

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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Washington, 27 January 2007: demonstrators march to oppose the war

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IMPERIALISTS BUNKER DOWN

In December 2006, following the defeat of the Republican majorities in Congress and with the critical report of the Iraq Study Group (ISG) pending, there was much speculation in the bourgeois media that the US and Britain would begin to withdraw from Iraq. A US Marine Corp Intelligence Report stated, 'the social and political situation has deteriorated to such a point that US and Iraqi troops are no longer capable of defeating the insurgency'. Colin Powell, President Bush's ex-Secretary of State admitted the US army was 'about broken'. Only 9% of the US population believed the war could be won; 70% wanted the new Congress to withdraw troops within six months. Yet, on 10 January President Bush announced he would be sending an additional 21,500 US soldiers. Why did this happen?

The imperialists created the Iraqi government as a democratic veneer for their occupation so as to gain international legality for their oil contracts and other acts of piracy. The puppet government dutifully carried out most of their masters' demands. For

instance, recently Prime Minister Al Maliki asked the United Nations to renew the mandate for the imperialist occupation for a further five years, before the Iraqi parliament had even considered the matter and after the US and Britain had pushed through the

motion a month early. However, the problem for the imperialists is that the puppet government cannot unite and lead the country the way they would like. The Iraqi elections exacerbated sectarian fears and even parts of the 'ruling' coalition are opposed to the occupation. Moqtada Al Sadr, leader of the Mehdi army, temporarily withdrew his supporters in protest at Al Maliki's talks with President Bush and is organising an anti-occupation grouping within the Iraqi parliament.

The reality is that the Iraqi government exists only within the heavily fortified Green Zone of Baghdad. Having used militias and sectarian violence to help them terrorise the Iraqi people and divide the resistance, the imperialists found the Iraqi police and army dominated by those militias and incapable or unwilling to take on a national security role and so give some relief to the occupying forces. Andrew Cordesman of the Centre for Strategic International Studies said: 'To put it bluntly, the US government must stop lying about the true nature

of Iraq readiness and Iraqi force development. There are not "more than 100 units" ready but probably less than a third of that.' Most significantly, the Iraqi people's resistance to the occupation has continued to grow. Polls show the overwhelming majority of both Shias and Sunnis support attacks on US and British troops and want them out of their country. The massive Operation Together Forward by imperialist and puppet forces in the summer failed to secure Baghdad, leading some in the US military and diplomatic service to suggest that a military solution was not possible. By the autumn the war had cost \$400 billion and on 31 December claimed its 3,000th US soldier's life. Approval of Bush's handling of the war slumped to a low of 27%.

US ruling class demands changes

Against this background, sections of the US ruling class decided the war could not continue in the same way. It threatened the wider global interests

of US imperialism. The resistance of the Iraqi people was, as Colonel Douglas McGregor put it, '[exposing] the myth of American military omniscience, of limitless economic resources harnessed to a perpetual "crusade for democracy"' and was inspiring further resistance to imperialism in Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon and Iran. Those behind the ISG were not concerned with the occupation of Iraq, however, only with the fact that the US appeared to be losing. They never intended to provide an exit strategy for US forces. On the contrary, the ISG report asserts the need for 'considerable military presence in the region with our still significant force in Iraq and with our powerful air, ground and naval deployments in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, as well as an increased presence in Afghanistan'. That US forces would stay in Iraq was never in doubt. James Baker, co-chair of the ISG, said, 'Our report makes clear that we are going to have

continued on page 6

No consent to Labour imperialism

'There are two types of nations similar to ours today. Those who do war fighting and peacekeeping and those who have, effectively, except in the most exceptional circumstances, retreated to the peacekeeping alone. Britain does both. We should stay that way. But how do we gain the consent to do it?'

'What we face is not a criminal conspiracy or even a fanatical but fringe terrorist organisation. We face something more akin to revolutionary communism in its early and most militant phase. It is global... So from the perspective of our Armed Forces, how do we define this new situation? The battle will be long. It has taken a generation for the enemy to grow. It will, in all probability take a generation to defeat...'

'The frontiers of our security no longer stop at the Channel. What happens in the Middle East affects us. What happens in Pakistan; or Indonesia; or in the attenuated struggles for territory and supremacy in Africa for example, in Sudan or Somalia. The new frontiers for our security are global. Our Armed Forces will be deployed in the lands of other nations far from home, with no immediate threat to our territory, in environments and in ways unfamiliar to them... They will usually fight alongside other nations, in alliance with them; notably, but probably not exclusively with the USA... There is a case for Britain in the early 21st century, with its imperial strength behind it, to slip quietly, even graciously into a different role. I do not share that case...' Tony Blair, 12 January 2007

Blair's speech spells out the position of the British state – a continuation into the new century of war, plunder and brutality. The veil of democracy, freedom and winning 'hearts and minds' is now almost worn away as the US/British war machine goes into overdrive. The resistance in Iraq has dealt an almost



Warmonger Blair rallies the troops in Afghanistan

knock-out punch to imperialism's plans in the Middle East. As a result the occupation armies are lashing out, with 22,000 new US troops planned to join the fold. The atrocities committed against the Iraqi people are set to escalate further in a last ditch battle as US/British imperialism attempt to salvage the situation (see pp1, 6 and 7).

The Bush administration is like a defeated gambler, losing and losing but putting more and more in, desperately hoping to recoup losses and win the jackpot. But many in the US ruling class are divided and angry about the ongoing Iraqi quagmire. They see other imperialist powers threatening their hegemony and need the freedom to move and act around the globe.

The main goal of imperialist countries is to plunder new resources and dominate new markets in order to sustain their wealth. Within each imperialist nation, the ruling class uses a small part of the superprofits it extracts from oppressed nations to buy off a section of the working class. By creating a privileged upper layer in the working class and giving it a stake in the system the ruling class is better able to achieve social peace. Lenin developed this theory from Marx and Engels to explain why the leaders of social democracy ended up supporting their own ruling class on the outbreak of the First Imperialist War in 1914. The consequences of this division for the US working class today are addressed in the article

Labour Aristocracy: mythmakers and their mistakes (pp8-9).

Meanwhile the Zionist regime continues its brutal treatment of the Palestinian people. Imperialism's strategy is to create conditions of civil war by arming Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah movement so that it can take on the democratically-elected Hamas government that represents the interests of the majority of Palestinians (p5). In Abbas imperialism has found a willing ally in its drive to defeat the liberation struggle.

'Five Minutes to Midnight' (p10) deals with imperialism's need to maintain its nuclear hegemony and the terrible dangers this brings for humanity. If necessary imperialism will use its weapons of mass destruction to maintain global domination – this is the lesson of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is not just the possibility of nuclear warfare that raises the spectre of Domsday but the systematic and ongoing destruction of the environment. Carbon offset schemes are the latest pretence invented by capitalism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But rather than help save the planet they are just another means for a few to make some money and a few more to appease their conscience (p3).

The only way to save the environment and the planet is to build socialism. The masses in Latin America are leading the way. The re-election of Hugo Chavez's government in Venezuela is accelerating the revolutionary process, bringing greater gains for the majority of the Venezuelan people (p11). This drive towards socialism in Latin America is inspired by the Cuban revolution which continues to go from strength to strength (p12).

In Britain too the oppressed are fighting back. Detainees at the notorious Harmondsworth Detention Centre rose up in protest against the inhuman conditions of their incarceration (p13). Asylum seekers, who live in constant fear of being snatched in the middle of the night, detained and deported to despotic regimes where they face possible torture and death, have begun to organise and resist (p16).

It is our duty to take a stand with all those fighting against imperialism, both at home and abroad. On page 14 of this paper you will find our forthcoming events around the country. Have a read, get informed, get angry and then come and join us in action.

Nationalists divide over Sinn Fein support for British policing

On 22 January, a report by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Nuala O'Loan graphically confirmed that the activities of loyalist death squads were assisted and sponsored by the Special Branch of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and its successor the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The nationalist people have known for decades about this collusion, which was and remains an integral part of Britain's war machine in Ireland. The report was published at the time that the Republican Movement is being moved by Sinn Fein towards accepting British policing in the north of Ireland. PAUL MALLON reports.

The report centred on the activities of the north Belfast Special Branch agent and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) member Mark Haddock, who was protected for his involvement in up to 16 murders and, between 1993 and 2003, paid at least £80,000. It revealed that records were destroyed, preventing 'senior police officers from being held to account', and stated that the UVF 'could not have operated as they did without the knowledge and support at the highest levels of the RUC and PSNI'. This report, along with others, confirms Britain's support for death squads in Ireland.

Yet this is the police force the specially convened Sinn Fein party Ard Fheis (conference) in Dublin on 28 January chose to support. Sinn Fein will now appoint representatives to the Policing Board and the District Policing Partnership Boards. Throughout the years of anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland the nationalist community has refused to support the police. Instead, in the face of police corruption and bigotry, nationalist areas were self-policed and regulated by the liberation movement.

In October 2006 the British and Irish governments brokered the St Andrews Agreement, which set out a timetable for the restoration of devolved powers and in which Republican acceptance of British policing would be in place by the time of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in March 2007.

By their friends...

Writing in *The Irish Times* on 8 January 2007, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated, 'Sinn Fein has demonstrated one of the most remarkable examples of leadership I have come across in modern politics...' And David Ervine, then leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, political wing of the UVF, wrote: 'The endgame was always going to shake up the republican movement and its supporters. It is, after all, the final acceptance by republicans of Northern

Ireland as a viable and integral part of the UK... if Adams pulls it off at the Ard Fheis, a real line in history will have been drawn.' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 9 January 2007)

Economic changes

The policing debate has indeed shaken up the Republican Movement and revealed profound divisions within the nationalist community. On the one hand are those with a stake in society, boosted by Sinn Fein's claims to be building an 'Ireland of equals'. On the other are those working class nationalists who have received little of the 'peace dividend', who do not feel represented in the political process and who are disillusioned by bourgeois politics. Thousands of people have disappeared from the electoral register, forcing Sinn Fein into a new registration campaign.

At the end of 2006 the average house price in the north was £180,128 – up 32.1% on 2005. In Republican West Belfast house prices have risen on average £600 a week in the past year. This growth fuels the inequality in the nationalist community that underlies present divisions on policing.



The McCord family whose complaint over the death of their son led to the exposure of RUC collusion with death squads

In the week prior to the Ard Fheis the Irish government unveiled a multimillion-pound programme of investment in the north, spanning the next five years; the timing of this announcement was designed to strengthen the hand of the new Irish middle class, Sinn Fein's constituency. It is speculated that up to £800 million will become available to the north from Dublin should power-sharing be restored.

This expresses the changing economic fortunes in Ireland: the economy of the Twenty-Six Counties has been transformed through foreign investment and privatisation while the Six Counties remains largely dependent upon state subsidy from London.

Growing opposition

A series of large meetings has taken place attracting open opposition to Sinn Fein under the title 'Policing – A Bridge Too Far?'. They have been attended by supporters of Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the 32 County Sovereignty Committee and Republican Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein is most concerned

about organised opposition to its rule within nationalist areas, and tried to label the public meetings as gathering of proscribed groups aimed at continuing the armed struggle. It then accused 'dissidents' of plotting to assassinate Sinn Fein leaders. Neither story had any basis in reality.

Not all of Sinn Fein is persuaded that collaborating with the British-imposed policing structure is the way forward. Six members of the 24-strong Sinn Fein Stormont parliamentary team have resigned in the past two months, as have some branches and long-standing members. On 3 January, former Sinn Fein Assembly member John Kelly, a founder of the Provisional IRA, and Brendan Hughes, a former Long Kesh hunger strike leader, said 'Sinn Fein is pursuing a strategy of threat against dissenting voices'. On 23 January a group of former Republican political prisoners announced the setting up of 'Ex-POWs and Concerned Republicans Against RUC/PSNI'.

A number of Republican candidates have announced they will be standing in opposition to Sinn Fein's support for the PSNI in the 7 March elec-

tions. In Derry, Peggy O'Hara, the 76-year-old mother of INLA volunteer Patsy O'Hara who died on hunger strike in 1981, will stand as an independent Republican. She said 'We didn't recognise the police then and we won't recognise them now.'

The Unionist veto remains at the heart of the Six County statelet, fully backed by British imperialism – Sinn Fein's reformist strategy of engagement with such forces will come up against severe tests in the period ahead. The nature of British rule in Ireland is changing and with it so too must the resistance to that rule. Days after the St Andrews Agreement, M15 announced plans for a new £20 million base outside Belfast. The British war in Ireland is not over. Whether the growing opposition to Sinn Fein's endorsement to policing proves to be significant remains unclear. One thing however remains certain – British imperialism has not left Ireland. For so long as this relationship remains it is the duty of communists in Britain to oppose Britain's occupation of Ireland.

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FRFI 2007 Fund Drive – £10,000

We are appealing once again to our readers to help us fund the continued development of our political work. Throughout 2006 we maintained our solidarity work with the Palestinian people; we built vibrant campaigns such as Tyneside Community Action for Refugees in support of asylum seekers; and we maintained our support for the Iraqi resistance in our regular street work.

We need newer technology to support this work; we need to pay higher rent and rates. We need your support to meet this year's £10,000 target – please give generously.

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

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Chaos and panic – hallmarks of health reforms

Saving money not safeguarding services

The end of the financial year is fast approaching and the emphasis in the NHS is to ensure that the books are balanced. Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt announced at the beginning of 2007 that the NHS is on track to break even within three months, but that jobs would have to be cut. Such job losses are being described as 'natural wastage' whilst Hewitt claims that jobs aren't being filled because the NHS is 'becoming more efficient'. However, 20,000 nurses and other NHS staff will have lost their jobs by the end of this March, and a further 40,000 jobs will go in 2007/08.

Workforce chaos

The NHS will not have the clinical staff it needs to deliver an effective service. This is the message from the draft of the government's NHS pay and workforce strategy for 2008-2011 leaked to the *Health Service Journal* in early January. The document predicts shortages of 14,000 nurses, 1,200 GPs and 1,100 junior doctors by 2010, but a surplus of 3,200 hospital consultants and 16,000 allied health professionals, healthcare scientists and technicians. Cuts in nurse training posts coupled with the retirement of a large number of

nurses will be the cause of the nursing shortfall.

Market-driven health policy

Hewitt reassures us that 'the NHS has been saved, but it still needs to be transformed to ensure that it will survive for another generation'. This transformation involves more private sector healthcare provision with guaranteed profits where competition replaces cooperation between departments and services. Planning and allocation of resources based on need does not even come into the picture as short-term measures predominate.

Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTC) are making profits by taking the most profitable and least risky cases off waiting lists. With the 'payment by results' system this means that the ISTCs take

money out of the NHS, ISTCs have preferential long-term contracts guaranteeing them full payment regardless of how few people they actually treat. Now the government is proposing Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS), private companies delivering clinical assessment, diagnostics and even treatment. The claim is that these will cut waiting times for referral, but the ICATS will send patients to treatment providers run by the same company to maximise their profits. Meanwhile hospital referrals by GPs are being reduced in an attempt to cut expenditure. Almost 70% of GPs are having their referrals to hospitals cut, with some facing cuts of up to 20%.

In the world of 'payment by results', NHS financial advisers are warning that hospitals may 'deliberately' carry out too

much work to generate extra income. In a development that beggars belief, a system of fines is proposed for hospitals which treat too many people too soon. Recently, Ipswich Hospital Trust aimed to improve its economic situation by treating people faster, but the Primary Care Trust (PCT) refused to pay up and the hospital found itself £2.5m worse off. Under the new regulations, PCTs will be able to fine hospitals up to 2% of the value of their contract for treating more than the agreed number of patients. However, from 2008, PCTs will also be able to fine hospitals if they don't treat people fast enough and miss the government target of treating people within 18 weeks of referral from their GP.

A healthcare system cannot provide healthcare to all on an equitable basis if it is run for profit, with decisions about service provision being financially driven. Current cutbacks are demoralising staff, driving wedges between departments in hospitals, between hospital and community-based services, and are beginning to affect people's trust in those taking clinical decisions about their care. Now is the time for collective action by all those on the front-line of delivering health care.

Hannah Callier



'Respect' – a crackdown on the working class

Since 1997 the British state's armoury of oppressive laws against young, working class people and their families has grown. These now include warning letters, behaviour contracts, dispersal orders, fixed penalty notices and, most notoriously, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). The creation of a 'Respect' Task Force within the Home Office in January 2006 indicates that the existing draconian legislation is only the beginning.

ASBOs

ASBOs, the jewel in Labour's police-state crown, can be handed out for offences including 'harassment', vandalism, littering, flyposting and begging. People can be banned from areas of their own neighbourhoods, from wearing certain clothes, from hanging around with certain people and from using certain words. Along with the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act – under which 17,000 people have been given on-the-spot fines – and CRASBOs (Criminally Related Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) – which account for over 70% of ASBOs and have made 'naming and shaming' of 'criminals' by police in communities and press a common practice – these measures represent a concerted drive to keep down young working class

people. According to the Policy Research Bureau, the average age of those receiving ASBOs is 16 and many have been served on children as young as 10. ASBOs are racist, with a disproportionate number imposed on young people of black or Asian origin. Other victims of ASBOs have included prostitutes, Travellers, people with severe mental illnesses and those with Asperger's, Tourette's and learning difficulties.

Between 2001 and 2005 9,853 ASBOs were imposed in England and Wales, mainly in areas with some of the highest levels of poverty and deprivation. 'ASBO capital' Manchester leads the way, with 1,237 imposed up to December 2005. The city has the lowest number of people in employment in England. Regions with more affluent populations, on the other hand, have the lowest number of ASBOs, such as Wiltshire (52) and Surrey (110). The latest statistics, due in the first quarter of this year, are expected to continue the acceleration of recent years: in the first year the number issued was 104; in 2002 426 and by 2005 there were 4,060.

'Respect'

Now the Labour government has appointed an anti-social behaviour 'tsar', Louise Casey, the government's 'Respect Coordinator'. In response to

recent criticism from sections of the ruling class that ASBOs 'don't work', following a report that 55% of those given an order don't comply with its conditions, Casey blamed the youth: 'I'm not surprised by the breach rates, when you are dealing with such criminal groups of people...kids who are breaching ASBOs are breaching everything else as well... It is not the failure of the ASBOs, it is the failure of getting the offending behaviour of that young person under control. That is a wider debate for the Home Office to have. This small minority who are in the "super-criminal" groups are breaching everything under the sun.'

Casey's job is to make it clear to Labour's middle class supporters that the government's priority is to protect them from Britain's dispossessed and to take care of 'the residents in the communities. Their voice needs to be heard a lot louder... We've got to take action.' Echoing Tony Blair and other Labour leaders: 'My parents would have been astounded by some of the wealth and choices that many of us have – but we can't walk away from those who don't enjoy those choices... We can only have liberty and live without fear if we are secure in the knowledge that rules are there to make us safe.'

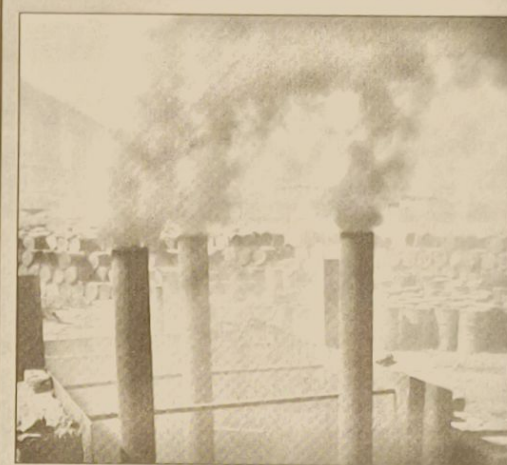
Casey is calling for a 'wide

debate' on how to strengthen the police and councils. There are new plans to give councils powers to force compulsory parenting courses on parents of 'problem' children. The 'tsar' feels that 'anybody who has got children who are behaving anti-socially should be offered a parenting course. If they won't take that, we've got to consider whether we have [to force them to undergo] parenting orders.'

Alongside this Home Secretary John Reid announced that £4m would be spent on 'supernannies' across England to give 'advice' to working class families in 77 local councils by the end of March. So, apparently, it is not enough to punish youths for the social situation that they grow up in. Now Labour wants to tell families how to bring up their children in the first place.

The government has approached town halls asking them to sign up to be 'Respect areas' – to agree to a crackdown on 'anti-social' neighbourhoods in exchange for extra funds and resources from the Home Office. Forty local authorities have now been selected on the basis of criteria of deprivation and high levels of street crime as well as truancy, exclusion from school and other factors. The attack on the working class continues.

Louis Brehony



Labour on climate change: greenwash and spin

In response to criticisms of his personal environmental record Tony Blair has paid £90 to a carbon offset company to compensate for the environmental impact of his Christmas holiday in Barbados. In doing so he was contributing to one of Britain's growth industries, with the Britain-based Carbon Neutral Company reporting an annual turnover of £2.7 million during 2006, while reaffirming the Labour government's bankrupt approach to climate change.

Much like the sale of indulgences by the medieval church, carbon offset schemes allow individuals and businesses to relieve their guilt for CO₂ emissions by paying a sum of money calculated in proportion to the size of the environmental sin. After a commission is taken this money is invested in a project to remove or prevent the equivalent amount of CO₂ from being produced elsewhere. There are now at least 23 offset companies based in the UK and the USA, managing projects that range from planting trees in India to installing energy saving light bulbs in hotels in Jamaica. Whatever else can be said for them, they are succeeding in one crucial area – making money. The industry had a combined turnover of £60 million in 2006, which is predicted to rise to £480 million by 2009.

Serious doubts about the methods used to calculate the positive effect of offset schemes have led to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ordering the Scottish and Southern Energy Group to stop making claims about 'neutralising' its customers' emissions, while a parliamentary select committee has been set up to investigate the many criticisms levelled at the carbon offset industry.

However, the real problem with offset schemes is more fundamental than concerns over the efficacy of this or that method of removing or avoiding emissions. Carbon

offset schemes promote the pernicious idea that stressed-out business executives can continue taking weekend breaks in New York as long as they pay for enough energy saving light bulbs to be given to peasants in Honduras.

The reality is that if unnecessary consumption continues to grow, as the needs of capital dictate, then not only will we very quickly run out of ways to offset our emissions, but we will find it is too late to make the economic, social and technological changes necessary to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

As Kevin Smith, researcher at Carbon Trade Watch, points out, offset schemes and the market solutions culture that they are a part of, only serve to divert people from the real task at hand: 'There are no offset schemes that encourage individuals to engage in collective action to bring about wider structural change. Offset schemes place the onus on individuals acting in isolation from others, and thus inhibit their political effectiveness.' (*Green Left Weekly*, 12 January 2007)

In Britain, Sir Terry Leahy, Chief Executive of Tesco, has called for the green movement to become 'a mass movement in green consumption'. At the same time British oil companies continue to destroy the environment in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, socialist Cuba has been recognised by the environmental charity WWF as the only country that combines a developed quality of life with a sustainable per-capita carbon footprint. 2006 was designated Cuba's 'Year of the Energy Revolution' and saw a range of energy-saving measures implemented, including the mandatory installation of government-provided energy-saving light bulbs at homes throughout the island. Under the twisted logic of the offset companies they would have sold the emissions that have been avoided as a result.

Sam Rae

SOMALIA Imperialists scramble for oil

CHARLES CHINWEIZU

Between 8 and 10 January 2007 the US bombed villages in the Lower Juba region of southern Somalia near the Kenyan border, killing almost 100 civilians including many children, some burned beyond recognition. The bombings were launched from neighbouring Djibouti by the Joint Combined Task Force Horn of Africa, comprising US Marines, Special Operations Forces and a naval task force whose primary mission has been training regional East African armies ostensibly to fight 'Islamist terrorist groups'. British PM Blair supported the bombing.

The assault continued US imperialism's policy in the oil-rich and strategically important Horn of Africa. The US claimed it was targeting the Al Qaida leadership in the region, including three men said to have masterminded the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. On 11 January, the US confirmed that all three suspects had survived. The US has never provided any credible evidence of Al Qaida's presence in Somalia – the 'Islamic terrorists' story is a cover for its real goals – to prevent an Islamic government and to obtain a foothold in a highly strategic area of the world via a client regime.

War in Somalia and the rise of the UIC

After the US-backed Siad Barre government fell in 1991, the US and Italy invaded Somalia to restore a puppet regime and protect imperialist interests. By the time they were forced out in 1994, 10,000 Somalis had been killed. Photographs showed the murder, rape



Ethiopian troops in Mogadishu, fighting on behalf of the imperialists

and torture of Somali civilians by Italian soldiers. Rival warlords, big businessmen employing clan-based militias, armed and funded by Italy, the US and Britain, mainly through Ethiopia, Yemen, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, took Somalia over and destroyed it.

There have been 14 attempts by the imperialists to set up a client regime in Somalia since 1991 – the most recent, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was 'elected' in Kenya in October 2004. It was not able to enter Somalia until 26 February 2006 when it met in a grain warehouse in Baidoa. The TFG is based on clan lines, with Somalia's four biggest clans each getting 61 parliamentary seats, and an alliance of minority clans 31 seats, thus perpetuating ethnic divisions. The TFG includes the very warlords who have ruined Somalia over the last 15 years such as Hussein Mohamed Farrah Aydid, a former US marine, now

Minister of the Interior, Musa Sudi Yalahwo, Minister of Commerce and its President, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, implicated in extra-judicial killings. The TFG has been recognised by the US, UN and EU but not by the Somali people.

In February 2006, the US secretly set up the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT), a CIA-funded alliance of Somali warlords. The US channelled up to \$150,000 a month to the ARPCT, which included known terrorist Mohamed Omar Habeb as well as Sudi Yalahwo. On 6 June 2006 the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) defeated the TFG and its forces, confining it to Baidoa, and drove the ARPCT from Mogadishu and most of Somalia. On 16 June the US Navy's 5th Fleet, patrolling off Somalia, picked up the fleeing Yalahwo. Others fled to Ethiopia.

A number of Islamic political groups established the first Islamic Sharia

courts in Somalia in 1996 and combined in 2002 to form the politically disparate UIC. With their victory the UIC brought a peace and security to Somalia unheard of in 15 years, winning them support from most Somalis. However, on 17 June 2006, 300 Ethiopian soldiers invaded Somalia with US support. On 20 July thousands more troops crossed the border. Ethiopian and US forces have 'a close working relationship'. Ethiopia has received nearly \$20 million in US military aid since 2002. Advisers from the Guam National Guard have been training Ethiopians in infantry skills at two camps in Ethiopia. By 24 December 2006, some 30,000 Ethiopian troops as well as US Special Forces and CIA operatives were inside Somalia. It was the third time Ethiopia had 'officially' invaded Somalia since 1993*. Britain and the US actively support Ethiopia and the repressive regime of Meles Zenawi. Zenawi rigged the 2005 Ethiopian elections and his security forces murdered 193 people who protested against the fraud. 80,000 others were arrested to quell the protests.

On 6 December 2006, the UN Security Council approved US-drafted Resolution 1725 calling for the deployment of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and African Union (AU) peacekeepers to Somalia to establish 'peace and stability'. It also authorised lifting the UN arms embargo. The intention is to allow US-armed and trained Kenyan, Ugandan and Rwandan troops, responsible for genocide in DR-Congo, to complete the work begun by Ethiopia – propping up the puppet TFG. On 28 December, the UIC were driven from Mogadishu, melting away without a fight, they said to prevent bloodshed.

The TFG and despised warlords are now back in Mogadishu. The UIC intend to launch a guerrilla insurgency against the imperialist-backed occupying troops. Since war erupted in Mogadishu in February 2006, hundreds have been killed and thousands wounded – many of them civilians. The fact that Somalia at the time was suffering the worst drought in 45 years with 1.4 million people facing starvation was of no concern to the imperialists.

Somali resources and imperialist rivalry

Somalia is just across the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Gulf of

Aden and overlooks the daily passage of oil tankers and warships to and from the Middle East. A quarter of the world's oil production passes through the narrow Straits of the Bab Al Mandeb, one of the world's seven 'oil transit choke points'. In addition, Somalia, rich in uranium, oil and natural gas, mostly unexploited, sits in the middle of the oil-rich East and Horn of Africa. Somalia has 200 billion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves and is likely to have oil.

With political instability potentially affecting oil supplies from Latin America and the Middle East, African oil has grown in strategic importance. The continent has become a battleground for imperialists scrambling to control oil, gas and other types of energy. 'Africa has a clear role to play in energy security for future generations,' according to Shell's general manager for gas and power in South Africa (*East African Standard*, 15 November 2006). Hence imperialism's eagerness to control Somalia.

The US bombing raids in southern Somalia exposed imperialist rivalries. On 9 January, Italy's Deputy Foreign Minister criticised the bombing as a 'grave intervention...[the] dialogue and negotiations that we have vigorously requested should resume and take the place of arms'. The next day a French Foreign Ministry spokesman said that the raids 'complicate the situation'.

This criticism had nothing to do with concern for Somalis and more to do with oil. Since 1986, US oil corporations and Shell have carved up Somalia between them with oil concessions, leaving Italy's Agip and France's Total as minor players; they have been trying to get back. In February 2001 Total signed an exploration agreement for the Indian Ocean off southern Somalia. The US has accused Italy of funneling arms to Jowhar-based warlords through Ethiopia despite a UN ban. Italy denies this, saying it was 'going with the centre of gravity' (*The Economist*, 14 December 2005). Britain and other EU countries continue to fund these terrorists too.

* Ethiopian troops crossed into Somalia in 1996 to supply militias in the border regions with arms. In 2002, former Somali military officials admitted they were trained and armed by Ethiopia to 'terrorise the entire city of Mogadishu'.

Imperialism's global web of terror

CAT WIENER

11 January 2007 marked a shameful anniversary: it is five years since the first detainees, hooded and shackled, were transferred from Afghanistan to the US naval base at Guantanamo in occupied Cuba. They were the first of more than 750 to pass through what has been described by human rights lawyers and activists as 'a US Devil's Island' and 'the gulag of our times'. The US immediately designated the detainees 'enemy combatants' outside US jurisdiction, to whom the provisions of the Geneva Convention and the laws of *habeas corpus* did not apply. Five years on, the name Guantanamo is synonymous with the annihilation of human and legal rights.

In May 2006 the United Nations demanded the immediate closure of Guantanamo. In June, the US Supreme Court ruled that military commissions (kangaroo courts set up to try the detainees) violate US and international law and that the Geneva Conventions do apply. But Guantanamo remains open for business

and in December 2006, the US military started transferring its 400 remaining prisoners – at least four of them children – to its brand-new \$30m concrete-and-steel high security facility, Camp 6. In November, President Bush signed into law the Military Commissions Act, stripping US courts of jurisdiction to hear appeals from any foreign national held as an 'enemy combatant' in US custody anywhere in the world and authorising the President to establish new military commissions. The administration is also taking action to have all pending *habeas corpus* petitions filed on behalf of the Guantanamo detainees thrown out.

Those transferred to Guantanamo enter a legal black hole, where *habeas corpus* is suspended, access to legal representation scant and psychological and physical abuse – described by the Red Cross as 'tantamount to torture' – routine. Detainees may be held for years – as one US official remarked, 'When we get to "forever" we'll argue the case in court' – sleeping on concrete floors in cells infested with scorpions and rats, in temperatures that can soar to 110F; only the most privileged and 'co-operative'



get accorded such luxuries as a toothbrush. Despite being labelled by Rumsfeld as 'among the most dangerous, well-trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth', and despite hundreds of hours of 'interrogation' and forced confessions, not one Guantanamo detainee has ever been convicted of a criminal offence by the US.

Yet these horrors are merely the tip of the iceberg, as the Council of Europe investigation, published in December 2006, into 'extraordinary rendition' makes clear. It uncovered a 'global spider's web' of secret prisons and rendition flights, where, without regard to due process or extradition laws, detainees

were simply shuttled between US detention facilities in Afghanistan and Guantanamo to secret locations run by the CIA in Europe, or to countries where torture is routine. Since 2003, up to

present during interrogation, CIA operatives prepare the questions and debrief immediately afterwards, with the information fed into a central database, code-named Harmony. Britain is party to such 'intelligence'. The US claims it has no responsibility for torture carried out by countries outside its jurisdiction.

Of the roughly 360 Guantanamo detainees who have been released to their countries of origin, Associated Press tracked 245. They found:

- 205 freed without charge or cleared of all charges.
- In Afghanistan, the reconciliation commission found that all those sent back had been victims of personal or tribal vendettas. In Pakistan at least 70 had been 'sold' to the US authorities by bounty-hunters.
- 14 tried, with eight acquittals and six awaiting a verdict.
- All those returned to Europe released without charge.

Many of these men had been held for three or four years. Eight British residents are still held in Guantanamo. The British government refuses to call for their release. It lied when it denied all knowledge of rendition flights. Its intelligence forces continue to cooperate with the US at Guantanamo and other torture centres. As a bastion of the fear, brutality and contempt for human rights that are the hallmarks of the so-called 'war on terror', Guantanamo suits our legislators of repression very well. It is the Orwellian symbol of a boot smashing into a human face, writ large.

PALESTINE Imperialists foment civil war

On 21 January, Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, addressing a meeting of prominent Palestinians in Gaza City, declared that the US had decided to topple the Hamas government. He said that the US and Israel's strategy was to prevent the formation of a national unity government and instigate a Palestinian civil war. 'They wish to punish the Palestinians for their democratic choice, and as a result, we live the economic, financial and informative dimensions of warfare', he added. **BOB SHEPHERD** reports.

Later that day Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), met with Hamas political leader Khaled Mashaal in Damascus to discuss yet again without agreement the formation and make up of a national unity government. The reasons for this are clear. Abbas and his Fatah faction are acting at the bidding of imperialism, and their idea of a national unity government is one where Hamas has little or no influence. Fatah leader Nabil Amr spelled out its position in an interview carried by *Al-Ahram Weekly* (11 January). When asked what conditions Hamas would have to accept if Fatah were to join a national unity government, Amr answered: 'Hamas must accept President Abbas's platform and political programme.' Amr also made it clear that Hamas's ministerial nominations to any national unity government would have to be agreed by the Quartet (US, EU, Russia and the UN): should Hamas put forward candidates 'we must ask the parties, the Quartet... we tried this with Hamas before, they gave some names for ministerial positions and we contacted the Quartet'. He did not continue, but when the Quartet said 'no' to Hamas's nominations in previous discussions Fatah followed with the subsequent breakdown of the talks. Abbas had anyway declared on 16 December that all progress towards a national unity government had stopped and that he was going to call new parliamentary and presidential elections.

Both Tony Blair and Condoleezza Rice visited Israel and Palestine in December and January, looking to bolster and strengthen Abbas in his confrontation with Hamas. Blair gave Abbas his full backing in his call for new elections, saying at a joint press conference in Ramallah on 18 December: 'I will not rest for a single moment until we have delivered what we both want to achieve'.

December saw over 40 Palestinians killed in clashes between Fatah and Hamas forces in Gaza. On 14 December Fatah units attempted to assassinate Haniyeh at the Rafah border crossing on his return from the hajj. This was after European Union monitors and Fatah-affiliated border guards first prevented him from entering Gaza on the orders of Israeli Defence Minister Peretz because he was carrying millions of dollars in cash to help break the financial blockade - he was forced to leave the money behind in Egypt. When Haniyeh was eventually admitted, Fatah attacked his motorcade, killing one of his bodyguards and wounding his son.

On 23 December Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert held their first summit meeting in Jerusalem. Olmert agreed to allow Egypt to deliver a shipment of arms to Abbas' Presidential Guard and to release directly to

Abbas \$100 million of illegally-held PA funds, provided they were used to bolster PA security forces and not to pay PA government employees. Five days later 2,000 automatic rifles and two million bullets were delivered across the border. On Israeli army radio Israeli Cabinet Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said that the arms

orders from Hamas Ministers. The reaction of Hamas was to announce that the Force would be doubled in size to around 12,000 men. On 7 January Fatah held a mass rally in Gaza City, reported to be tens of thousands in size and including many members of the PA security forces. US favourite Mohammed Dahlan was the main speaker, launching an open attack on Hamas and branding them as 'a gang of murderous agents of Iran' declaring that 'if anyone from Fatah is attacked we will hit back twice as hard'. In response a Hamas spokesman said 'Dahlan and his cohorts are CIA agents...[they] are trying to plunge the Palestinian people into chaos and civil war in the service of America and Israel...even the gasoline in their cars is paid for by the CIA'. Dahlan has made millions from his monopoly of



Hamas leader Haniyeh after his motorcade was attacked in Gaza in December

were designed to give Abbas 'the capability to hold his own against those organisations that are trying to spoil everything'. The Zionists sanctioned the weapons shipment on the strict understanding that the weapons would be for internal Palestinian use and would not be used against Israeli forces. This hardly needed to be spelt out as Abbas' PA security forces have been conspicuous by their absence from all recent confrontations between Israeli forces and the Palestinian people. A recent example was in Ramallah on 4 January. When Israeli troops invaded the city with a convoy of 20 vehicles to arrest a militant from the Fatah-affiliated Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the only opposition came from stone-throwing youth and the Palestinian resistance. As it happened, the Zionists failed to seize their intended target, but they killed four civilians and wounded 22 more. PA security forces disappeared from the streets.

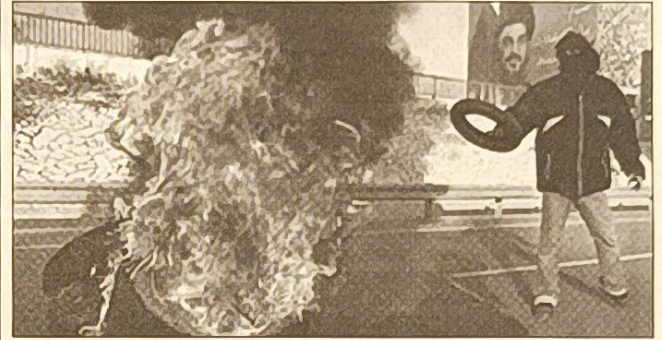
Abbas and Fatah are now stepping up their attacks on Hamas. On 6 January Abbas declared that the Hamas-controlled Executive Force was illegal and should either be disbanded or integrated into his own security forces. Hamas had set up the Executive Force because the mainly Fatah-affiliated PA security forces refused to carry out

the import of oil into Gaza; he has been a US and Zionist stooge for many years. Abbas appointed him as the 'general commander of the PA security apparatuses' at the specific request of the US and Israel in return for which the US gave Abbas \$86 million to boost his Presidential Guard.

The visit of Condoleezza Rice to Ramallah on 14 January resulted in an announcement of informal talks between Abbas, Olmert and herself sometime in February about the nature of a future Palestinian state. Imperialism has already defined this: it will be bounded in the West Bank by the Apartheid Wall and the advancing colonial settlements. On 15 January, the day Rice met Olmert in Jerusalem, the Israeli Housing Ministry announced it was building 44 more housing units in the Maaleh Adumim colony to the east of Jerusalem. The checkpoints in the West Bank, far from any being dismantled as Abbas and Olmert had supposedly agreed, are being reinstated around Nablus with the commercial crossing to the east of the city permanently closed by Israel. Abbas and his Fatah supporters, in attacking Hamas and attempting to undermine support for the elected Hamas government, are acting as open and willing tools of Zionism and imperialism.

LEBANON

Protests against Saniora government continue



In a desperate attempt to shore up the puppet Saniora government, the imperialist powers came together in a 'donor' conference in Paris on 25 January and pledged \$7.5bn aid for the reconstruction of Lebanon. They did so amid massive protests led by Hizbullah and the largely Christian Free Patriotic Movement united in the Lebanese National Opposition. The aid is linked to a reform plan adopted by the Lebanese cabinet on 4 January which proposes to raise value-added tax and privatise telephone and electricity sectors. Lebanon's state debt, currently running at 41 billion dollars, is 185% of GNP, making it one of the world's most indebted nations. Its economy remains at a virtual standstill following the Israeli blitzkrieg last summer.

Opposition to the reforms started with a sit-in organised by Lebanon's main labour union in Beirut. Throughout January there have been continual protests culminating on 23 January with a one-day general strike to bring down the imperialist-backed government. Led by Hizbullah, the stoppage marked the first escalation by the opposition since its supporters began an open-ended daily sit-in around government offices in central Beirut on 1 December 2006 to demand a national unity cabinet. 'In the face of the obstinacy of the government barricaded behind the walls of the Grand Serail, the opposition calls on its supporters to step up their peaceful and democratic protests and on all Lebanese to observe a [one-day] general strike', an opposition statement said.

The action was announced the day after Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah vowed that the opposition would be taking more

action to see that its demands are met. But the Hizbullah leader, who seeks the formation of a national unity government, has also promised that the alliance will never use weapons in its political struggle in Lebanon, repeating that the group's arms are for fighting Israel: 'We are not a sectarian-motivated party,' he said.

Although the Lebanese government threatened to use the police and armed forces to quell the strike, thousands of people blocked off the main roads with rubble and burning tyres in the Lebanese capital, including that leading to Beirut international airport. 'Saniora out, down with the government', the protesters chanted as they lit tyres in central Beirut, close to the prime minister's office. Protesters also cut off several streets in central Beirut and the mainly Shia southern suburbs and the southern and northern entrances of the capital. The highway to Damascus was also blocked. In some suburbs, the protesters faced opposition from a pro-government militia, who opened fire and threw stones at them, killing six people and injuring over 120 others in the process.

The Lebanese national opposition issued a statement calling on the government to get the message of the strike. It warned that it would adopt other forms of protest against the unconstitutional government of Saniora and his ruling bloc. The leader of the Al Marada movement, the former Interior Minister Suleiman Franjeh said 'A new chance has been granted to the March 14th movement. If they ignore the nation's will, we will take on a much more decisive action. Today's strike with all its vitality and greatness will be nothing compared to that.'

Yehya Ayesh

Israel's Chief of Staff resigns

The repercussions of Israel's defeat in Lebanon last summer now include the scalp of former Israeli army Chief of Staff Dan Halutz who resigned on 16 January. Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah welcomed the announcement and forecast that Labour Defence Minister Amir Peretz and Prime Minister Olmert would have to follow. He added that Israel staged the war on instructions from the imperialists to 'open the western gate to the so-called New Middle East', and that it was also aimed at 'forcing a major demographic change in Lebanon, not allowing residents of south Lebanon who fled the area to return to it...and changing Lebanon into mini states'. Halutz's resignation showed that Hizbullah achieved a 'historic, strategic victory' over the Israelis and that it was 'the first war that Israel has lost and failed to achieve its objectives'.

It is a time of deepening crisis for

the Israeli government. Olmert languishes in the opinion polls with a mere 14% support. He is openly feuding with Peretz. The avowedly racist Avigdor Lieberman, himself a recent cabinet appointment (see FRFI 194), has condemned Peretz' nomination of Ghaleb Majadale as Sports, Science and Culture minister, the first Arab cabinet minister. 'This is a lethal blow to Zionism', Lieberman declared. Former Justice Minister Haim Ramon is awaiting a verdict on sexual assault charges whilst Israeli police are calling for charges of rape and sexual assault of an undisclosed number of women to be laid against President Moshe Katsav. This is not all: Olmert is facing a third criminal investigation for corruption. A recent poll revealed that 42% of Israeli citizens regard Olmert's public behaviour as corrupt to very corrupt, compared to 26% and 24% for Lieberman and Peretz respectively.

IRAQ: IMPERIALISTS BUNKER DOWN

continued from page 1

substantial, very robust residual troop levels in Iraq for a long, long time.' In fact, the ISG recommended sending an additional 20,000 military 'trainers' to Iraq. The ISG understood that any major withdrawal from Iraq would look like a defeat and US imperialism cannot afford to admit any sort of defeat in Iraq because it would undermine its strategy of global economic and political hegemony through overwhelming military might. As Robert Gates, the new Secretary of State for Defence (and an initial member of the ISG), admitted at his swearing-in ceremony, failure in Iraq would be 'a calamity that would haunt our nation, impair our credibility and endanger Americans for decades to come'.

Blame the Iraqis

The ISG had no new solutions. It recommended withholding US support unless the Iraqi government achieved certain 'milestones'. Whatever 'support' might mean was never made clear. If it meant aid then it had no substance since the majority of the promised reconstruction 'aid' has never materialised, or has been squandered by corruption or finished up in the coffers of US multinationals such as Halliburton. If it was a bluff that the US might pull out then, as Strobe Talbot, head of the US Brookings Institute, pointed out, 'The logic of the pressure tactic is not clear since most of the Iraqis want us out.'

Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski said the suggestion to hold the Iraqi government to account 'is based on the pervasive illusion that there is such a thing as the Iraqi government'. The only new suggestion from the ISG was that a solution might be found by involving Iraq's neighbours, including talks with Syria and Iran. That idea was given short shrift by President Bush even before the report was published.

The purpose of the ISG was to defuse the increasing opposition to the war within the US and prevent the growing criticism of President Bush from becoming a political crisis by 'camouflaging' a change in direction. That change was to divert political culpability for the disaster onto the Iraqis themselves. The ISG report said 'the Iraqi people and their leaders have been slow to demonstrate their capacity or will to act'; the implication being that the US must therefore take whatever action is necessary to save the Iraqis from themselves.

So, after appearing dutifully to consider a number of critical reports from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department and the National Security Council as well as the ISG report and then ignoring most of them, Bush has been able to 'humbly' admit mistakes and then pose as the resolute statesman, steering his own determined course, escalating the war.

As loyal servants of the ruling class, there was never any possibility that the new Democratic Party majorities in Congress would translate their pre-election rhetoric into anti-war activity. The first acts of the new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, were to announce a 'bipartisan' approach and that there would be no impeachment of the President. Indeed, the Democrats indicated they would be likely to support a request for \$97.7 billion to continue the war on Iraq, this in addi-

tion to the Pentagon's \$560 billion budget. Pelosi then chose Silvestra Reyes as chair of the Intelligence Committee, who promptly called for the 'elimination' of the Iraqi militias. Senate majority leader Harry Reid supported an increase in US forces in Iraq even before they had been announced, albeit for a limited period.

After Bush's plan became clear Senator Joe Biden, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, wrung his hands, saying he wasn't happy with increased troop deployments, but he was powerless to do anything – thus in one sentence exploding the myth of bourgeois democracy. Not a single Democratic senator opposed the appointment of Robert Gates, the ex-CIA official who recommended the bombing of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and was involved in the Iran-Contra cover-up.

If there is to be any serious opposition it must come from the US anti-war movement, sections of which are planning to occupy the offices of any member of Congress who votes for the war budget.

Imperialism breeds racism

Most sickening of all was the way these despicable apologists for imperialism tripped over each other to follow the lead given by the ISG report and heap blame on the Iraqi people for the imperialists' predicament. All the racist bile that underpins their politics came surging to the surface.

Senator Evan Bayh said, 'We all want them (the Iraqis) to succeed. Too often they seem unable or unwilling to do that'. Senator Hillary Clinton said, 'America's credibility is being held hostage by the Iraqi government'. Senator Barack Obama, supposedly

an opponent of the war, asserted, 'No more coddling. No more equivocation...The US is not going to hold this country together indefinitely'.

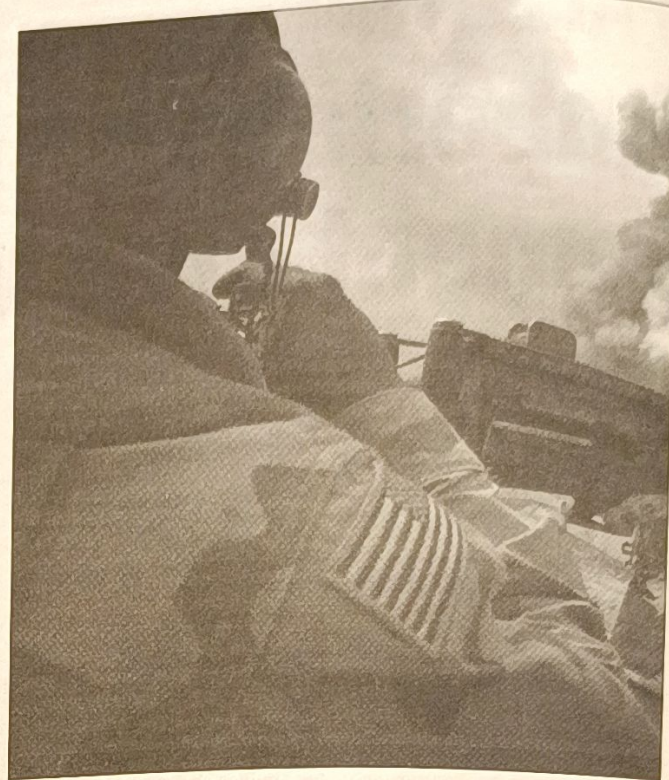
The Democrats were in concert with Republicans and the neo-cons. Republican Congressman Robin Hayes cried, 'If Iraqis are determined and decide to destroy themselves and their country, I don't know how in the world we're going to stop them'. Richard Perle said, 'We underestimated the depravity of the Iraqis' and Rumsfeld told the Iraqis they needed 'to pull their socks up'. If all this seems unreal, take note of the reported comments of one senior Bush advisor (believed to be Karl Rove), 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality'.

Still greater savagery

Unfortunately for the Iraqi people the hidden intention will be only too real. When imperialists start blaming their victims and announce a fresh approach to 'save the victims from themselves' it is to justify the unleashing of the most savage barbarity, unrestrained by even a passing recognition of humanity. It is an admission that any attempt to influence 'hearts and minds' has been abandoned and terror will reign indefinitely until the people 'come to their senses'.

It happened in the British colonies; it happened in Vietnam; it happened in Central America. In fact the 'Salvador Option', as the US imperialists so flipantly call it, has been partially implemented in Iraq for the last two years, since James Steele, the man who commanded the US military in El Salvador, was drafted in to train Iraqi forces in 'irregular missions'.

President Bush's plan is to secure



Baghdad by flooding all 23 neighbourhoods of the city with US troops and 31,500 fresh Iraqi forces, probably Steele's men. They will operate without restraint – death squads, torture, assassination, indiscriminate air strikes. Even the massacres in Najaf and Fallujah, where US forces used white phosphorus against civilians, will pale beside the bestiality to come.

However, no matter what barbarity the imperialists and their stooges perpetrate they will not find progress easy. The ISG report admitted the Mehdi Army has at least 60,000 members. The US orchestrated trial and lynching of Saddam Hussein served only to increase Sunni recruits to the Resistance. When the imperialists last tried to secure Baghdad they were staggered by the reaction. General John Sattler said violence had increased at 'an unbelievably rapid

senior Downing Street adviser was dispatched for talks with the Syrians last November. However, in early December the US government told British banks to shut down their Iran operations and back its boycott of the country. Not surprisingly, after a meeting with Bush that same month, Blair had changed his tune and called for Iran to be isolated and 'pinned' back across the whole of the region'. Labour Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett welcomed President Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq and reassured the US there would be no big pull-out of British troops, although the British are still hoping to withdraw about 1,000 troops from Iraq in the spring to increase their forces in Afghanistan.

Blair said before Christmas, Britain would pay 'a very heavy price' if it distanced itself from the US. But sections of the British ruling class, like that in the US, are worried that Britain's military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan mean British imperialism's wider interests are being neglected. The cost of the war in Afghanistan tripled last year and the total cost to Britain for both wars was £1.4 billion. The army is overstretched, under-strength and lacking adequate equipment. Last year the British army fell below 100,000 for the first time since the Victorian era.

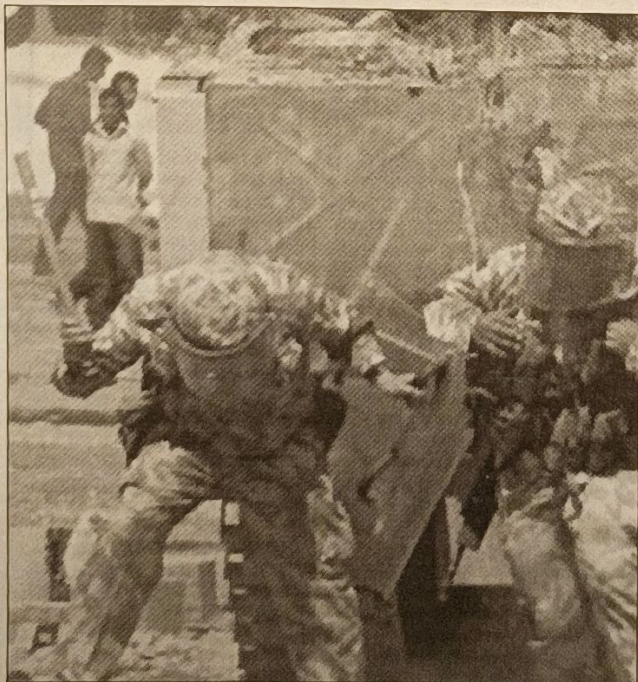
In January Blair launched what he called a national debate about the future of the armed forces, saying the country had to decide whether it wanted to remain a major world power. This means, of course, that he wants big increases in military spending so that Britain can continue to act as a subordinate partner to the US, relying on US military might to police its imperial interests, rather than subsuming Britain into a European military force.

Stealing the oil

The ISG made several recommendations regarding Iraq's oil. Not surprisingly, since two of its authors James Baker and Lawrence Eagleburger have had a long-standing relationship with the oil industry, the Baker law firm and family having interests in Amoco, Exxon and Texaco, and Eagleburger having been until recently a director of Halliburton. Both men, when in office in the 1980s, were very active in promoting trade with Iraq as a means of getting at Iraqi oil. Their report called for the US to assist in privatising Iraq's national oil industry, opening it up to foreign companies and helping to draft a new national oil

'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality'

Bush senior advisor



British troops in Basra

pace'. Attacks on imperialist forces surged to an average of 180 per day. The Bush plan will involve much house-to-house fighting. Recently 160 US troops were injured trying to clear resistance fighters from just one mile of Haifa Street in Baghdad and this was the sixth time they had had to do so. General George Casey, commander of US forces in the region was sceptical whether the extra troops would make much difference. He has since been replaced.

December 2006 was the deadliest month in the last two years for US troops with 111 killed. No-one knows how many Iraqis are dying because the imperialists have never bothered to count but estimates suggest at least 6,000 suffer violent deaths every month. Yet, one senior White House adviser said 2007 would be much bloodier than 2006 and, in announcing his plan, President Bush admitted 2007 would be 'a bloody and violent year', and then had the gall to blame the impending onslaught on the Iraqi people.

Labour, loyal US ally

In Britain, the Labour government's initial response to the idea of talks with Iran and Syria was positive. A

Afghanistan – cracks open up in the imperialist front

law for the country. In fact, as the authors were aware, these recommendations are already well advanced, further evidence that the ISG intended to justify rather than reverse US policy in Iraq.

The new oil law was cobbled together last year by Iraqi government officials and representatives of the oil multinationals under the direction of the US consultancy firm Bearing Point Inc. The Iraqi parliament, of course, wasn't consulted and by November most of members of parliament had not even seen the proposed law. Yet the IMF insisted the law be passed soon, the original deadline being the end of 2006. The IMF also demanded an end to fuel subsidies, the second phase of which, announced in January, will multiply the price of fuel 16 times and so increase the cost of living for the Iraqi people by 20%.

The new oil law will permit foreign companies to enter into production sharing agreements (PSAs), which will allow them effectively to operate as private companies. In the rest of the Middle East and in most of the world oil industries are state owned. The oil multinationals will be allowed to keep 60-70% of revenue while they recoup investment costs and 20% thereafter. These figures are roughly twice the norm for PSAs.

It has been calculated that the new law will allow foreign companies to control up to 87% of Iraqi oil and give a return on investment of between 42% and 162%, representing a theft from the Iraqi people of \$200 billion as compared with state ownership. Both BP and Shell are among the companies jostling to take a stake in the carve-up.

However, British and US companies are worried about investing while the security situation in Iraq is so bad. French and Russian companies Total and Lukoil are less worried and hope to get in first. France and Russia initially opposed the invasion and have

given little or no support to the occupation so consider their companies less likely targets for the resistance. These strategic economic considerations are what lie behind all the apparent wrangling over war or peace between imperialist rivals at the United Nations. No doubt they also contributed to Bush's plan for a new military offensive.

Imperialists bunker down

Ali Allawi, former Iraqi minister and adviser to Al Maliki, wrote in January, 'What we are witnessing in Iraq is the beginning of the unravelling of the unjust and unstable system that was carved out of the Ottoman Empire (by British imperialism). It had held for nearly 100 years by a mixture of foreign occupation, outside meddling, brutal dictatorships and minority rule.'

It is this system that the US and British imperialists are desperately trying to sustain. The US has built four massive military bases at strategic points around Iraq. In Baghdad it is building the biggest embassy in the world, covering 114 acres with walls 15 feet thick. It is six times bigger than the UN buildings in New York. It will be self-sufficient in power and water and have its own swimming pool and military barracks. The ISG report recommended that when it opens in September civilian staff should have their salaries doubled and be offered easy postings afterwards, to ensure they agree to work there. This does not sound like an occupier intending to leave in the near future.

The imperialist forces will try to hammer the Iraqi people into submission and then bunker down in their fortresses to protect their oil and their strategic position. They will never leave until they are forced out.

Victory to the Iraqi resistance!

Jim Craven

The imperialist forces face deepening problems in Afghanistan. By the end of last year 36 British and 34 Canadian troops had been killed: a death rate for British forces greater than in Iraq. Over 100 suicide attacks took place in 2006 compared with just 17 in the previous 12 months. Taliban and other attacks on Afghan forces increased by more than 300% in 2006 and on NATO forces by over 270%. The British and Canadians continue to meet fierce resistance wherever they go in the south. In Musa Qala the British brokered a peace deal with the village elders which the Afghan resistance has respected, but the deal only applies within the town, so British forces continue to face major attacks just outside its boundaries.

When NATO forces respond they often do so in an indiscriminate manner. In Punjwayi during Operation Medusa NATO claimed to have killed more than 1,000 resistance fighters and captured huge stockpiles of weapons but air attacks killed many civilians. In October at least 30 nomadic herders were killed by NATO air strikes. At the beginning of December in Kandahar British troops opened fire indiscriminately following a bomb attack on their convoy. Witnesses said most of the 23 killed and injured civilians were the victims of the gun fire not the bomb. Such incidents only anger the local people and draw new recruits into the resistance.

Imperialist rivalries create divisions

But it is not just the rising resistance that is causing the occupying forces problems. There are clear signs of growing tensions between Britain and the US over tactics in Afghanistan and between the rival imperialist powers that contribute to NATO. The US administration was not happy with the Musa Qala peace deal. The CIA told puppet Afghan President Hamid Karzai to sack Helmand's governor Mohammed Daud and his deputy, key British allies in the region. The US also criticised the British commander of NATO forces, General David Richards, for being too political. General Jim Jones, the US Supreme Commander NATO said Richards 'would have been sacked if he had been an American officer'.

At the NATO summit in Riga, Latvia at the end of November the US pushed the idea that NATO should reinvent itself as 'the security core of a global club of democracies'. In other words, police imperialism, but act, of course, under US hegemony. To try and secure this US domination President Bush pushed for membership of NATO for Georgia and Ukraine, two of its allies in the Caucasus region. Bush demanded that NATO members give more support in Afghanistan. The other leading imperialist nations (Britain apart) would have none of it. They all refused to increase their troop numbers in Afghanistan and made only minor concessions to allow them to operate in more combative roles. The Belgian foreign minister even suggested NATO should consider an exit strategy.



Britain, however, continued to push the US-British partnership, which it needs to provide enough military clout to defend its global interests. Britain agreed to send an extra battalion to Afghanistan. Blair criticised reluctant NATO members saying, 'NATO's credibility is at stake and if we don't succeed in Afghanistan the whole of our world (meaning British imperialism) will be less secure.' He continued this line in a speech in January when he criticised those countries that were 'willing to take part in peacemaking but not warmaking'.

Puppet government corrupt and incapable

The NATO summit set a deadline of 2008 for handing over elements of security to Afghan forces. As things stand this is nothing more than wishful thinking. \$1 billion has been spent on the Afghan police but they are completely ineffectual. Like the army the police is riddled with drug traffickers. The Afghan government was described by Condoleezza Rice just a year ago as 'a fully functioning sovereign government'. But it is headed by US-puppet Hamid Karzai and dominated by US-backed warlords such as Ismael Khan, Rashid Dostum and Yusuf Pashtun.

Almost all the \$7.3 billion provided for development projects has disappeared into their pockets. None of the foreign troops or contractors in Afghanistan are answerable to the Afghan government or Afghan law. Afghan opium production increased by 26% this year with poppy cultivation up 132% in Helmand province where British troops are based. Top official at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Antonia Maria Costa, called on NATO to 'destroy the heroin labs and bring to justice the big traders'. But NATO will not do this for it will bring other powerful forces into conflict with them.

As General Jim Jones pointed out, 'There is a tendency to characterise all of the violence as the resurgence of

the Taliban. This is inaccurate. The violence has other causes including the strong presence of the drug cartels who have their own security system.' According to the UNODC foreign drug traffickers make \$50 billion a year from this trade.

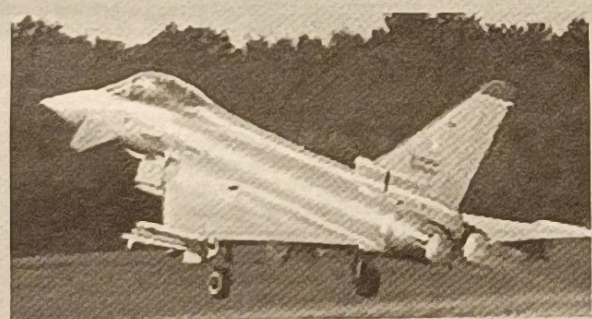
Only suffering for Afghan people

For the Afghan people it is a very different story. In Kandahar, for instance, there is a shortage of water and sewage runs openly in the streets. Electricity supplies provide less than six hours a day. Kidnapping, banditry and police corruption are rife. Overall 39% of Afghan children under five years of age are malnourished. 61% of Afghans have to rely on untreated water. Some women are treated as savagely as they were under the Taliban. Most girls cannot go to school. The Afghan human rights commission has reported women burning themselves to avoid family abuse. Malalai Joya, one of the few outspoken women in the Afghan parliament, has been attacked and threatened with rape by other MPs.

The northern warlords have threatened that if the Taliban take Kandahar then they will take over Kabul, effectively splitting the country. They must be keenly aware of the devious nature of the imperialists. They know the US wants Afghanistan for its strategic position close to the Caspian Basin and to run a pipeline from the oilfields there. Both Hamid Karzai and the first US ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, were executives of Unocal, the US company that negotiated with the previous Taliban regime for the pipeline. They know the US armed and trained Taliban fighters to overthrow the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan in the 1980s. They know it is not beyond the realms of possibility that the US would try to reach a settlement with the Taliban again if it suited its purpose.

Jim Craven

Fraud rules



In December the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, called a halt to the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) investigation into allegations that the BAE Systems had bribed Saudi Arabian officials.

Goldsmith told the House of Lords that the decision was taken on national security grounds because there was a risk that if the investigations continued Saudi Arabia might not co-operate in the 'war on terror'. The director of the SFO, Robert Wardle, said they had found significant evidence of fraud and hoped to find more from Swiss banks. Goldsmith maintained that the SFO had no evidence and that none would be found.

The Solicitor General, Mike O'Brien, told Parliament that the SFO was pressured at least seven times to drop the investigation: three times by Blair, three times by the ambassador to Saudi Arabia and once by BAE. Goldsmith said economic considerations had played no part in the decision, although Blair made the customary indications of concern for British jobs. In August 2006 Saudi Arabia ordered 72 Typhoon fighters worth up to £10 billion from BAE to replace the Tornados, also supplied by BAE. SFO investigations continue, for now, into BAE deals involving South Africa, Romania, Tanzania, Chile, Qatar and the Czech Republic.

The US Solidarity website¹ carries a recent article by Charles Post attacking what he calls 'The Myth of the Labour Aristocracy', originally published in *Against the Current*. It is worth examining because the article has been reposted all over the place and much of the response, even when critical, is clearly dazzled by the parade of numbers supposedly 'refuting' or 'demolishing' the theory. In fact, the article simply repeats familiar bourgeois criticisms and its numbers are just plain wrong.

According to Post, Lenin's theory of the Labour Aristocracy, which holds that a privileged section of the working class is essentially bribed by imperialism and is the main social prop of the ruling class, 'is not a theoretically rigorous or factually realistic explanation of working-class reformism or conservatism'. There are supposedly 'grave empirical problems with Lenin's claims that higher wages for a significant minority of workers in the imperialist countries comes from the super profits earned from the exploitation of lower paid workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America.' A negligible amount of capital (1.25% according to Post) goes to what Post calls 'the South'. The profits that come back are mostly made in what Post calls 'the North'. Therefore 'only 2-3% of total US wages in the 1990s could have come from profits earned in Africa, Asia and Latin America'.

Any benefits of imperialism are enjoyed by the entire US working class, according to Post:

'Imperialist investment in the global South benefits all workers in the global North – both highly paid and poorly paid workers. Higher profits and increased investment mean not only more employment and rising wages for "aristocratic" steel, automobile, machine-making, trucking and construction workers, but also for lowly paid clerical, janitorial, garment and food processing workers.'

Therefore the entire working class in the imperialist country is a Labour Aristocracy which

'includes poorly paid immigrant janitors and garment workers, African-American and Latino poultry workers, as well as the multi-racial workforce in auto and trucking.'

If everybody is in the privileged Labour Aristocracy, then there is no privilege and no Labour Aristocracy. If there's no Labour Aristocracy, there's no significant split in the labour movement, no opportunism and the 'real' struggle is not about imperialism, but is the struggle of workers in unions around economic issues.

Post's numbers

In fact it is Post, not Lenin, who suffers from 'grave empirical problems'. According to Post:

'Imperialist investment, particularly in the global South, represents a tiny portion of global capitalist investment. Foreign direct investment makes up only 5% of total world investment – that is to say, 95% of total capitalist investment takes place within the boundaries of each industrialized country.'

This would mean, against Lenin, that the export of capital is not that significant. If Post is correct, it's just a peripheral activity: the real action is each country's capitalists exploiting 'their' workers.

But when we look at the numbers for foreign direct investment (FDI), Post

Table 1. US FDI as share of total US direct investment (\$ billions)²

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Private non-residential investment	1,052.6	1,133.9	1,232.1	1,176.8	1,066.3	1,077.4
plus US FDI abroad	142.6	224.9	159.2	142.3	154.5	149.9
less foreign FDI in US	-147.9	-220.3	-236.7	-60.0	-34.4	-30.4
Total US direct investment	1,047.3	1,138.6	1,154.6	1,259.1	1,186.4	1,196.9
US FDI % of total direct investment	13.6%	19.8%	13.8%	11.3%	13.0%	12.5%

Table 2. US FDI in imperialist and dependent countries (\$ billions)³

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total FDI	142.6	224.9	159.2	142.3	154.5	149.9
Imperialist countries	90.0	131.3	91.8	69.9	93.8	88.7
Dependent countries	52.6	93.7	67.4	72.5	60.7	61.2
Imperialist as % of total FDI	63.1%	58.4%	57.7%	49.1%	60.7%	59.2%
Dependent as % of total FDI	36.9%	41.6%	42.3%	50.9%	39.3%	40.8%
Dependent as % of total US direct investment	5.0%	8.2%	5.8%	5.8%	5.1%	5.1%

gets his facts wrong (see Table 1).

We see, very clearly, that the proportion of direct investment abroad is far higher than Post's 5%, varying from 11% to almost 14% or higher in recent years. We can see, as Lenin says, export of capital is significant, much more significant than Post allows.

Post got the proportions wrong by a factor of two or three. What about its location? Post continues:

'Of that five percent of total global investment that is foreign direct investment, nearly three-quarters flow from one industrialized country – one part of

the global North – to another. Thus only 1.25% of total world investment flows from the global North to the global South.'

Later, Post casually mentions that profits 'earned abroad' reached over 30% of total US profits in 2000. If just 5 percent of investment can produce 30 percent of the profits, that immediately contradicts Post's argument and supports Lenin's. It seems that Post himself has a problem with 'theoretical rigour' as well! Let's look at the actual figures and find where Post makes his mistakes (see Table 2).



Wall Street: 'Lenin was absolutely right to emphasise the significance to imperialism of the exploitation of ... dependent nations, where the rate of profit is consistently higher'.

Labour Aristocracy: mythmakers and their mistakes

Table 3. Total US foreign investment (\$ billions)⁵

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total foreign investment	346.6	515.6	559.3	377.2	291.3	328.5	872.3	446.4
Imperialist countries	219.7	323.9	339.2	253.4	188.6	292.3	521.4	241.1
Dependent countries	126.9	191.7	220.1	123.8	102.7	36.2	350.9	205.4
Dependent as % of total foreign	36.6%	37.2%	39.4%	32.8%	35.3%	11.0%	40.2%	46.0%
Total FDI as % of total foreign	41.2%	43.6%	28.5%	37.7%	53.0%	45.6%	(28.0%)	(2.0%)

Post significantly overestimates the proportion of FDI going to the imperialist countries and underestimates the amount of total US direct investment going to the dependent countries by a factor of four or more.

We need to go much further than this to understand what is really going on. First, Post excluded all US foreign investment apart from FDI, without explanation. Yet, for Lenin, a key characteristic of imperialism is *finance capital*, which Post completely ignores in his article.⁴ When we do include it, this more than doubles the amount of US foreign investment (see Table 3).

Total US foreign investment includes not only FDI, but also indirect investment, mostly financial. In recent years, FDI has varied between 28.5% and 53% of total investment. In the flow of all US foreign investment, the dependent countries generally receive upwards of one third.

To sum up, we have the following empirical results, which completely corroborate Lenin's analysis of imperialism and totally undermine Post's argument: very significant amounts of capital are exported from the US to other countries. Amongst these countries, the dependent countries figure very significantly. For Post, foreign investment is insignificant, and that going to the dependent countries is utterly marginal. For Lenin – and for US imperialism! – foreign investment is very important, and a significant amount of it is directed to the dependent countries to take advantage of low wages and other costs.

How big is the booty?

Even if Post gets his theory totally wrong and the numbers totally wrong, perhaps he's right when he claims that the return on foreign investment is a trivial amount? After all, it's not what

goes out that really matters; what's important is what capital brings back.

Imperialist booty returns to the plunderer by a variety of mechanisms. These include, obviously, return on investment and interest on loans. There are royalty payments and license fees for 'intellectual property' – payments for using someone else's design or process. There are also 'service payments' for insurance and other services. In addition there are 'transfer prices', where a US company 'buys' intermediate or semi-finished parts or components below their full cost from a foreign subsidiary or partner, invisibly exporting profits made in another country. Then there is also the mechanism of unequal exchange, between imperialist and dependent countries.⁶ Because these profits are not realised until the commodities are paid for in the imperialist country, they eventually show up as 'domestic' profits, even though they are really part of the whole imperialist relationship.

How much are these? By their very nature, the effects of transfer pricing and unequal exchange are difficult to quantify. In the US in 2005, receipts on US-owned assets abroad came to \$471.7bn.⁷ In addition there were \$57.4bn in license fees and royalties, and a further \$158.2bn in 'other private services', a total of \$687.3bn. These are quite significant numbers. Compared to non-residential private fixed investment in 2005 of \$1,265.7bn – they total about 50%. They represent a similar proportion when compared to corporate profits of \$1,330.7bn. So they're obviously very significant to the capitalists.

Since Post tries to minimise the significance of investment in dependent countries, let's have a look at the geographic origin of these profits. Taking profits from foreign investment alone the following is found (see Table 4).

Table 4. Geographical origin of profits from foreign investment (\$ billions)⁸

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total profits from foreign investment	255.8	288.0	344.2	281.8	264.5	295.6	369.0	469.0
Imperialist countries	128.7	149.1	177.8	143.8	138.9	155.8	192.3	239.9
Dependent countries	127.0	138.8	166.4	138.0	125.6	139.8	176.7	229.1
Dependent as % of total foreign	49.7%	48.2%	48.3%	49.0%	47.5%	47.3%	47.9%	48.9%
US domestic profits	654.7	674.5	615.4	584.7	681.9	744.1	880.5	992.7
Dependent as % of domestic	19.4%	20.6%	27.0%	23.6%	18.4%	18.8%	20.1%	23.1%

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Table 5. Rates of return on US Foreign Direct Investment by area (%)¹⁰

	2002	2003	2004	2005
All countries	8.1	9.8	10.7	11.1
Canada	8.3	8.9	11.0	9.9
Europe	7.9	9.4	9.4	9.8
Latin America and Other	5.8	8.3	10.1	11.5
Africa	12.0	17.6	22.0	23.1
Middle East	13.3	16.5	20.8	23.1
Asia and Pacific	10.7	12.1	13.7	13.6

First, we see that profits from US foreign investment in dependent nations is about half of all profits on US foreign investment. Second, compared to US domestic profits from exploiting workers in the US, the receipts from exploitation of the dependent nations is clearly very significant. This should not be surprising, for profit rates in these countries are higher. In the world outside the US, the dependent nations have 34.2% of the income,⁹ but contribute 48.9% of the foreign profits. The OECD countries, generally the beneficiaries of imperialism, have 65.8% of the income, but contribute 51.1% of US profits from foreign investment. Although the absolute contribution of imperialist and dependent countries to US foreign profits is almost evenly split, *relatively*, when compared to income, the dependent nations contribute at a rate double that of the imperialist countries. Lenin was absolutely right to emphasise the significance to imperialism of the exploitation of these dependent nations, where the rate of profit is generally consistently higher. This is the extraction of super-profits at work (see Table 5).

These super-profits amount to some 10% or so of capital formation in these countries – and that's just to the US and doesn't include the booty carted off by European and Asian imperialists. Indeed, for Africa, the poorest continent, it has been shown that between 1970 and 1996, sub-Saharan countries were *net donors* to the rest of the world of up to \$106.5bn. This takes the form of massive external indebtedness of the African states, which working people are expected to pay off, and massive private wealth of a handful of elites who deposit their wealth in imperialist banks and other assets.¹¹

Another source of imperialist-related super profits is the exploitation of immigrant workers, a feature of imperialism noted by Lenin. In the US there are some 12 million undocumented migrants, most of whom have entered the US specifically to work and whose precarious residential status leaves them vulnerable to super-exploitation.

Although ameliorated, there continue to be racist disparities in access to jobs, in pay and working conditions between white and minority workers. These have their origin in forced immigration and slavery and are perpetuated by imperialism. These result both in super-exploitation of workers of colour and also the enjoyment of privileges by a Labour Aristocracy.

Then there is the prison-industrial complex. Pay rates for California prisoners are lower than those for workers in China. Prisoners provide a literally captive workforce. The Oregon Department of Corrections boasts in a marketing circular: 'Benefits to you: Inmates show up each day clean, sober, and ready to work. No Immigration and Naturalization Service issues. You save money (including workers' comp., insurance, sick leave, and other benefit costs).'¹²

Who gets the booty?

Post's theory is wrong and the numbers for capital export and its location are wrong. But, there's a sliver of hope left: Post's argument is that super-profits are trivial compared to workers' income and, anyway, are spread around amongst everyone.

There are 114.38m households in the United States.¹³ Just the profits from foreign investment, royalties and 'other services' of \$687.3bn come to over \$6,000 per household. With a median

annual income of \$46,326, that's about six weeks' income, 13% of annual income, when spread around equally. That's quite a considerable sum, and is even larger in relation to a household receiving just \$12,000-\$20,000 – between 30% and 50%. This is before considering profits from unequal exchange and other sources of super-profits.

It is just ridiculous to pretend – as Post does – that these super profits benefit the entire working class equally. Unlike in Europe, where the working class wrested health and other social benefits through the state, US workers depend directly on their employer for these, and they are not distributed equally.¹⁴

- 23% of US workers are ineligible for paid vacation or bank holidays
- 29% have no access to healthcare insurance
- 54% no access to dental coverage
- 71% no access to vision coverage
- 40% no access to retirement benefits
- 48% no access to life insurance benefits
- 61% no access to short-term disability benefit
- 70% no access to long-term disability benefit

Not only are these benefits unequal, they are not distributed randomly amongst all sections of the working class. If we compare workers in small service companies,¹⁵ with workers in large manufacturing companies, we find that the service workers received \$14.72 per hour,¹⁶ compared with the manufacturing workers' \$25.14 per hour. But when it comes to benefits, the service workers receive benefits of \$4.83 per hour, while the manufacturing worker receives \$15.28 per hour in benefits – *more in benefits than the service worker's wage*.

The privileges of a Labour Aristocracy are not confined to wage rates or conditions at work. They relate to quality of life, hours of work, environmental racism, location and thousands of other factors big and small. We could continue to point to innumerable examples of privileges of all sorts enjoyed by the better-off section of the working class. Are these the result of imperialism? This is not a TV crime drama: it's impossible to dye bank notes in Botswana or the Philippines or El Salvador, then find traces of purple ink on the hands of better-off workers in the US. What is obvious is that, without these super-profits, the US ruling-class, in order to increase its domestic profits to compensate, would not only have to attack the poorest sections of the US working class, but to slash the living standards of its privileged sections.

If anyone believes that all benefit equally from imperialism, they need to explain how that happens. What kind of equality is there between fully benefited skilled workers on the one hand, receiving \$30-50 per hour, with two cars, living in a house they own in the suburbs, and a single mother on the other, an undocumented worker, holding down two unbenefited part-time jobs receiving a sliver above minimum wage, living in an apartment in a rundown project? How are they 'equally' sharing in the super-profits from imperialism?

It's impossible to satisfy empirical critics of the Labour Aristocracy theory. They demand a level of proof that they cannot supply themselves. None of them would be able to 'prove' with numbers that 'the working class' is exploited. Yet, when it comes to the privileges of the Labour Aristocracy,

different and higher standards of proof apply.

Post refers to several econometric studies, to try to prove that monopoly capital is no different from competitive capitalism, that there is no such thing as super-profits. All they prove is that Post doesn't understand Lenin's theory of imperialism or what the Marxist theory of monopoly is. Yet these same studies consistently emphasise that Post's favoured explanation of privilege – trade union struggle – doesn't explain why privileges exist where there are no trade unions. Facts, such as the split in the AFL-CIO and the mobilisation of millions of immigrant workers against the state, outside the trade unions, which provide blatant 'proofs', of momentous historic proportions, of the existence of a Labour Aristocracy, he simply ignores. There are none so blind as those who will not see.

Post's capitalism

Having discarded Lenin's imperialism what does Post's capitalism look like?



With Colombian army protection, Exxon Mobil exploits the coal resources of Colombia

First, there is no fundamental difference between imperialist nations and dependent ones. Where Lenin saw 'booty' 'plundered', Post sees 'profits earned'. The social relation of exploitation is replaced by a merely geographical one: Post writes evasively about 'the North' and 'the South' as if they meet on equal terms, although, as we have seen, the dependent 'Southern' countries are bled by 'Northern' imperialism.

Second, there is no need for inter-imperialist rivalry. With no external super-profits at stake, preoccupied with exploiting 'their own' working class, there is no imperative for capitalists to divide the world, no need for imperialist war, no need for US imperialism to invade Iraq.

Third, divisions within the working-class are not due to mechanisms of imperialist based privilege. Instead, Post has to explain them in terms of inherent differences in birth or biology: 'race, nationality and gender structure the "employment queue" ... race, nationality and gender do generate a stratified working class'. For Marxists of course, it is completely the other way round: it is the mechanisms of privilege which create 'race', nationality and gender inequality: 'A Negro is a Negro. Only under certain conditions does he become a slave', as Marx famously remarked.¹⁷

Fourth, where Lenin blames the poverty and misery of working people in the dependent nations on imperialism, if there is no extraction of super-profits, then some factor inside the dependent nations must cause their underdevelopment. There would have to be some deficiency in the populations of 'the South', whether inherent or culturally based, which prevents them from following in the brisk footsteps of 'the North'. Post doesn't get this far, but provides no explanation of why dependent countries remain poor.

Fifth, capitalism benefits workers. According to Post:

'Higher profits result in more invest-

ment across the board in the industrialized countries. More investment eventually brings a growing demand for labor (within limits set by investment in newer, more capital intensive technology), falling unemployment and rising wages for all workers in the industrialized capitalist countries.'

But this is exactly what the ruling class says! In fact, to Marxists, Post's argument has a very familiar ring:

'The more quickly the capital destined for production – the productive capital – increases, the more prosperous industry is, the more the bourgeoisie enriches itself, the better business gets, so many more workers does the capitalist need, so much the dearer does the worker sell himself.'¹⁸

This is, of course, the age-old argument of the bourgeois economists, which Marx demolishes in his short pamphlet *Wage Labour and Capital!* It's as if Post copied the bourgeoisie's argument almost directly from Marx! Of

It was not just Lenin who subscribed to the theory of the Labour Aristocracy to understand the relationship of the working class to imperialism. So did Nikolai Bukharin, Amílcar Cabral, James Connolly, Georgi Dimitrov, Antonio Gramsci, C L R James, Bela Kun, Georg Lukacs, José Carlos Mariátegui, Karl Radek, M N Roy, Liu Shaoqi, Josef Stalin, Leon Trotsky and Clara Zetkin. Heroes or demons, martyrs or traitors, love them or hate them, however they ended up, they all came from the same political tradition: classic communism, forged in the struggle against opportunism in the split in the international working class over the imperialist world war of 1914-1918, a split which had its origins in the existence of the Labour Aristocracy. If there's no such split today, then communism is archaic, a historical peculiarity, the need for which has been superseded in some way. In our next instalment, we'll explore where Post ends up as he saunters down this road.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

- 1 www.solidarity-us.org
- 2 In order to get a figure for total industrial investment by US capitalists, we have taken the figures for 'Gross private fixed non-residential investment' in the GDP tables and, from the Balance of Payments tables, added/subtracted the figures for FDI outward and inward, respectively. We have omitted figures for 2004 and 2005 because a one-off tax break, encouraging repatriation of retained profits, distorts the numbers.
- 3 'Imperialist countries' are EU, Canada and Japan. The figures are taken from US International Transactions Accounts country and regional data publicly available at www.bea.gov.
- 4 See David Yaffe: 'Britain: Parasitic and Decaying Capitalism', FRFI 194, www.revolutionarycommunistgroup.com/frfi/194/ for a full discussion of Finance Capital and the role of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), especially p8.
- 5 Source: US International Transactions Accounts country and regional data at www.bea.gov. The 2003-5 figures are accounting distortions from normal for FDI, due to the one-off tax break. But the fact that the capitalists give themselves a tax break should alert us to how important these profits are to them.
- 6 'The richer country exploits the poorer one, even where the latter gains by the exchange'. Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Works, 32, p294. Marx has an example of trade between Europe and Asia, Capital 3, Works, 37, pp149-50. See also Henryk Grossmann, *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*, London, 1992, pp169-173.
- 7 There are slight differences in some of these figures between National Income tables and Balance of Payments tables because of different treatment of 'US Territories', in particular the colony of Puerto Rico.
- 8 Source: US International Transactions Accounts country and regional data at www.bea.gov.
- 9 Source: World Bank, *World Development Report* Selected Indicators, 2005
- 10 Calculated from Bureau of Economic Analysis data, using the standard technique described in US Department of Commerce, *Survey of Current Business*, September 2006, p91, Table 1, note 1.
- 11 See James K Boyce and Léonce Ndikumana, 'Is Africa a Net Creditor? New Estimates of Capital Flight from Severely Indebted Sub-Saharan African Countries, 1970-1996', Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2001
- 12 Dan Pens, 'US: Oregon's Prison Slaveocracy', *Prison Legal News*, 1 May, 1998.
- 13 US Government Census – <http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032006/hhinc/toc.htm>
- 14 US Government Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States*, March 2006.
- 15 The comparison is for 2006, 3rd quarter from BLS, 'Employer Costs for Employee Compensation'. The comparison is between workers in service industry companies with less than 50 workers and workers in large (500 or more workers) 'goods-producing' companies.
- 16 For comparison, the pay of a regular supermarket worker, benefited, in the Bay Area is \$8-\$8.50 per hour.
- 17 Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*.
- 18 Ibid.

Imperialism and communism

So where does this end up politically? This issue is not purely economic, although its roots are economic. Nor is it simply tactical. It's not over some abstract theoretical issue. This goes right to the heart of modern politics. It's very simple: do we need to be communists?

FIVE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

Part one

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the hands on the Doomsday Clock from seven to five minutes to midnight on 17 January. Midnight is the symbolic end of civilisation: Armageddon. The scientists explained that the 'level of danger has escalated precipitously'; they warned 'We stand on the brink of a second nuclear age. Not since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has the world faced such perilous choices.' The proliferation of nuclear weapons to more countries such as North Korea, the US's recently stated readiness to use nuclear weapons to destroy 'time urgent targets' and the 26,000 nuclear weapons still held by the US and Russia, weighed in the decision to move the clock hands forward. The scientists also stressed the 'dire threat to human civilisation' posed by global warming. Time is running out for humanity. **TREVOR RAYNE** reports.

When President Bush announced his 'Axis of Evil' in January 2002, three countries were named: Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Three months after the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) announced on 9 October 2006 that it had tested a nuclear weapon and the subsequent US government mobilisation of the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions against it, the DPRK has faded from the news. Now Iran is back in the firing line. In December 2006 the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran over its nuclear and missile programmes and set a 60-day deadline for Iran to suspend almost all nuclear activity or face further sanctions. The US has proceeded to amass an armada in the Persian Gulf.

After the DPRK's nuclear test the US's lead negotiator on Korea, Christopher Hill, said, 'It can have a future or it can have these weapons. It cannot have both.' By January 2007 the US was engaged in six party talks with the DPRK, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea over the DPRK's nuclear programme. The US had doubled its aircraft carrier force and airpower in the Persian Gulf and on 16 January dispatched another aircraft carrier strike force to join them. The US also sent Patriot anti-missile systems into the Gulf. These weapons have nothing to do with winning a ground war with guerrillas in Iraq.

Unlike the DPRK, Iran is in no position to test a nuclear weapon and will not be able to do so for some years. Iran has stated that it has no intention of possessing nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the Persian Gulf is now so congested that on 9 January a US nuclear submarine collided with a Japanese oil tanker.

In his 10 January 2007 statement on increasing US troop strength in Iraq President Bush targeted Iran and Syria: '[they] are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq. Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops... Success in Iraq... begins with addressing Iran and Syria'. Five hours after Bush's speech US soldiers raided the Iranian consulate in Kurdish-controlled Irbil in Iraq and seized five consular officials. Iraq's foreign minister said they had worked in Iraq providing consular services for ten years. The US accused the officials of supplying weapons for

use against US soldiers. We can expect part of the additional US troop contingent in Iraq to be stationed along the Iranian border and for the US to engage in cross-border 'hot pursuit' raids (as with Cambodia in the Vietnam War). A possible Gulf of Tonkin-type incident (used to escalate US engagement in the Vietnam War) might be staged in the Persian Gulf to justify an all-out US aerial attack on Iran.



The 2002 US National Security Strategy document states that there must be no global or regional rival to US dominance. That same year's US Nuclear Posture Review directs US companies to build smaller, tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use: China, Russia, Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Syria and Libya were identified as possible targets. The former Soviet Union made it a principle that it would never be the first to use nuclear weapons; the US made no such commitment. MAD (mutually assured destruction or deterrence) has been replaced by NUTS (nuclear use theorists) who propose pre-emptive nuclear strikes. The US maintains the right to attack non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons. In 2004 the US declared its new policy for the quick use of nuclear weapons to destroy 'time urgent targets'. A recent announcement by the US Nuclear Weapons Council said that the US would implement the Reliable Replacement Warhead programme, building the next generation of nuclear weapons to accompany and then replace the current 10,000 nuclear warheads that the US has. Repeated US nuclear threats against the DPRK (1950, 1951, 1953, 1976, 1993 and 1995) surely forced that country to resort to developing its own nuclear weapons. Constant US

bellicosity towards Iran is driving that country to a nuclear weapons defence.

Given that the US ruling class intends to establish itself as the unrivalled global power and that the Project for an American Century is foundering in the war in Iraq, it is to be expected that the US will use its military strengths to attempt to reverse its setbacks: it will not give up control over Middle East oil without a fight. A nuclear armed Iran threatens US and British dominance in the Middle East and Israel's regional military superiority. Asked on 18 April 2006 if his assertion that 'all options are on the table' regarding Iran included the possibility of a nuclear strike, President Bush reiterated, 'All options are on the table. We want to solve this diplomatically, and we're working hard to do so.'

The Israeli military is equipped by the US to serve as an adjunct and extension to US imperialism. On 7 January *The Times* reported that two Israeli Air Force squadrons are training for a nuclear attack on Iran to destroy the country's uranium enrichment facilities using 'tactical nuclear weapons'. Israeli jets have been flying test bombing runs to Gibraltar and against a mock-up of the Iranian

nuclear reactor at Natanz. The Israeli General Oded Tira described preparations for the attack that included ensuring minimum opposition to the Bush government in the US and Europe and gaining the cooperation of Saudi Arabia. Preparations are to include anti-Iranian reports in the media: psychological warfare. Last year Israel's deputy defence minister said, 'I do not advocate a military, Israeli pre-emptive strike against Iran. I am aware of all its possible repercussions. I consider it very much the last resort, but sometimes the last resort is the only resort.'

Israel possesses the world's third or fourth largest stockpile of nuclear

in preventing Iran from achieving nuclear weapons, while Israel, with US supplies, would remain the undisputed regional military power. However, if a nuclear attack is used, the purpose is also in the message it sends: the ability and willingness of imperialism to use nuclear weapons, of which it is the chief possessor with the greatest ability to deliver them to target. This demonstration would be a warning to everyone everywhere of the consequences of challenging the US ruling class. When the US and British Allies firebombed Dresden in February 1945 and exploded atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 they served as warnings to the Soviet Union



'I don't know what kind of weapons will be used in the third world war, assuming there will be a third world war. But I can tell you what the fourth world war will be fought with – stone clubs.'

Albert Einstein

weapons and conventional bunker-buster bombs.

The Israeli military has the capacity to strike with nuclear missiles anywhere in the Middle East. Germany recently supplied Israel with submarines capable of carrying nuclear warheads; they are stationed in the Persian Gulf. A precedent exists: Israeli Air Force jets destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981 with conventional weapons. The US prevented any UN sanctions being imposed on Israel. Israel has never formally acknowledged that it has nuclear weapons, has therefore never signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT) and does not open its nuclear facilities for inspection – which is demanded of Iran and the DPRK. Iran is a signatory to the NNPT and its nuclear facilities are open to International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. The US accuses Iran of operating a clandestine nuclear programme, despite a CIA report to the contrary.

For imperialism and Israel an attack, including nuclear attack, on Iran holds out the prospects of humbling Iran, when its influence in Iraq and the Middle East is growing, and isolating Syria and Hizbullah in Lebanon. President Bush could declare victory

and the advancing Red Army; warnings about the extents to which imperialism would go in defence of its interests. Harlan Ullman, who coined the phrase Shock and Awe used for the 2003 attack on Baghdad, explained the thinking, 'You have this simultaneous effect, rather like nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks, but minutes...through delivery of instant, nearly incomprehensible levels of mass destruction directed at influencing society writ large.' *The Times* reports an Israeli source, 'One mission, one strike and the Iranian nuclear project will be demolished.'

In *The Independent* (28 October 2006) Robert Fisk said that scientists have identified traces of a uranium bomb of some kind dropped by the Israeli Air Force on the Lebanese villages of Khiam and At-Tiri in August 2006. This may have been a trial for a new weapon. In August Hizbullah fired a missile that destroyed an Israeli boat off the coast of Beirut. This missile was no doubt used as a test by Iran for Iranian batteries aimed at the Persian Gulf. Russia supplies Iran with nuclear equipment. In January Russia sold anti-missile missiles to Iran.

If Israel and the US resort to an attack of any kind on Iran, the gauntlet will have been thrown down to the peoples of the Middle East. The Shia militias in Iraq will escalate attacks on US and British forces. Iran will either undergo a collapse of its government or seek to quickly develop nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arab states will respond by implementing their own plans for nuclear weaponry. China and Russia will oppose military action against Iran. China, Russia and Europe will mobilise to defend their interests and assert their global ambitions. Oil prices are likely to soar as Gulf supplies are disrupted and a global depression could ensue. The US ruling class is likely to be engulfed in bitter disputes between rival factions; the Bush administration is said to be prepared to defy Congress to attack Iran. A US Air Force analyst estimated that 400 Iranian targets would have to be hit to destroy Iran's nuclear industry. It may be possible to attack Iran and to fire tactical nuclear weapons, but it is not easy to calculate their economic and political consequences. The use of nuclear weapons and the attack on Iran will be a demonstration of political weakness. ■

A CALCULATED GAMBLE

Most of the guiding ideas for the development of the atomic and then hydrogen bombs were derived from European university laboratories. The sum spent on developing the atomic bomb was more than had been spent on all scientific research since the beginning of human history. The atomic bomb that exploded over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 reached 18 million degrees centigrade in one millionth of a second. The centre of the sun burns at 15 million degrees centigrade. The scientists who developed the atomic bomb feared that it might set the Earth's atmosphere on fire and destroy life on the planet. Before testing the bomb they did a calculation: Edward Teller, 'father of the hydrogen bomb', forecast that the chances of this happening were three in one million.

VENEZUELA

Creation of a new vanguard party

'The time has come for the end of privileges, the end of inequality, and nothing and no one can make us stop the car of the revolution, cost us what it may...Equality without socialism is impossible.'

Hugo Chavez, inauguration speech



On 3 December President Chavez was re-elected for a third term until 2013. He received an overwhelming 4,500,000 of the 7,500,000 votes cast. On 15 December he declared that his majority party in Congress, the Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR), is to be dissolved and he will create the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. On 8 January, to the consternation of both the local bourgeoisie and international capitalists, he announced plans to pursue the building of socialism in Venezuela by nationalising key industries.

These decisions are complementary. By creating a new, emphatically democratic party, he invites the members of the MVR – with its majority in Congress – and its coalition parties, to reorganise so that: 'The corrupt, the thieves, the drunks, the bad lads will be left

outside'. Chavez is combating the historical burden of corruption and institutional clientelism and providing a consistent political-economic programme that aims to remove Venezuela from the field of imperialist super-profits.

The steps to '21st century socialism' will now require control of the Central Bank to be taken away from financial capital, and the higher revenues retained by the state to be directed towards building socialism.

At his inauguration, President Chavez spoke of five 'motors of the revolution' which will lead into the Simon Bolivar National Project up to 2021. Nationalising the leading sectors is the first 'motor'. Heading the list to be nationalised will be the biggest private power group, Electricidad de Caracas, majority owned by the US AES corporation, and the main telecommunications company

Compañía Anónima Nacional de Teléfonos de Venezuela which was privatised in 1991.

Proper control of gas and oil resources is the second 'motor'. Negotiations had already started with Chevron, Total and Statoil to secure a majority stake in the heavy oil operations in the Orinoco basin. Chavez wants contracts with ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips to be renegotiated so that the state oil company PDVSA takes up to 60% compared to the current 30% to 49%. Exxon had already refused changes to contracts on conventional oil operations and left the business.

Transforming the state

Once the radical new constitution was in place in 2000, President Chavez changed the focus and purpose of government. The government faced massive obstruction from the ensconced middle classes. New laws were introduced, and changes demanded by the majority were met by new health, education and housing programmes, supported by Cuba. Government departments are being replaced to meet the needs of the working class, like the Ministry of Popular Economy. In December 2006 two new ministries were announced, to deal with telecommunications and indigenous peoples. Another, Integration and Foreign Commerce, was closed. The government will not renew the licence for Radio Caracas Television because it participated in the defeated coup of 2002. Land redistribution has accelerated, and abandoned factories have been taken over by the state and workers' co-management put in place. Since 1998 seven new universities have opened (with 15 more due soon), 50 new high schools, tens of thousands of new college places and 200 new college buses. The third 'motor' of revolution will be a new programme to carry education into homes and work-

places. The fourth 'motor' will be the president's expanded capacity to establish laws for a year by decree in order to accelerate change.

A new political party

To build socialism Chavez wants militants to choose a new leadership for the new party. Using the enormous confidence vested in him by the mass of the poor, he has presented supporters and members of allied organisations like Patria Para Todos, the Movement Electoral de Pueblo and the 60-year-old Communist Party of Venezuela, with a fundamental choice – build a common anti-imperialist programme or be excluded from government.

All of this centres on continued political developments in local communities. Community campaigns have been central to the political development of the masses. The aim now is to bring together the local land, health, defence, sports, water and other committees that have grown up over the last seven years. This will enable communities to look at their problems as a whole. These committees have taken their strength from those working informally, the underemployed and unemployed workers. New communal councils, organised from 2006 in urban neighbourhoods and composed of 200 to 400 families, now receive \$1bn directly from the government for projects.

A confederation of communal councils is to be promoted by the state; Chavez calls this a 'new geometry of popular power'. This is the fifth 'motor' of revolutionary change. The president has stated that the aim is to 'displace the bourgeois state' with the 'communal state'. The energy and demands of these councils are needed to motivate those more regularly employed otherwise they will lack the ideological force to fight against the constantly surfacing economism of the old and new trade union leaders. In the new UNT union, struggles over the nature of demands has expressed itself in factionalism, blunting revolutionary initiatives. President Chavez is providing the basis for unity among all workers against the exploitation of any worker.

Alvaro Michaels

BOLIVIA

Social movements on the march again



On 8 January, tens of thousands of supporters of Bolivia's social movements fought police on the streets of Cochabamba city as they demanded the resignation of its governor, Manfred Reyes Villa. In December, Reyes Villa had declared his support for opposition ruling class parties which are demanding that every new article that the Constituent Assembly approves must have a two-thirds majority. In addition he called for a re-run of last July's referendum on departmental autonomy in Cochabamba. Cochabamba had voted by 63% to 37% against greater self-government, along with the majority of the rest of the country. Reyes Villa wants to overturn this result so that Cochabamba joins the four wealthy eastern regions in moving towards a break-up of the country. The ruling class hopes that this Balkanisation strategy will defeat the government of President Evo Morales.

Morales responded by firing the Cochabamba police chief for the decision to fire tear gas at protestors. Since then social movements have continued daily demonstrations and fought Reyes Villa's overwhelmingly middle class supporters in the streets; two people were killed on 11 January and hundreds injured. Reyes Villa has fled Cochabamba and taken up residence in Santa Cruz; the social movements are now discussing the establish-

ment of an alternative administration in Cochabamba – shades of Oaxaca. Reyes Villa, a very wealthy man, is notorious as the former Cochabamba mayor who signed a contract with Bechtel privatising the water supply, precipitating the 2000 'water war'.

The Bolivian ruling class has been caught out by the success of Morales' limited reforms. The partial gas nationalisation has already been worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy, allowing Morales to raise teachers' salaries by 10%. The land reform he has enacted is a threat to the 14 families who hold 12,000 square miles of mainly unused land in the departments of Santa Cruz and Beni. On 10 January, Morales announced that he would proceed with the nationalisation of the mining industry in 2007.

Ruben Costas, president of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee, announcing a 'town meeting' for 15 December voiced the separatist ambitions of the ruling class: 'At this meeting, we will mark out the path of the "Nation of the Lowlands" and Bolivia. We will all be there, and together we will sing, as always, our shout of freedom, our shout of independence'. Cochabamba, however, shows that the social movements of the Bolivian working class and peasantry are mobilising again, and they will be pushing Morales to stand firm against the separatist machinations of the ruling class.

Robert Clough

MEXICO

Repression in Oaxaca intensifies

Intense repression against the people of Oaxaca unleashed five days before the inauguration of Felipe Calderon as president of Mexico on 30 November has led to a temporary set-back for the mass movement organised by APPO, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca. More than 200 activists were arrested and transported to distant prisons where they were subjected to beatings and other forms of torture. Dozens of others have been murdered. With the livelihood of millions of peasants threatened by subsidised corn imported from the US and three quarters of the population living in poverty, the new president wants to show the working class and oppressed of Mexico that resistance to his neo-liberal programme will be crushed without mercy.

The first attempt to crush

APPO's resistance at the end of October ended in failure as the risen people beat back a combined assault from marines and federal police. APPO has been demanding the resignation of Oaxacan state governor Ulises Ruis since the summer because of his brutality and corruption. During the first 15 months of Ruis's administration 29 activists were assassinated. From June to October 2006 at least 18 were assassinated. In November the repression intensified, and over the two months to the end of December, 24 were assassinated (APPO statement, 30 December 2006). On 12 January, teacher Enriqueta Santiago was seized by paramilitaries and was later found dead, shot six times. The result is that for the moment APPO is in retreat, although it has called a 'mega-march' for 3 February.

Calderon depends on Ruis's Institutional Revolutionary Party

(PRI) to provide sufficient support in Congress for a constitutional amendment to privatise PEMEX, the state-owned oil industry. The PRI has demanded its price: the crushing of APPO, and Calderon is delivering. As further indication of his priorities, Calderon has increased the military budget by 30% whilst keeping the social budget to a mere 10% of foreign and domestic debt service. However, there is no sign that the current stagnant state of the Mexican economy will improve, and plenty of indications that conditions for the mass of people will deteriorate. NAFTA has progressively reduced tariffs on the import of corn; over a million families have been forced off the land from the dumping of subsidised US corn. All tariffs on imported corn and beans will be abolished on 1 January 2008 which will threaten the livelihoods of millions more. Bush's proposed construction of a wall the length of the US-Mexican border will prevent those displaced from joining the 2.4 million who have emigrated to the US over the past six years. Mass opposition to Calderon and the Mexican ruling class is bound to emerge.

Robert Clough

ECUADOR

Presidential elections: neo-liberalism defeated

On 26 November Ecuador elected its eighth president in ten years. Rafael Correa, briefly an economics minister in the outgoing government and 'left-Christian' leader of the year-old National Alliance, defeated his neo-liberal billionaire opponent Alvaro Noboa with 57% of the second-round vote against Noboa's 43%. Expected to win in the first round on 15 October, Correa lost to Noboa by 22.8% votes to 26.8% votes. The subsequent turnaround certainly

came from a popular reaction to Noboa's threats to privatise Petroecuador, the principal source of state revenue and the state electricity and telephone companies. His proposal to privatise social security as well would condemn 200,000 elderly people to immediate misery.

But presidential and legislative voting patterns don't match, and Correa has virtually no support in the single legislative chamber. In opposition to the President, Noboa will certainly ally with the Social Patriotic

Party of former president Lucio Gutierrez whom the masses forced from office in April 2005. Building ruling class unity will be essential since, despite their fractured political organisation, the indigenous groups and poor urban workers, along with the better-off oil and electricity workers, will demand action from Correa to rescue the country from debt and poverty. A first step will be a referendum scheduled for 18 March to set up a Constituent Assembly.

Alvaro Michaels

CUBA NEWS

US shields convicted terrorist

More twists and turns as the US administration attempts to ensure its protégé, Luis Posada Carriles, continues to evade justice. Since his illegal entry into the United States in April 2005, Venezuela has been seeking the extradition of anti-Cuban terrorist Posada to face charges for blowing up a Cubana airline in 1976, killing all 73 civilians on board. At the time, Posada had already been on the CIA payroll for 13 years and the FBI was fully aware of the bomb plot.

Posada has made it clear that, if put on trial, he will reveal the full extent of US collusion in his murderous activities. Conveniently, therefore, the US administration has just 'discovered' that Posada lied about his illegal entry (an accusation made at the time by the Cuban government and angrily refuted by then Under-Secretary for Latin America Roger Noriega as being 'entirely without substance'), allowing seven minor immigration charges to be brought against him – and avoiding, for the time being, extradition to Venezuela.

At the same time, evidence has emerged that all files held on Posada by Miami FBI were shredded in 2003 on the orders of the then South Florida FBI chief Hector Pesquera (a leading prosecutor of the Cuban 5), to avoid handing them over to the Panamanian authorities as evidence in Posada's trial for the attempted assassination of Fidel Castro in 2000. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Otto Reich met with then President of Panama, Moscoso in 2003 and 2004 to ensure a speedy, little-reported trial, light sentences for those involved and, within six months, a free pardon for the convicts from the outgoing president.

On 17 January Posada was transferred to Otero County prison in New Mexico from an immigration detention centre in Texas. His lawyers are demanding his release and the US authorities have been given until 1 February to convince a court he should continue to be held indefinitely.

Close down Guantanamo torture camp

On 11 January, demonstrations all over the world marked the fifth anniversary of the opening of the notorious US torture camps in Guantanamo Bay, in illegally-occupied Cuba. In Cuba, former detainee Shafiq Rasul from Britain, the mother of detained British resident Omar Deghayes, and Cindy Sheehan, mother of a US soldier killed in Iraq, were amongst those who marched right up to the border in Guantanamo to demand the camp be closed down and all the prisoners freed.

Cuban literacy campaign can do it

Cuba's successful model for spreading literacy amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged – the 'I can do it' campaign, enthusiastically embraced by educators as far apart as New Zealand and the Caribbean – was launched in Bolivia a year ago, and has already taught over 200,000 Bolivians to read and write in Spanish. In November, it was extended to the indigenous languages of the country – Ayamará and Quechua, with Guarani to come. By 2008, Bolivia expects 1.2 million more Bolivians to become literate. Last year, Venezuela declared itself free of illiteracy, using the Cuban method.

Infant mortality rate reaches all-time low

Cuba's infant mortality rates – a solid indicator of the overall health of the population – dropped to the lowest rate in the country's history last year. The figure for 2006 was 5.3 per 1,000 live births; of the countries in South America, only comparatively developed Chile (9) and Costa Rica (9.7) come near. More remarkable still is that the figure is spread evenly across the country, in contrast to the vast gulf between rich and poor evident in imperialist countries. In the developed world, only Latvia has an infant mortality rate worse than the US's 5 per 1,000 live births, but this average masks the grim reality that for black people in the US the rate soars to 9.3. The country with the highest rate of infant mortality in the world is Angola, with 185 per 1,000 live births.

Cat Wiener

SWP: mired in sectarianism

For some time, the SWP leadership has been struggling to maintain its increasingly reactionary stance on Cuba. However, on 13 January 2007, *Socialist Worker* published a debate article by Diana Raby of the Institute of Latin American Studies at Liverpool University. Raby is also the author of *Democracy and Revolution: Latin America and socialism* (Pluto Press 2006). Possibly for the first time ever, the pages of *Socialist Worker* entertained the idea that Cuba might be a leading revolutionary force and, as Raby says in her book, 'a beacon of hope'.

The article examines the role played by Cuba as a model for Venezuela and Bolivia, with a government based on the working class and popular movements, constructing an 'alternative social and economic order'. Raby clearly understands the role of the 26

July Movement grouped around Fidel Castro and the dynamic between the pressure of the mass movement and Castro's own revolutionary leadership. Like Chavez, she writes, he 'gives voice' to the 'aspirations of the masses'. She ends her article with a call to 'overcome yesterday's sectarian divisions and sterile debates and unite to support it' [revolutionary Latin America].

If only. The immediate response in *Socialist Worker* was a spate of opportunist SWP apparatchiks clumsily parroting the leadership line: 'Cuba is not a socialist country. It is a dictatorship run by Castro and his party' writes one. Far from inspiring Bolivia and Venezuela, Cuba is 'restraining other struggles in the region'. 'Raby is wrong to imply that socialism exists or is being created in Cuba', another tells us. Raby is accused of promoting ch-

arismatic leaders and 'socialism from above' at the expense of the 'mass activity of working people in transforming their daily lives'. A week later, the heavy artillery weighed in with a full-page article by Chris Harman, trashing the idea of Cuba as a revolutionary model for Latin America.

'Today, despite talk of socialism, Cuba is marked by enormous disparities of wealth and income... supporters of the Cuban model might try to use the movement from below to establish state control of industry and control of the state by a single party. But they would stop the movement in its tracks if the mass of the people took decisions into their own hands' (*Socialist Worker*, 27 January 2007). As the people of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia get on with the real business of creating revolutionary change, the SWP remains mired in sectarianism. ■

Solidarity brigade to Cuba

On 21 April, Rock around the Blockade's seventh brigade will depart for Cuba for two weeks, taking with us money raised throughout the year to provide a sound system for the Union of Young Communists, which plays a vital role in organising and raising the consciousness of young people in Cuba.

We will divide our time between the City of Havana and visiting projects in rural areas, have opportunities to meet with representatives from the Communist Party, Federation of Cuban Women, students, trade unionists and health and education workers, and see some of the vital work being carried out by Cuba's social workers as part of con-

solidating the Battle of Ideas. We will also be in Cuba to join the millions who take to the streets to celebrate 1 May. The brigade will be an opportunity to witness the process of a socialist society being built and sustained on a daily basis, and the brigadistas will be speaking at meetings around Britain to share their experiences on their return.

Rock around the Blockade campaigns actively in solidarity with socialist Cuba on the streets of Britain. We need your support! Get involved, help build the campaign, raise more funds to support Cuba and oppose the illegal US blockade.

Join Rock around the Blockade



2005 Brigadistas with building workers at a school for children with special needs

Yes, I would like to join Rock around the Blockade

and enclose £10 waged/£4 low-waged/£2 concessions (delete as appropriate) £
I would like to donate £ towards the sound system for the UJC

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

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Reviews

END STATE HANDOUTS

■ Plundering the Public Sector

David Craig and Richard Brooks Constable 2006 £9.99 paperback, ISBN 978-1-84529-374-1

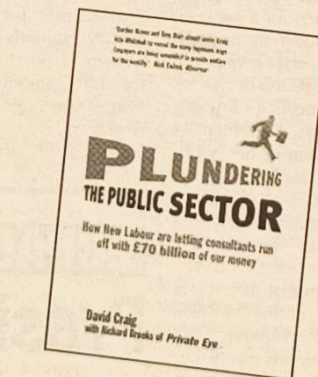
'What is your greatest legacy?' Mrs. Thatcher was asked recently. Without hesitation, she replied 'Tony Blair'. How right she was about New Labour!

Plundering the Public Sector is a readable and indeed entertaining exposé of 'How New Labour are letting consultants run off with £70 billion of our money' (the book's subtitle). Sidelining civil servants, Parliament, the political parties, the trade unions, and indeed anyone who has anything to do with the real world of providing services, New Labour has poured millions into consultancy firms, highly profitable businesses, with an estimated gross profit rate of 55%. The writer admits that the figure is 'estimated', because of the veil of secrecy drawn over their operations, under the guise of 'commercial confidentiality'. The entertainment value arises when the author, from his own experience as a consultant, describes the seven consulting profit-boosters, shabby tricks to boost the consultants' bills: the ingenuity of their excuses when occasionally called to account, an unholy trinity of stonewalling, circumlocution and opacity; and some elementary

lessons in consultantese ('learning the lessons', 'changing the culture' and so on).

But the great merit of this book is that it shows that the employment of private consultancy firms is part of the government's privatisation programme for education and health. The authors cleverly undermine every New Labour claim for the virtues of privatisation.

Private sector management expertise? In management terms (cost overruns, punctual completion of projects), the private sector is no more efficient than the state – its expertise in making 'efficiency savings' relies on sacking thousands and worsening the conditions of those left. No to ideology, yes to 'what works'? On the evidence provided here, the private sector is anarchic and wasteful. Free choice? The government chooses between private sector Tweedledum... and private sector Tweedledee, and the choice of a well-funded, democratically accountable welfare service is the only choice which is not allowed. Partnership between the private and public sector? One of the partners 'negotiates' its own terms, will walk away if it does not make enough profit, expects to be bailed out if things go wrong, and does not expect to pay if by extreme mischance its



greed and inefficiencies are exposed – no prizes for guessing which one. Interestingly, the authors point out that when in power, the Conservatives were very cautious about the Private Finance Initiative and the only Labour shadow minister not to warn against its dangers was Gordon Brown (so much for the 'difference' between Brown and Blair).

Best of all, the final chapter puts forward a practical programme for reining in consultants, for restoring democratic accountability, and for re-nationalising the NHS. Every worker in the health service, and every supporter of fair and universal public services, should read this book.

Patrick Newman



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

■ Courageous Ali and the Heartless King

Tariq Mehmood, illustrated by Abbas Shah, Satchel, 2006, ISBN 0-9552539-2-6, £6.99

This is the adventure – part Sinbad the Sailor, part Aladdin – of 13-year-old Ali who sets off to find his father who has been taken prisoner in the Great Palace of King Khauf. The action includes a secret army of flying farting camels and a cloak of invisibility but is primarily a tale of courage and hope in the midst of cruelty and war. King Khauf and Prince Gosler are Bush and Blair and this is the story of the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The message is that children and young people can resist lies and injustice where adults are coerced into submission and conformity. There is hope for the future.

Tariq Mehmood, who regularly goes into schools to tell stories, knows well that children have a tendency towards being fair and an instinct for truth. This book will entertain and inform, and more than that, validate the instinctive revulsion that children in this country feel for the conduct of British politicians. A recommended read – buy it as a present for young teens and enjoy it yourself.

Susan Davidson

Solidarity with the Harmondsworth Uprising! Shut down Labour's immigration prisons

On Tuesday 28 November 2006 detainees at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre rose up in protest against their imprisonment. The revolt lasted more than 24 hours and resulted in substantial damage to the privately-run detention centre. The protest came the day after the publication of a damning inspection report by Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers into conditions at Harmondsworth, and was directly triggered by the attempts of members of staff to prevent a group of detainees from watching a news broadcast about the report. **ANNABELLE RICHARDSON** reports.

The uprising started in B-wing but detainees in the other three wings quickly joined in. Specialist prison riot squads, called Tornado teams, were drafted in from all across south-east England to batter the protesters into submission. About 50 detainees were taken to the courtyard around midnight and left there with no food, shivering in the cold, until 7am on Wednesday. Some did not get their medication. Other detainees were locked in their rooms even though parts of the detention centre were on fire. The fires set off the sprinkler system, which caused extensive water damage to the centre.

The protest continued well into Wednesday lunchtime when detainees in one courtyard spelled out a make-shift 'SOS: Freedom' and 'HELP' banner with bedsheets. These were photographed by a news helicopter and published widely. Clearly fearful that this would lead to support for the prisoners and make it more difficult to denounce them as violent animals, the government rapidly declared the airspace above the centre a 'no fly zone', citing vague 'security reasons'.

Harmondsworth is run by private company Kalyx, a subsidiary of Sodexo. It holds up to 501 detainees and at the time of the uprising held 484. Home Secretary John Reid announced that the figure included '177 foreign nationals who had been convicted of criminal offences, had completed their custodial sentences and who were in the process of being deported or considered for deportation'.

Reid clearly intended journalists and the public to conclude that the detainees included violent criminals; however the Home Office's own agreements on post-sentence immigration detention indicate that no-one convicted of a violent, sexual, terrorist or Class A drugs offence can be transferred to a detention centre. Instead they must remain in prison until their deportation. Those awaiting deportation in Harmondsworth were all serving less than four years' imprisonment, mainly for minor drugs offences, or criminal offences directly related to immigration. *The Guardian* interviewed one detainee, an elderly man from Leeds who has lived and worked in Britain since the age of 13 and yet is now being considered for deportation to Jamaica following a three-month sentence for cannabis offences.

Reid claimed that all other detainees were 'immigration offenders and failed asylum seekers who are in the United Kingdom in breach of our immigration laws and who are being held pending removal'. He omitted to mention the significant number of

covering July to September 2006, fast-tracked asylum seekers in Harmondsworth had a 99% refusal rate, as opposed to 81% refusal for all asylum seekers.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons uncovered a regime obsessed with control and where 61% of detainees felt unsafe, particularly because of staff victimisation. One detainee reported that 'The first thing they say to you when you come in here is don't mess about or we'll make life difficult for you'.

The report concludes that many of 'the rules and systems would have been considered over-controlling in a prison, let alone a removal centre'. For

suits in privileges being removed, including the right to leave one's room between 8.30pm and 7.30am, which is particularly harsh for smokers, as smoking is not allowed in the rooms.

Ex-Harmondsworth detainee Joseph Mande told FRFI 'The level of respect of officers for detainees was very low, there was a lot of racism and a denial of services to detainees. On three occasions when evidence was sent from Africa, when the evidence arrived at Harmondsworth they sent it back, claiming they didn't have that person in the centre.'

In these conditions, the high level of self-harm is not surprising. Since 2000 there have been four suicides at Harmondsworth, along with numerous acts of self-harm. However, there has also been sustained and regular resistance by detainees, ranging from hunger strikes and small protests to full-scale uprisings.

As always happens in the case of protests by the incarcerated against the fact and conditions of their detention, the state has moved to criminalise the protesters. John Reid accused them of sabotage and denounced them for being 'prepared to destroy property and to endanger their fellow detainees'. In fact, the loss of detention capacity caused by the uprising at Harmondsworth massively assisted 50-150 detainees from other centres, who were released on bail, and therefore put in a far better position to fight their cases against deportation.

According to information provided by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 11 people were arrested on 29 November 2006 on suspicion of violent disorder. There are no charges at present. They have all been 'bailed' until the end of January pending further investigation by the Metropolitan Police's Specialist Crime Directorate. Of course this does not mean they have been released from detention.

If these asylum seekers go to trial they will be depicted as violent troublemakers and instigators of otherwise passive and accepting detainees. They will be sentenced to terms of criminal imprisonment and then be deported at the end of these sentences.

The uprising at Harmondsworth was not the first to occur there; nor will it be the last. Oppression breeds resistance. Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! stands in complete solidarity with all those in struggle against immigration detention and salutes the resistance of all Harmondsworth detainees involved in the uprising.

*Close down Harmondsworth!
End all immigration detention!*



Detainees used bedsheets to tell the outside world about their treatment

asylum seekers being held in administrative detention while a decision is made on their claim, under the 'fast-tracking' system. Such decisions are mainly based on the nationality of the applicant and asylum seekers from a list of supposedly 'safe' countries find themselves imprisoned and pushed through the fast-track system. These 'safe' countries include Afghanistan, Turkey, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire.

Legal and human rights organisations, such as the Refugee Legal Centre and Bail for Immigration Detainees, have demonstrated that the fast-tracking system is completely unfair. According to Home Office statistics

example, detainees are not allowed to use their own toiletries; nor are they allowed to display any photographs or pictures in their rooms – rooms in which the windows do not open. The report also criticises the 'incentives scheme', which operates more like a punishment scheme, 'depriving detainees of basic entitlements such as the ability to attend religious services.' Punishments such as removal from association and temporary confinement are frequently used for 'bad' behaviour. Detainees reported abuse by prison guards and this is likely to be under rather than over reported. The act of resisting removal also re-

INSIDE HARMONDSWORTH

This is an extract from the diary kept by Clive, who was a detainee in Harmondsworth in August 2006 and who is fighting against his deportation to Jamaica. FRFI would like to thank Clive and his partner Kim for providing us with this insight into the day-to-day treatment of detainees.

Sunday: Went on visit to see Kim and was told that if we had any contact at all between us that I would be put in the block.

Monday: Went on visit yet again with Kim, and yet again we were told that we could not hold hands.

Tuesday: Went to see the doctor as I

have lost a tremendous amount of weight...and the doctor told me that the only way that I could get any thing else in here besides the food was if I was an alcoholic. I am 6ft 5in tall and weighing 10st at the moment when my weight should be between 14-15st.

...Put up pictures on my wall of Kim and myself and was told to take them down and was given no reason as to why they are not allowed.

Friday: Went on a visit with Kim, and the both of us had both our shoes off and had our feet on top of each other's feet, and we were told that it is against the rules to take off your shoes

Sunday: Went to go into the TV room for a smoke and to watch TV at 11pm and was told that the TV has been

taken away and that the room will be locked which means that I had no access to either the hot or cold water, because that is where the water filter is situated and there is no other water filter anywhere else...was told that it would be closed all night.

...Approached by two officers and was taken down to the end of the landing and was spoken to behind a door to be told that I was meant to have been rude to one of the officers regarding why the room was locked and yet again I was spoken to as if I was a teenager...as if I had no right to ask why the room was locked. As often, I am threatened with the block, not only me but other detainees as well. I feel that I am living in a prison not a detention centre...this is making me more stressed and sicker as the days go by.

INSIDE NEWS

Long Lartin punitive regime

Alfredo Mavrici, who is a prisoner at Long Lartin in Worcestershire, contacted FRFI in December to tell us that he was the first prisoner to be put on a new 'Segregation Basic Regime'. We reprint the regime details below.

Segregation Basic Regime

- Closed visits only
- One shower per week on a Sunday
- One telephone call on a Sunday
- Legal calls will not be allowed and contact will be by letter only
- No shared exercise
- No radio or TV
- Library trolley once a week
- No access to in-cell activities
- Maximum of £2.50 to spend per week and will have no access to private cash
- No access to education
- Bed pack to be made each day at breakfast and the bed pack must remain until the evening meal is served.

NON COMPLIANCE WITH THIS POLICY IS TO BE REPORTED AND DEALT WITH VIA THE ADJUDICATION SYSTEM.

The last condition refers to the rolling up of bedding and mattress into a military barracks style 'bed pack'. So, a prisoner who can do nothing and go nowhere, cannot even spend the hours of solitary, slow-passing time lying on his bed.

Protesting against deaths of women prisoners

On 18 January, as gale-force winds battered Britain, a vigil led by Pauline Campbell and supported by RCG comrades and others took place outside Styal women's prison. It was the fourth anniversary of the death of Sarah Campbell, who died in the 'care' of the prison in 2003. Sarah's mother, Pauline, has received no apology from the Home Office, despite its admission of 'failure in the duty of care'.

The vigil didn't exactly go as planned as the 60mph gusts blocked roads on all sides and some supporters were unable to attend. Pauline used the



opportunity, however, to write 'Shame on the Home Office' and other slogans on the dirt-covered sides of two prison vans, held up on the road. The screws were furious, and one quickly ran out of the van to rub off what we had written. Shortly after a cop (who was supposed to be diverting the traffic) ran frantically towards the scene and said we could be done for 'graffiti'. This was, however, a short respite from what was otherwise a sombre day. Those Labour politicians responsible for Sarah Campbell's death have admitted no guilt for their crimes and two more women, Caroline Powell and Lucy Wood, have already died in British prisons in January 2007. The fight goes on.

Louis Brehony

FRFI ROUNDUP

End Labour's war in Iraq and Afghanistan

The bloodshed and murder in Iraq have escalated to new heights of brutality in the last two months. The Bush administration is seeking to push another 22,000 troops into Iraq in a desperate gamble to strengthen the occupation and defeat the resistance. The British Labour government continues to participate in this barbarity. **Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!** supporters have been on the streets throughout Britain calling for an end to Labour's war and occupation.

On 3 December FRFI held a meeting in Newcastle to discuss the role of the 38,000 mercenaries who are part of the occupation of Iraq, many of them employed by British companies. On 8 January RCG activists attended a public meeting of Tyneside Stop the War Coalition and won the support of the meeting for a local demonstration alongside the national Stop the War demonstration on 24 February.

In Manchester FRFI members have been working closely with a relatively new group, Stop the Warmongers, which includes progressively minded people who oppose the anti-democratic tactics of the Stop the War coalition and its Labour-loving politics. As one Stop the Warmongers activist commented: 'We are against the slogan "Stop the War" because we support the right of the Iraqi people to wage war against the invaders...we are against imperialist war and against the Labour warmongers.' With this group we are working towards a demonstration in Manchester on 17 March to mark the 4th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

Victory to the Palestinian people!

In London FRFI activists, working with the Victory to the Intifada group (VTI), have continued to picket Marks and Spencer's flagship store on Oxford Street. M&S is Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel and we have been holding weekly protests against the company for the last six years. On Saturday 16 December, VTI held a demonstration on Oxford Street to highlight the plight of Palestinians living under siege in Bethlehem. A large photo exhibition on the pavement outside M&S illustrated the reality for Palestinians living under occupation.

Several lively Saturday afternoon pickets of Marks and Spencer were also held in Newcastle over the Christmas period. On 16 December, Manchester VTI held a successful demonstration outside Marks and Spencer on the busy Market Street. The police were absent so we took the opportunity to re-establish our presence outside M&S's main doors, leafleting, petitioning and displaying flags and placards and calling for a boycott of the store, Israeli goods and for an end to all British support for Israel.

Defend asylum seekers!

Asylum seekers are continuing to face racism from the state on a daily basis, both from the reactionary media and from the Labour government. Families are being snatched from their houses and placed in detention centres from where they face being deported back to their countries of origin and possible imprisonment and torture.

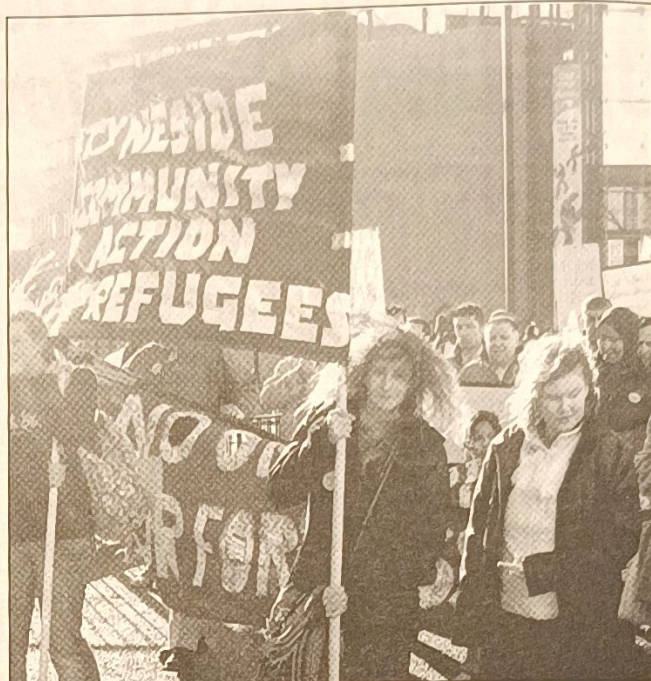
On the first Tuesday of every month, comrades in London continue the demonstrations outside Communications House to highlight the Labour government's racist treatment of asylum seekers in Britain. Communications House is an unmarked austere building which the public pass, unaware that it is a place of fear for asylum seekers who are forced to sign on and face the regular threat of

arbitrary detention and/or deportation. Comrades are regularly joined by members of the asylum and migrant community, who show their courage and determination by coming out on the streets to highlight their cases and support each other. United we stand, divided we fall.

On 8 December members of the FRFI and Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) supported a march through Newcastle organised by members of the Congolese community to expose the recent sham elections in DR Congo, which had been supported and legitimised by the 'international community' of imperialist plunderers. The following day, on 9 December, Congolese asylum seekers were amongst those taking part in a demonstration organised by TCAR in solidarity with the protests at Harmondsworth and the hunger strike at Yarl's Wood.

During December and January the Immigration Service carried out a wave of dawn raids in Newcastle focusing on Kurdish asylum seekers from Turkey.

TCAR responded with several emergency demonstrations outside Government Offices North East and with campaigns of protest at Turkish Airways and the Home Office, which helped to avert several attempted deportations. On 20 January TCAR held a militant demonstration through the centre of Newcastle to protest against deportations of asylum seekers and to launch a pledge of resistance to snatch squads. Over 100 protesters from diverse communities participated in the march, which included a rally at Grey's Monument. Speakers included asylum seekers from Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ethiopia and Turkey and representatives from Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Stop the War Coalition and the Jesus Army. Protesters marched under the banner 'Here to Stay, Here to Fight - Defend Asylum Rights!' and demanded an end to dawn raids, the brutal policy of snatching failed asylum seekers from their homes in the early hours of the morning.



Newcastle upon Tyne 20 January: TCAR demonstration against snatch squads

Hands off Ireland!

FRFI attended two demonstrations in Glasgow on the weekend of the 20-21 January to mark the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when British paratroopers shot 26 civil rights protesters in Derry, killing 13 of them. FRFI comrades marched through the city centre alongside the several thousand working-class people who came out on the streets to commemorate the atrocity, braving freezing weather, hundreds of police and two hundred loyalists on a counter-picket. The march was addressed by relatives of one of the victims, and a delegate from the Basque country. Comrades in Glasgow also leafleted at Celtic Park with the Republican Prisoners' Action Group, continuing to bring attention to the plight of the Republican POWs in Maghaberry gaol.

Viva Cuba!

On 23 December Rock around the Blockade held a demonstration on the north pavement of Trafalgar Square, London in solidarity with the Cuban 5, the five Cubans in gaol in the US for fighting terrorism and exposing the reac-

tionary role of the Bush regime and their supporters in the Miami Mafia. This was part of an international week of action called by Cuba on the fifth anniversary of the trial of the five men. They have now served eight years in gaol and the campaign for their immediate release is growing.

In December three street stalls were held in central Manchester linking the issue of the 5 with Cuba's struggle for socialism. Images of the Cuban 5 were displayed visibly alongside Cuban and Venezuelan flags, making our stalls the revolutionary alternative to Santa's grotto.

Throughout December stalls were held in Newcastle to call for solidarity with socialist Cuba and to fundraise for the 2007 brigade. These activities culminated in a 'Celebration of Resistance and Revolution' on 31 December, held to celebrate the eve of the 48th anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Supporters gathered on the streets of central Newcastle with flags, banners and music, and were joined by an Ecuadorian folk band as well as hip hop and spoken word artists.



London 23 December: RATB holds a demonstration to free the Cuban 5

Events

LONDON

Tuesdays 6 February and 6 March,

1-2pm

Demonstration **Defend asylum seekers!**

Communications House
210 Old Street, EC1
(Nearest tube Old Street)

Wednesday 7 February, 7-9.30pm

Public meeting LSE FRFI society

Close down the prison camps in occupied Guantanamo Bay!

Release the prisoners now!

London School of Economics (LSE), Houghton Street, WC2
S421, St Clement's Building
(Nearest tube Holborn)

Wednesday 14 February, 7-9.30pm

Public meeting LSE FRFI society

Life under occupation - a report back from Palestine

LSE, S421, St Clement's Building

Wednesday 21 February, 7-9.30pm

Public meeting LSE FRFI society

Seeking asylum - fleeing imperialism

LSE, Z229, St Philip's Building

Saturday 24 February

Join the FRFI anti-imperialist contingent on the national **Stop the War** march.
Meet 12 noon, Hyde Park

Wednesday 7 March, 7-9.30pm

Public meeting LSE FRFI society

Cuban democracy - dispelling the myths

LSE, H101, Connaught House, Aldwych

Wednesday 14 March, 7-9.30pm

Public meeting LSE FRFI society with speaker from Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association
Forced separation: a personal story
LSE, Z229, St Philip's Building

Saturday 17 March, 12-3pm

Join London FRFI on the streets for action **against the war in Iraq on the fourth anniversary of the invasion** (phone or email for further details)

Wednesday 21 March, 7-9.30pm

Public meeting LSE FRFI society
Fourth anniversary of the Iraq war - imperialist troops out of the Middle East!
LSE, E304 East Building

Every Thursday, 6-8pm

Victory to the Intifada

Demonstration outside Marks & Spencer

Oxford Street (Marble Arch end)

Nearest tube Marble Arch

For further details call 020 7837 1688 or 07815 617 746

Or email eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com or northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com

NEWCASTLE

Wednesday 21 February, 6-9pm

Palestine Update Public Meeting

Venue to be announced, contact for details

Saturday 24 February, 12 noon

Troops Out Now!

Street action in solidarity with the Iraqi Resistance

Grey's Monument

Saturday 17 March, 12 noon

Demonstration to mark the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq

Grey's Monument

Every Saturday 12-2pm

Street action - call or email for details

Every Saturday, 3pm

Meeting of **Tyneside Community Action for Refugees**

Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop,

bottom of Westgate Road

(contact tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk)

For further details call 07857 323 523

Or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com

MANCHESTER

Sunday 4 February, 2pm

Anti-imperialist forum

Latin America and the struggle for socialism

Cross Street Chapel, off Market Street

Donation on the door

Wheelchair access available

Saturday 17 February, 12 noon

Victory to the Intifada

Picket outside Marks & Spencer

Market Street

Saturday 17 March, 12 noon

Demonstration: End the occupation of Iraq! Support the Iraqi resistance!

Stop the Warmongers

Piccadilly Gardens

Monday 26 March, 12 noon

North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group protest

Dallas Court Immigration Reporting Centre

South Langworthy Road, next to Broadway

tram station, Salford

Contact flightback_05@yahoo.com

07779 189 794

For further details call 0781 6547 066

Or email mrcrgfrfi@fmail.net

Website: www.manchesterrfri.co.uk

ROCHDALE

Saturday 24 February, 12 noon

Victory to the Intifada

Picket outside Marks & Spencer

Market Street

For details contact 07816 547 066

LEEDS

RCG/FRFI in Leeds is currently planning new

activities in the area

To get involved contact 07899 983 131,

frfi_leeds@yahoo.co.uk

GLASGOW

Saturday 3 February, 1-3pm

Street meeting **Troops out now! End the occupation of Iraq!**

Donald Dewar statue, Buchanan Street

Tuesday 27 February, 7-9.30pm

Discussion **Iraq, the anti-war movement**

and the Labour Party

Room M127, George Moore Building,

Glasgow Caledonian University

Tuesday 6 March, 7-9.30pm

FRFI readers' group meeting

Room M127, George Moore Building,

Glasgow Caledonian University

Tuesday 27 March, 7-9.30pm

Revolutionary Latin America

Room M127, George Moore Building,

Glasgow Caledonian University

For further details contact 07773 374 858

or email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.scotlandfrfi.co.uk

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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

email _____

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Apartheid wall misnomer?

I think that calling that obscenity that the Zionists are building the 'Apartheid Wall' dilutes the impact and horror of what is happening in Palestine.

Calling it the Apartheid Wall diverts attention away to another land and another struggle. The whole emphasis should be directed clearly at the people who are building the wall (the Zionists) and the precise location (Palestine), something that the average person can identify with. Not a vague mixture.

DERRICK
(by e-mail)

Reply

Thanks for your comments. We would welcome ideas for an alternative description of Israel's Wall. Previously it has been suggested that the

Zionists' monstrous wall should be called the Annexation Wall because its purpose is clearly to take more land from the Palestinians and to make life so impossible for the Palestinians that they are forced to leave. The reason we use the term Apartheid in referring to the Wall is because in general we feel that people understand the term Apartheid to mean racist oppression and the forced racist displacement of people into enclosed guarded communities with amenities, services and funding withheld.

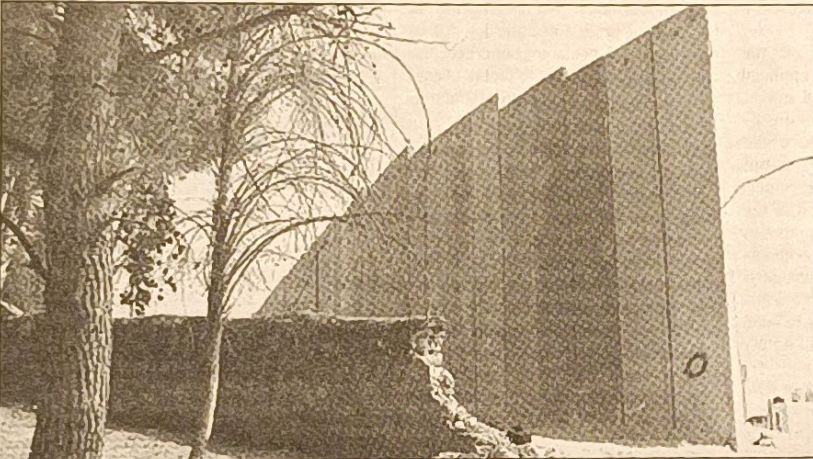
Apartheid may refer to a different place, a different time and a different situation but it usefully recalls to people's minds the extreme racism of the white supremacist South African state. Israel was very close to the South African Apartheid regime; their shared ideology led them to undertake combined research into making an ethnic bomb – one that would kill only a certain ethnicity/race of people.

Israel manages to throw off criticisms of its racist institutions, laws, policies and aims with a counter charge of anti-semitism. We consider the analogy to Apartheid exposes Israel's policies as racist and backed by imperialism.

This brutal Zionist wall is displacing people and cutting through communities and forcing Palestinians to live in an open prison, purely because they are not Jewish. They are the indigenous people of a land that has been occupied with imperialist backing in order to control the population of the Middle East and ensure its plunder by companies whose profits enrich the ruling class of the imperialist nations.

The Apartheid Wall is also the name that the Palestinian people are using to describe it themselves.

FIONA
Victory to the Intifada!
London



Victory for Brian Haw

For the last six years Brian Haw has protested outside the Houses of Parliament in London initially against the sanctions on Iraq and now against the war in Iraq. Tony Blair at one point commented that this was a reflection of British democracy – a warmongering prime minister who can come out of parliament and face an anti-war demonstration.

However, the Labour government became uncomfortable with this constant reminder and introduced a law which outlawed demonstrations within one

kilometre of the Houses of Parliament. The 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA) required that Brian Haw's placards must be no bigger than three metres high and wide and one metre in depth. In May 2006, it took 78 police officers in the dead of night to destroy the peace camp to make the size fit the SOCPA conditions. The artist Mark Wallinger has reconstructed the Parliament Square display which is being exhibited at the Tate Britain in London until August.

Brian has never given in and

has challenged everything in court. In December 2006 Brian was charged under SOCPA with failing to comply with the conditions imposed by the police the previous May. On 22 January 2007, Brian Haw won the right to continue demonstrating in Parliament Square. The judge ruled that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner had acted outside the law, and that the conditions imposed on Brian under SOCPA lacked clarity and were invalid because they were invoked by a junior officer.

In court with Brian were four

other protesters arrested under SOCPA, Maria Gellastegui, Stephen Jago, Barbara Tucker and Martin McGrath, whose cases were adjourned.

Let their victory be a lesson for all of us who continue to protest against the Labour government's vicious wars abroad and increasingly restrictive laws at home – the only struggle you lose is the one you give up.

HANNAH CALLER
North London

Demand human rights for immigrants

A friend wrote to FRFI in March 2006 about my case. I have been detained at HMP Littlehey for seven months under the Immigration Act. At my trial in October 2003, no deportation upon release was recommended, but in December 2005 I was issued with a deportation order. I lodged an appeal to the immigration tribunal which I lost in February 2006. I was however awarded early release on parole in March 2006. I then received two Restriction Orders at the end of March saying I would not be deported and should not be detained but should be released to go back to my family in Berkshire.

But in April, one day before my release, I received a Detention Order from the Immigration Department and ever since then I have been kept in the dark about

my situation. My family have been suffering, after being assured I would be returned to them. My family and I moved to the UK more than six years ago, when my children were very young. We have no family or home to go back to.

We are being deprived of our right to be together. Surely the Home Office must be in breach of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act? Foreigners are being treated as if we are less than human. Perhaps you could bring some pressure to bear on the Home Secretary and the Immigration Department of the Home Office? We are all supposed to be human and be treated as such but what they are doing is totally opposite.

JOHANNES NYS (JP7042)
Foxrot Wing 19, HMP Littlehey,
Perry, Cambridgeshire PE28 0SR

Imperialist hypocrisy

If the hypocrites of imperialist regimes are going to start lynching perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity, then shouldn't they have dangled General Sharon from a coarse noose and every Israeli leader since 1949 for their cult of sadism upon the people of Lebanon and Palestine?

But what has been played out in the courtroom drama and the agents who escorted the former Iraqi president to the gallows was a

fleeting sense of achievement and an adaptation for the US TV audience. Indeed a pathetic conciliation to fulfil the common craving created by café dwellers of downtown Manhattan.

And, of course, this political assassination of Saddam Hussein has been cultivated by plutocracy, sending shockwaves throughout the Middle East to political leaders who do not conform – that they will suffer the same fate if they dare jeopardise corporate elites that breed in the filth of the new US and Israeli Babylonian dynasties.

STEWART CAMPBELL
Corby

A brighter future

Another one bites the dust. Another year, that is. Unfortunately it was not one of those things like poverty, war, oppression, exploitation, the class contradiction and all the spawn thereof we wish and work to see dining in the dustbin of history. From this dark concrete corner in a remote island of the US gulag archipelago close to the longest night of the year it would be easy to see the socio-political (and, here where coal is king and crowns itself with tops removed from mountains, the physical) landscape as dismal and bleak. That would, however, necessitate being blind to the firmament of lights generated by people in resistance to the forces of repression.

Consciousness is rising! A solid majority everywhere recognises the war in the Middle East as a concentration of crimes of imperialism. Demands to replace war and tax cuts for the rapacious rich with social services and income equalisation are escalating. Sanity in criminal justice is making inroads against the failures of macho, tough-guy approaches. Militancy is growing. So there is light in the world. And thus it is appropriate to celebrate that light – our light! – as the naturality returns us through the solstice to the sunlight of ever-longer days. 'Tis the season to be jolly! Act accordingly! The future holds promise.

BILL DUNNE #10916-086
USP Big Sandy,
PO Box 2068, Inez, KY, 41224,
United States

'We are all Hrant Dink'

Over 100,000 people protested in Istanbul on 23 January at the murder of Hrant Dink. Dink was the editor of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian *Agos* and had been tried and sentenced to six months in prison in October 2005 for speaking out about the genocide of up to one million Armenians by Turkey in 1915 and thereby 'insulting Turkishness'. The Turkish state denies there was a genocide. Protesters carried banners and chanted 'We are all Hrant Dink', 'We are all Armenians' and 'We are all Armenian, Kurdish and Turkish'. Dink's killers were fascists: a teenage member of a right-wing nationalist party has confessed to the murder and others have been arrested. Prime Minister Erdogan said, 'A bullet was fired at freedom of thought and democratic life.' This hypocritical statement was intended to hide embarrassment and reduce the

prospect that the new US Congress will pass a law recognising the mass murder of Ottoman Armenians as genocide. It is also intended to limit the damage caused to Turkey's attempt to qualify for European Union membership by its human rights violations. Despite repeated death threats against him and his family since his conviction Dink was given no protection from the authorities.

The Turkish government protects the fascists as it has protected the fascist murderers of many communists, progressives and Kurdish people in Turkey. The Turkish state may arrest people and so try to distance itself from the murder of Hrant Dink but it is as complicit in his death as it was in murders at Maras, Corum, Sivas and so on.

MUNZUR DERSIMI
East London

SWP slates Cuba

I was doing a Google Images search on the web when I came across this page by accident: <http://www.cubaverdad.net/cdr.htm>

It's a nasty little article about the CDRs in Cuba, and I assume the website is run by one of the Miami Mafia groups. Anyway, I quickly skimmed through it and then I suddenly noticed, underneath it: 'This article was first printed in *International Socialism Journal* 2:20 (Autumn 1983), pp.135-44. *International Socialism Journal* is a quarterly journal of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP-Britain).'

OK, it is no surprise to me that back in the 1980s the SWP had the anti-Cuban line that it still has today (I remember Mike Gonzalez telling people to 'find out about Cuba' from the CANF website at an SWP meeting) but I was still shocked by the lengths these slimy beasts go to trying to convince people that Cuba is an evil totalitarian regime!!

REDS
London

E viva il comunismo – solidarity from Italy

I look forward to our Communist Workers' Party and the Revolutionary Communist Group collaborating in the struggle against imperialism. I was very interested in your books on the 1984-85 miners' strike and on the Labour Party. I agree with the author when he says that the Labour Party is not a socialist party but, rather, a party fit for imperialism. All Labour governments have repressed the Irish liberation movement with violence. The Irish liberation movement has strong connections with socialism and I am a great admirer of James Connolly, the father of Irish revolutionary Marxism.

In Como, we have started a support group for socialist Cuba, Bolivarian Venezuela and all the liberation movements in Latin America, called Comitato

Venceremos (the We Will Win Committee) and plan to hold meetings, rallies and fund-raising meals in a local trade union hall. We held an evening of Cuba's revolutionary music and food in January. I will be going to my beloved socialist Cuba in July with the International Brigade of the National Association for Friendship between Italy and Cuba – it is the realisation of a dream. Fidel Castro is the man I respect most in my life; I also have great admiration for Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque.

A strong communist, revolutionary, anti-fascist, internationalist embrace – I am proud to call you comrades and friends.

ROBERTO VANZULLI
Como, Italy

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Resisting immigration snatch squads in Tyneside

On 20 January Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) held a militant march through Newcastle to protest against deportations of asylum seekers and to launch its Pledge of Resistance to snatch squads. A rally in the city centre was addressed by asylum seekers from Turkey, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Ethiopia, together with speakers from TCAR, FRFI, Newcastle Stop the War and the Jesus Army. The Pledge of Resistance was read out and received enthusiastically. We reproduce an edited text of the Pledge below.

The Pledge of Resistance

Seeking asylum is not a crime! Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

Legal aid for asylum claims has been cut back to a five-hour standard, which makes it impossible for solicitors to adequately prepare a case. The time allowed for submitting an appeal has been reduced to 10 days, with 10 hours legal aid, and the right to a second appeal to an immigration tribunal has been withdrawn. Under this system 81% of asylum seekers are being refused. Now the government proposes to withdraw the right even to a first appeal as long as asylum seekers remain in Britain. Under the 'New Asylum Model' applications are 'fast-tracked' to the point where as little as 1% of applications are successful, and the time limit for submitting an appeal is four days.

The asylum system will never be fair as long as it is managed by the Home Office of a racist and imperialist Labour government which has vested interests in every corner of the world. As long as Britain is dependent for its wealth on the movement of British capital around the world in order to loot the resources of oppressed countries, the British government will never be impartial on the question of immigration of those countries' inhabitants to Britain. For example, the government is lying to us

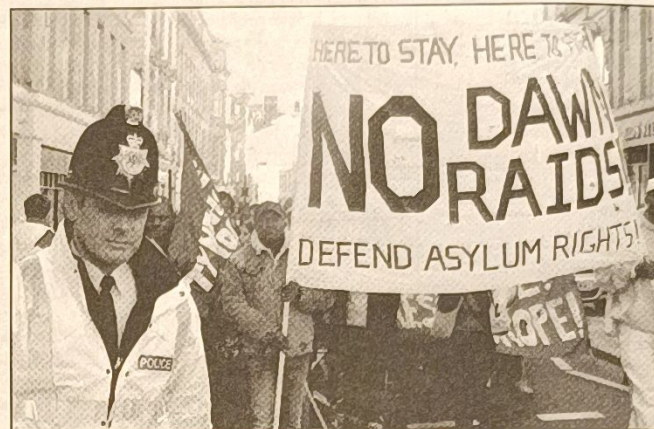
about what is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan so it can look like it is winning the war. The government is telling us that it is safe to deport Iraqis back to Iraq, and it has put Afghanistan on a list of 'safe' countries. Both of these things are lies, and the British Labour government is telling similar lies about other countries in order to serve its own interests, the interests of the British ruling class.

Because asylum seekers are refused a fair process for their applications, any deportation carried out at present from Britain must be considered unjust and illegal. Where the government of a country carries out actions which are against the principles of law and justice, then it is the duty of the people in that country to oppose those actions by any means necessary. It is the government that is acting illegally, not asylum seekers. Therefore, all asylum seekers and British people have a right and a duty to resist deportations!

We call on all those in Britain who support justice and democracy to sign a pledge of resistance against the snatch squads who are daily dragging away members of our community and forcing them onto planes back to countries where they face extreme danger, when their cases have been rejected without proper consideration and legal process, by a government hopelessly biased against those fleeing countries torn apart by imperialist plunder, war and corruption.

We have held demonstrations, petitioned MPs, collected signatures, and had cases publicised in the media, but still the government refuses to listen. The deportations continue. The black vans continue to be sent out from North Shields Reporting Centre to snatch families under cover of darkness and drag them screaming from our communities. We are committed to peaceful protest and the legal process wherever possible, but where the government continues to close its ears we will not sit back and allow them to commit these injustices.

Therefore we call on all the people of Tyneside to sign the pledge to stand together with asylum seekers in their area in active resistance to snatch squads. *Snatch squads are a matter of life and death to asylum seekers. Once a family is snatched there is very little that can be done directly to prevent their deportation. The government wants to be able to snatch people quietly, in the early hours of the morning, when local people will not see. We will oppose them. We will expose them by all means at our disposal. We will make a noise. We will expose them in the press. When the snatch squads arrive in our local area we will arrive too, and we will stand between them and the family they intend to snatch.* Sign the pledge of resistance! End deportations! tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk 07857 323 523



TCAR supporters march against snatch squads

Home Office targets asylum seekers and activists in Scotland

On 8 January Ugandan asylum seeker Zahra Byansi and her two sons, aged 5 and 12, were detained at Brand Street Immigration Centre in Glasgow and subsequently transported to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre in England. The family had been detained and threatened with deportation in March 2006, but freed after a successful campaign in Glasgow.

Zahra Byansi is one of Glasgow's leading asylum seeker activists, consistently involved in demonstrations, protests and marches for the last 15 months. She was a prominent speaker at many demonstrations held by UNITY and spoke last year at FRFI protests in the city centre. She has been a leading member of the Kingsway Asylum Group and was involved in the early morning vigils against dawn raids that prevented immigration officials entering the Kingsway estate (see FRFI 194). Her kidnapping is a conscious attempt by the Home Office to hunt down activists and intimidate Glasgow asylum seekers.

Scottish Nationalist Party MSP Sandra White publicly stated that Zahra had been 'targeted' because of her high profile campaigning for other asylum seekers and that: 'The arrest of this innocent woman and her children is a criminal act by the Home Secretary.'

No to dawn raids!

The Christmas period had seen no let-up in dawn raids, with up to a dozen families brutally snatched from their homes in Glasgow. The holiday period is an opportune time for the immigration services to conduct these raids, as lawyers and MPs are impossible to contact.

The snatching of asylum seekers continues to draw criticism from all sections of Scottish society. Glasgow Archbishop Mario Conti said dawn raids should be stopped 'once and for all' and called for a reprieve over Christmas. 'It is heartbreaking to see families, who have integrated admirably and made a significant contribution to schools, parishes and communities, being roused from their beds and dragged away by police and immigration officials.' (Sunday Herald, 24 December 2006)

On 3 January, Scotland's largest teaching union, the Educational Institute of Scotland called for an end to dawn raids and the closure of Dungavel Detention Centre. It said that raids were 'harrowing' for families

and left children depressed when fellow pupils disappeared. Scotland's Children's Commissioner Kathleen Marshall has accused the state of 'terrifying' children.

Working class solidarity grows

At the end of November, a Scottish woman from the working class estate of Knightswood was charged with obstructing the course of justice for harbouring an asylum seeker and her three-year-old twins in her flat. The family sought shelter after immigration officials battered down their door in a dawn raid. When the woman refused to let the immigration officials into her house, she was charged with obstructing the course of justice and is awaiting a summons from the procurator fiscal. The Glasgow woman said: 'I do not regret it. They could have been black or white or asylum seekers or anybody, but what I heard that morning was frightening - never mind how terrified the children were.' (The Scotsman, 26 December 2006)

This is a further warning by the Home Office that it will not tolerate resistance and is willing to criminalise not only those asylum seekers who fight back, but also all those who assist them in their struggle. The solidarity movement in Glasgow has continued to gain strength, with protests of 60-70 people at Brand Street throughout December, and active working class support for asylum seekers is growing. In communities where asylum seekers have now been resident for several years it is assuming creative and militant new forms.

The Boxing Day edition of The Scotsman sympathetically detailed the story of Noreen Real and Jean Donnachie, who spent Christmas Day leading a patrol on the poverty stricken Kingsway estate to watch out for immigration removal vans. The article reported how the two women established Kingsway Against Removals and Deportation, and how every day between 15 and 30 people patrol the estate to make sure immigration officials cannot seize families. Mrs Donnachie said: 'We are both mothers and grandmothers; that is why we do it. Asylum seekers have made our community a better place. There are no problems among asylum seekers here or fighting with the neighbours... They are ripping the heart out of the community by removing asylum seekers.'

Joseph Eskovitch

Solidarity with asylum seekers! Close all detention and reporting centres

Demonstrate at Communications House Tuesday 6 February and 6 March 1-2pm

The brave actions of the detainees at Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre at the end of November 2006 publicised the disgusting conditions and treatment faced by asylum seekers who are imprisoned to a wide audience. Despite every attempt by Home Secretary John Reid and his sidekicks in the National Offender Management Service and Immigration Service to portray the protesters as criminals and saboteurs, the very fact that the uprising followed immediately after the publication of the most damning report ever into an immigration detention centre by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, meant that these lies could not be sustained.

In December and January London FRFI dedicated its monthly demonstration at Communications House immigration reporting centre to highlighting the struggle of the detainees at Harmondsworth. On 6 February and 6 March we will again be demonstrating outside Communications House, and we urge anyone in London who supports this struggle to join us.

Immigration reporting centres are places of fear for asylum seekers, who have to report to them monthly, weekly or even several times a week. From reporting centres asylum seekers are often detained without warning and sent to removal centres, such as Harmondsworth, to await deportation.

Protest at UK Immigration Service, Communications House, 210 Old Street, London, EC1V 9BR (nearest tube Old Street) Tuesday 6 February and 6 March.

For further information phone 020 7837 1688 or email defendasylumseekers@yahoo.co.uk

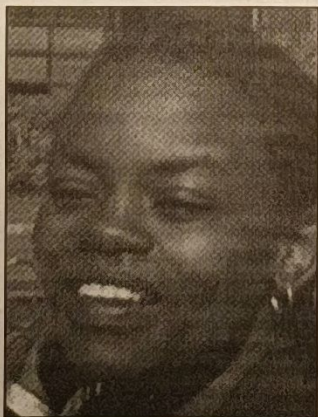
Shut Harmondsworth and Colnbrook detention centres Close all detention centres! Stop deportations! No immigration controls

Demonstrate outside Harmondsworth and Colnbrook detention centres near Heathrow 11.30am Saturday 10 February 2007

Directions: take a tube to Heathrow, then take the U3 bus to Harmondsworth. Coaches will leave central London at 10am, from opposite University of London Union (ULU), Malet Street, WC1E 7HY. To book your seat ring 07983 274 568. Tickets will cost £6 - asylum seekers free and no one turned away.

Organised by London No Borders, supported by other organisations, including FRFI.

A de-brief meeting will be held in central London following the demonstration. No Borders will be putting on a benefit gig in the evening. Food and drink will be available.



Zahra Byansi