed a statement challenging the legality of their detention, and set up a campaign 'Cry Freedom' to protest against the lack of automatic bail reviews and to challenge the reasons given for their detention and the quota-driven attitude of the Home Office. They said they were prepared to die rather than be deported. Sanctions were immediately placed on the hunger strikers, denying them access to the chapel, IT room, library or shop. Those who spoke to journalists were beaten up. In desperation at the resolve of the protesters, Home Office officials met with Colnbrook detainees, promised to look at all their cases individually, and convinced some to quit the strike, whilst others were being forced to eat.

On 17 April, 125 immigration prisoners, including some as young as 15 at Haslar Removal Centre, Portsmouth,

began a hunger strike in solidarity with the Colnbrook protests and against conditions at Haslar. They staged a peaceful sit-in in the exercise yard and refused to go inside. Staff locked them out and called in a specialist Prison Service riot squad to search them and lock them up. During the night 40 detainees were removed from Haslar to Colnbrook. Detained asylum seekers condemned the length of time they spent in custody, in a centre that was dirty and unheated, with no doors on cubicles. 'We have no privacy and people steal our belongings...this place is not fit for dogs.'

The Home Office was forced to admit the hunger strike was taking place but said it was not linked to those at other detention centres. On 17 April, Nigerian asylum seeker Amos Onokare Aljaibo was brutally beaten by guards at Haslar for speaking to *The Guardian*, leaving severe swelling on his hands, knees and behind his right ear, a tender larynx and nerve damage to his hands. He was punched, pushed to the floor, choked and kicked unconscious by three custody officers. He was then transferred to Colnbrook while unconscious and denied access to a doctor for 10 days (*The Guardian*, 1 May 2006).

On 18 April, over 300 detainees in Harmondsworth detention centre, next to Colnbrook, held a mass one-day food refusal in solidarity with the protests in Colnbrook and Haslar. On 20 April, around 20 Kurdish detainees facing deportation to Turkey began a hunger strike in Harmondsworth. By 23 April, the Colnbrook detainees had ended their 15-day hunger strike, following hollow promises of a meeting with a Home Office minister. Four days later, after the official didn't show up, 50 of them resumed the hunger strike and continued until 12 May 2006.

Scotland: resistance grows as repression continues



State repression of asylum seekers can intensify only so much before the fear and weakness wrought by the brutality of dawn raids and deportations gives way to anger, organisation and resistance. In April and May around a dozen families were dragged from their homes, including those with small children. But all of the last five families to have been snatched and incarcerated in detention centres have been returned to Glasgow following successful campaigns.

Mobilising around the demands of an end to dawn raids and deportations, and the right to work, hundreds of asylum seekers and supporters have taken to the streets of Glasgow in recent months in a series of protests and marches. Unity – the Scottish Union

of Asylum Seekers has been at the forefront of this new movement. Formed in February this year (see FRFI 190), the advanced nature of this organisation is being demonstrated time and again.

On 8 April, Unity organised a march of around 400 asylum seekers and supporters from the Home Office Immigration Centre on Brand Street to Glasgow city centre. They were undeterred by the Labour-controlled council who attempted to ban the march and the police who persuaded Glasgow Trades Hall into banning the meeting that was to end the march. The RCG had a lively contingent on the march and the 'Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!' banner was proudly carried by Algerian and Turkish asylum seekers.

Steps are also being taken towards the creation of wider working class unity. In response to the deportation of the Argavan family to Turkey in February 2006, asylum seekers and friends and supporters from the working class area of Cranhill, Glasgow demonstrated on 15 April. Members of the Scottish Parliament, Rosie Kane (Scottish Socialist Party) and Sandra White (Scottish Nationalist Party) spoke alongside an asylum seeker representative from Unity. The RCG gave a message of solidarity, focusing on the link between the British Labour Party's war against the oppressed people of Iraq and attacks on asylum seekers and workers in Britain.

With the support of Unity, FRFI has called a further demonstration on Saturday 27 May in Glasgow city centre, demanding the right to work and an end to dawn raids. The only way to win the just demands of asylum seekers is through building a movement of consistent protest, willing to mobilise on the streets. Joseph Eskovitch

Organising to defend asylum seekers in Tyneside

Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) was formed in November 2005 by asylum seekers, refugees, and local groups and individuals. FRFI has been playing a major role in the organisation of TCAR. TCAR has held regular pickets of North Shields Immigration Service Reporting Centre and organised two prominent demonstrations: a 'Right to Work' demonstration in Newcastle on 11 March and a 'Big Noise Demo' against detentions and deportations outside North Shields Reporting Centre on 5 April.

On 4 May at 6am Mariam Nandawula, a Ugandan member of TCAR living in Woodlands Crescent was snatched from her home together with her five-year-old son Jonah by around 10 immigration police and taken to Yarl's Wood detention centre. She was told she would be deported two days later. Woodlands Crescent is on an estate

that was due for demolition, but was re-opened to house asylum seeker families. FRFI had recently done a door-to-door paper sale there to mobilise for a public meeting on racism, which several residents then attended, subsequently becoming involved in TCAR and beginning to organise on the estate to defend against attacks, both from individual racists and the state. Another member of TCAR on Mariam's estate saw the raid and sounded the alarm. After two days of work and phone calls by hundreds of people, the airline KLM made the decision not to carry Mariam on the scheduled flight. Following this, a new solicitor was found and a fresh asylum claim is now being lodged for Mariam and Jonah.

Tyneside Community Action for Refugees can be contacted at: tyneside-carn@yahoo.co.uk