

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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END DEPORTATIONS TO CONGO

In a national day of action on 12 April called by the Congo Support Project, FRFI and North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWSAG) joined a sit-down protest and march in Manchester to demand an end to deportations to the Democratic Republic of Congo and to denounce the biased British media (see pages 16 and 7).

INSIDE

WELCOME... p2

LABOUR

Ten years of Labour: abuse of power p1/2
The rise of New Labour p10/11

IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN

Imperialist surge means more misery p4/5

PALESTINE/LEBANON

Zionist terror – Palestinians starve
Imperialists try to destabilise Lebanon p6

LATIN AMERICA

Venezuela: the fight for a United Socialist Party p7

CUBA VIVE

Rock around the Blockade in Cuba: Cuban socialism in action p8/9

COMMUNISM

Anti-communist witch-hunt across eastern Europe p12

FIGHT RACISM!

Organising against Labour's racist immigration laws p16

+ news, prisoners fightback, round-up and letters

TEN YEARS OF LABOUR ABUSE OF POWER

'We cannot suffer any longer the arrogance of power unchecked...Increasingly it [the government] is exhibiting not just a conviction of its own capacity to govern well... but an assumption of some divine right to rule, which is dangerous...'

Tony Blair on the Thatcher government, December 1987, *The Times*

'Hand on heart, I did what I thought was right... This country is a blessed nation. The British are special. The world knows it. In our innermost thoughts we know it. This is the greatest nation on earth.'

Tony Blair, resignation speech, 10 May 2007

With a valedictory assertion of British superiority, Tony Blair resigned as Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party after ten years in power. His long awaited departure has created a ripple on the surface of what passes for political debate in 21st century Britain. Labour's supporters hope that where Blair is judged to have failed, Gordon Brown, his successor, will alter Labour's course. In particular the Labour Left and the trade union leadership hope that Blair's departure will allow some fine tuning towards 'Old Labour' and some restoration of

Labour's socialist credentials. The concentration on the personalities and peccadilloes of Labour's leading men is, as usual, wholly misleading. In reality the class forces that brought Labour to government on 2 May 1997 will still be there on 28 June 2007, when the new leader takes over. Those class forces exclude the working class and are implacably opposed to socialism.

The Labour government came to power in 1997 pledging to modernise the welfare state, govern in the interests of 'all our people', create a

dynamic economy in partnership with business and clean up politics. In every respect it has failed to meet the interests of the working class.

Large sums have indeed been poured into the NHS and education, but for Blair modernisation meant privatisation. The trebling of the NHS budget from £34 billion in 1997 to £94 billion has been concentrated on the creation of rich 'Foundation Hospitals', PFI initiatives and higher salaries for GPs and consultants at the expense of community-level provision which meets the needs of working class people, in particular the young and the old.

'Good' schools are oversubscribed by the middle classes who move mountains (and their homes) to ensure that their children get the places. Private schools are flourishing. Neighbourhood schools in working class areas provide a sub-standard education. Literacy and numeracy levels are not rising at the predicted rate, and Labour's solution of more tests and exams for children is failing. Private control of schools under the auspices of religion or business ethics – in the shape of 'academies' – is their remaining hope for disciplining working class children. Whatever is offered to working class children, it will be cheap.

In October 1997 FRFI wrote:

'the politics of New Labour have become a form of populist totalitarianism. As Larry Elliot puts it in *The Guardian*, having decided that it will not regulate the markets ("the role of governments is not to command but to facilitate") – Blair New Labour "will regulate the people instead, imposing a panoply of social controls to ensure that the problems caused by uncontrollable unregulated economy – crime, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown – don't threaten the comfortable lifestyles of its new middle class constituency". Blair has written that "the breakdown of family and community bonds is intimately linked to the breakdown in law and order. Both family and community rely on notions of mutual respect and duty". Adding that "the values of a decent society are in many ways the value of the family unit, which is why helping to re-establish good family and community life should be a central object of government policy".

Those who thought that this meant a more enlightened government were wrong. In every respect we were right. The focus of Labour's social policy has been the disciplining and control of the working class. Those who do not conform are subject to a panoply of laws and regulations.

Working class children are named and shamed by Anti-Social Behaviour Orders; their parents are subject to 'Parenting Orders'; everywhere there are cameras to ensure 'good' behaviour. The prisons are overflowing and another expansion of police powers is in the pipeline. Historic and vital civil rights have disappeared under Labour: the right to silence, the assumption of innocence until proven guilty. This Labour government is ensuring that 'justice' for working class people is rationed. More and more offences are subject to strict liability and instant fines. The Legal Aid budget is being chopped, the availability of affordable legal advice dismantled and, yet again, *habeas corpus* is under attack.

The economic counterpart to the social disciplining of the working class is a flexible labour market: freedom for the market is matched by social control for the working class. Opposing any improvement in trade union rights in 1997, Blair announced: 'Flexible labour markets are an important and permanent feature in raising efficiency and ultimately living standards.' Within days of coming to power the Bank of England was granted control of interest rates. Ten years later and British workers have

continued on page 2

Welcome...

A new British nuclear submarine, the *Astute Class*, will be in service in January 2009, powered by a nuclear reactor that makes refuelling unnecessary for 25 years. Producing its own oxygen and drinking water it will be able to observe the movements of cruisers as far away as New York Harbour from the English Channel, drawing close to the coast without being detected and listening to conversations on mobile phones. It can transport special troops in mini-submers and up to 38 Tomahawk cruise missiles firing up to 1,400 miles, as well as Spearfish torpedoes capable of destroying a large warship. It will use fibre optics, infrared waves and thermal imaging, with a permanent crew of 98 sailors who can watch movies on giant plasma screens. BAE Systems will build two other submarines of the same class, *Ambush* and *Artful*, estimated to cost \$7.5bn. All this is in addition to the planned Trident replacement.

Commenting on the development, Fidel Castro said:

'The intelligent and tenacious people of that nation will surely not feel any sense of pride. What is most amazing is that with such an amount of money, 75,000 doctors could be trained to care for 150 million people...You could build 3,000 polyclinics, fitted out with sophisticated equipment, ten times what our country possesses...We must bow our heads in awe at reading the news about the English submarine. It teaches us, among other things, about the sophisticated weapons that are needed to maintain the untenable order developed by the United States imperial system... Churchill said: Sink the Bismarck! Today Blair says: Sink whatever remains of Great Britain's prestige! For that purpose, or for the holocaust of the species, is what his "marvellous submarine" will be good for.' (Fidel Castro Ruz, *Juventud Rebelde*, 21 May, 2007).

Blair has presided over a decade of increasing global military and nuclear tensions as imperialist powers compete over spheres of influence. US



Fidel Castro

military spending will be \$647.2bn in 2008 and as the possibility of attack on Iran escalates, scientists declare that humanity's clock is at five minutes to midnight – where midnight is nuclear Armageddon.

The people of Iraq, however, must feel closer still to midnight as the bloodshed increases. In the year ending March 2007, civilian deaths were up 78% on the previous year. One-third of Iraqis live in poverty, one in eight children die before their fifth birthday, 900,000 children have been orphaned since the invasion and an eighth of the population are refugees. US counter-insurgency strategy is based on document FM3-24, with the objectives of creating ghettos to be 'cleared' of insurgents whilst residents receive obligatory ID cards and their movements are monitored. A three-mile long, 12-foot high wall is being built in the Adhamiya quarter of Baghdad. The professed aim is to 'establish a free market economy' (see page 4/5).

Sound familiar? It is – an adaptation of Israel's strategy for sustaining its illegal occupation of Palestinian land. Senior Israeli officers were among those who drew up the plan. Gaining control of Iraq is an important component in preparing for a US or Israeli air strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.

But resistance puts paid to the best laid plans as Israel has learnt in both Palestine and Lebanon. Israel's Winograd Committee concluded that Israel lost its war against Hizbullah last summer, despite the devastation inflicted on the Lebanese population (see page 6). Meanwhile, resistance in Palestine, led by Hamas, is

forcing the fascist Israeli state to take increasingly extreme measures to destroy it: the creation of ghettos by check points and the construction of the Apartheid Wall; the economic blockade by the US and the EU threatening to starve the Palestinian population; Israel's military incursion and bombings, its financial and military assistance to Fatah to fuel civil war, and the arrest of members of the democratically elected Hamas government (see page 6).

Blair's mandate has been characterised by an obscene abuse of power and an unadulterated representation of the interests of financial capital and British monopolies (see page 1/2). Labour's imperialist offensive has been matched by a racist onslaught against asylum seekers and refugees (see page 16) and punitive treatment of prisoners (see page 13). It has speeded along privatisation of Britain's infrastructure and social services, of healthcare and education, totally ignoring evidence of the deterioration of provision with privatisation (see page 2/3). All this sweetened with that infamous Blair grin, while hand on heart he swears that he did what he thought was best.

And he did. Blair's government was successful – as executors of British capital, no-one more so than the new Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Forget the phoney distinction between 'New' and 'Old' Labour, Blair followed the long tradition of the Labour Party in government, faithful servants to the rich and powerful, ardent representatives of British imperialism. Brown will steadfastly uphold the same banner (see page 10/11).

In August 2005, Blair said about Islamic terrorism: 'I think it has got some of the same characteristics as revolutionary communism, you know, in the sense that it has got an ideology'. More recently, Brown called for a 'cultural Cold War' against Islamic fundamentalism: 'not too dissimilar to that of the cultural Cold War against communism in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s'. Anti-communism is growing in Europe particularly in the ex-Soviet bloc countries (see page 12). But why now – nearly two decades since the collapse of the socialist bloc?

Because the capitalist utopia never materialised. The imperialists tremble at the increasing assertiveness and alliance between Cuba, Venezuela and a growing revolutionary movement in Latin America – offering a powerful alternative to bankrupt neo-liberal policies. While Blair steps down, a recuperated Fidel Castro can return to the front line to expose the moral corruption of the British government's nuclear drive. Unlike Blair, Castro's leadership has inspired millions with its ideology and practice, showing that another world is possible. The intelligent and tenacious people of Cuba undoubtedly feel a sense of pride (see page 8/9).

Join the anti-imperialist resistance, join the revolutionary communists! Contact us to get involved.

Ten years of Labour

continued from page 1

the lowest wages, the longest hours and the least union membership in Europe. British capital has greedily consumed cheap labour from the new eastern European members of the EU and the minimum wage is set at a level which ensures that low-waged families have to rely on tax credits – a subsidy for the capitalists. Welfare benefits have been pared down to the minimum and 27% of children in Britain still live in poverty; Britain has fallen from 15th place to 18th in the human development index. At the other end of the scale, the rich have become immeasurably richer.

Even the promise to clean up British politics has ended in an inevitable black hole of corruption. Constitutional reform of the House of Lords ended up with the Labour Party mired in a cash and loans for peerages scandal as it attempted to supplement its lavish spending.

Whatever repression Labour has designed for the British working class has been multiplied again and again in its treatment of immigrants and the working class internationally. The racism which underpins British imperialism means that asylum seekers who come to Britain are subject to the harshest treatment. They are now denied the right to work, medical treatment or shelter. At the end of the road, destitution, dawn raids and the taking of their children into care are intended to force them to leave the country 'voluntarily'. In response to the desperate gangster culture that kills young black people in Britain's cities, Blair blames their parents and their communities. Muslim communities are similarly called on to put a stop to 'terrorism'. In the ratcheting up of police powers, Labour is now threatening

to repeal parts of the Human Rights Act that enshrine the right to a fair trial. This Labour Party has no socialist principles.

In his resignation speech Blair opined that 'decision-making is hard'. With a great deal of soulful angst he tried to disguise the advance planning, manoeuvring, cold calculation and immense conniving, lying and false propaganda that lay behind Britain's armed interventions and wars: 1999 Serbia and Kosovo; 2000 Sierra Leone; 2001 Afghanistan; 2003 Iraq. Even the 'presidential' first ladies, Laura Bush and Cherie Blair, cynically called on the US/British war machines to 'liberate' Afghani and Iraqi women from oppression. Thousands of civilians have died and are still dying as a result. These wars were the hallmarks of Labour's 'ethical' foreign policy, alongside the renewal of Trident and a burgeoning arms industry which has exported deadly weapons to every tyrannical regime in the world.

This reactionary legacy is the backdrop to Blair's resignation and Brown's assumption of power. The Parliamentary Labour Party has ensured that there will not even be an election by party members and trade unions – thereby ruling out the candidacy of John McDonnell, the left's main hope, who couldn't even get enough nominations to stand. Assorted Labour ministers, who have served Blair loyally as the government turned the screw on the working class, are now scrambling to gather a few shreds of credibility for the deputy leadership election.

Throughout the last ten years the opportunist left in Britain has collaborated with Labour. As Labour has moved inexorably to the right, and the trade union movement has collaborated in its own marginali-

sation, the petit bourgeois left has moved with them. All of these parties twist and turn to maintain a foothold in bourgeois politics – at various elections they have argued for a Vote for Labour; Vote for the Labour Left; Vote Socialist or Labour; Vote Socialist if you can, Labour if you must; and ultimately Vote Respect – George Galloway's party which promises to restore 'Old Labour'. To ensure the umbilical cord to the Labour Party is unbroken, left Labour MPs adorn the platforms of every radical left campaign, especially 'Stop the War', even though they are completely without influence in the Labour Party and simply maintain the fiction that it is possible to be a socialist and a Labour Party member. These forces are now pinning their hopes on the election of a left-leaning deputy leader.

There are movements across the world that oppose imperialism and stand up for the interests of working class people: in Venezuela and Cuba, in the growing movements across Latin America. There are oppressed people who are struggling for self-determination and social progress despite the barbaric opposition of imperialism and its puppets: in Palestine, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Africa. There are working class people in Britain who will fight against racism and oppression here. There is an urgent task for socialists in Britain to build support for this resistance and these movements. The Labour Party will oppose this, and the opportunist left will tailor its solidarity to suit Labour. That is why the precondition for a socialist movement in Britain is a complete break not just with Blair and Brown, but with the entire Labour Party.

Carol Brickley

Health matters

By next year, compared to 1997, NHS spending will have tripled, reaching £94 billion. There are 20,000 more consultants and GPs, 70,000 more nurses, 118 new hospitals, 188 new GP practices. Statistics look good: in 1997, almost 300,000 people were waiting over six months for operations compared with only 199 people in March 2006, the government claimed. In 2003, 75% of people in A&E were seen within four hours and in 2006 98.5%.

However, figures can be massaged, regional and other variations can be hidden and money is not the only solution. 90% of treatments happen in the community, but resources for community services have been cut while money is ploughed into hospitals.

Since 1997, repetitive reorganisation has been the theme, with the initial dismantling of general practice fundholding; setting up of primary care groups, which then became primary care trusts; these then merged to halve the number; while regional health authorities became strategic health authorities and having created 28 such authorities, they were then merged into ten. Some hospitals have become Foundation Trusts and Independent Treatment Centres have been introduced.

Private companies are beginning to take over GP practices. The Private Finance Initiative, where the private sector builds the hospital and leases it back to the NHS in return for rent, has been expanded under Labour but with mounting financial concerns that are currently being suppressed.

Competition has been introduced where people and services previously cooperated. Despite reorganisations and the increase in money, there are currently debt, closures and removal of services with hospitals threatened with closure or loss of Accident and Emergency and maternity services. Jobs are being frozen or cut. The promise about choices for pregnant women, for which no extra funding is allocated, is estimated to need 3,000 more midwives but only 1,000 will qualify in 2009. The *Connecting for Health* IT system cannot deliver and the cost has run into billions. Student nurses are qualifying with no prospect of a job. Chaos reigns in the appointment of doctors.

Private Finance Initiative

In March 2006, the Department of Health tried to stop the publication of work from Manchester University showing the cost of building the first 12

hospitals under PFI. Allyson Pollock, professor at Edinburgh University, has recently shown that the figures quoted by the government to justify PFIs are flawed. Since 1999, there has been ample evidence that the expansion of PFI has led to a contraction in services, with, for example, 30% fewer beds in the PFI hospitals. Recent research by Jean Shaul of Manchester University shows that the first 12 hospitals built under PFI were paying 8% interest compared to 4.75% for public finance...adding up to an extra £60 million per year for each 30-year contract. The additional cost of private finance, taken overall for the 155 schemes worth £9 billion, comes to £480 million per year. Most hospitals built under PFI are paying back on average 20% more than expected when the deal was signed, with some paying up to 50-70% more. Hospitals have gone bankrupt.

Big business is what underlies the last ten years of Labour in the health sector. A large percentage of Labour's increase in NHS spending is going to fund PFI. And as he stepped into the leadership position, Gordon Brown announced an expansion of PFI schemes worth tens of billions of pounds.

Hannah Caller

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FRFI 2007 Fund Drive – £10,000

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Ireland

Power sharing returns

PAUL MALLON

After four and a half years' suspension, devolved government in the north of Ireland returned with the reconvening of the Stormont Assembly on 11 May. In his oath of office speech, First Minister and Unionist leader Ian Paisley declared: 'I have not changed my Unionism, the union of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, which I believe is today stronger than ever.' Sinn Féin deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness on the other hand claimed 'I am proud to stand here today as an Irish Republican who believes absolutely in a united Ireland.' Here lies the contradiction of a political process which is hailed as the final solution to centuries of conflict between Britain and Ireland.

On 15 May Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern became the first Irish premier to address the Westminster parliament in London. In a speech celebrating 'the most beneficial transformation in British-Irish relations in over 800 years', Ahern told his audience; 'the so-called "Irish Question" was for a long time shorthand in these halls for a nuisance, a problem, a danger. A recurring crisis that was debated here, but not where its effects were most felt'. But today, he declared, 'I can stand here and say that the "Irish Question" as understood then has been transformed by the Good Friday Agreement.'

Sinn Féin has now replaced the middle-class SDLP as the main voice of northern nationalism. Under its leadership, the Republican movement has accepted the ceasefires of the



Power sharing – left to right: Paisley, McGuinness, Blair and Ahern

1990s, British rule and the Unionist veto as set down in the Good Friday Agreement, the various acts of decommissioning that followed, and the disbandment of the IRA in 2005. Finally, Sinn Féin has now accepted the sectarian police force in Ireland and will take

up their seats on the policing boards in June. British imperialism has constantly shaped the political process which has led to this result, and at every turn backed the Unionists in whatever demands they have placed on Republicans.

Meanwhile, on 3 May the

main loyalist death squad, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), stated that it would be standing down its members but would not be decommissioning any of its weapons. This move was being made now because the 'constitutional question has now been firmly settled'. The UVF always refused to meet with the international arms body established to oversee the disarming of the IRA but this has never been a major issue for the Labour government. Today in the north of Ireland there are over 144,500 legally held firearms, one for every nine citizens over the age of 16 years – the overwhelming majority are in the hands of Unionists.

On 16 May representatives of the former IRA leadership met with leaders from the loyalist death squads in their first ever public meeting. The images of this exchange were front-page news in the Irish press, and presented as evidence of the new type of politics in Ireland today, which reduces the conflict to one between two warring communities rather than one waged by Republicans against British im-

On 23 May it was announced that a further so-called 'peace wall' – euphemism for a segregation wall – is to be built in Belfast. Since the 1994 ceasefires nine other such walls have been built as sectarianism has increased during the course of the peace process. The result is increased segregation: in Belfast in 1991 63% of the population lived in areas that were either more than 90% Protestant or 90% Catholic. By 2001 this had risen to 66%.

perialism. Anti-imperialist politics have now been replaced with the politics of identity and culture; demands for national and political rights have been replaced by demands for civil and human rights.

With the IRA out of the way Sinn Féin is now free to court middle-class votes in the south. However, in elections to the Dublin parliament on 24 May Sinn Féin did much worse than expected, winning only four seats compared to the five out of 166 seats they held in the last Dáil parliament.

Education notes

PFI – Politically and

Financially Insupportable

The Private Finance Initiative (PFI), promoted by Brown when Chancellor of the Exchequer and embraced by the Labour Party, gives private businesses major government contracts to build and run institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons in the state sector. The spin is that private entrepreneurs have an energy and vision lacking in local and central government and via partnership with the public sector can run a service like an efficient business, respecting the user as a client, and offering customer choice.

Five years on from its introduction, most PFI contracts are causing massive problems: the price of renewing contracts is rising steeply and their duration is increasing. Cleaning, school dinners and pay-roll services are now tied in to non-negotiable contracts for years ahead even where they have proved unsatisfactory. The list of disasters is long: head teachers must pay extra to use their school halls for after-school activities, caretakers refuse to clean up after sick children on grounds of health and safety, schools have to discuss the siting of rubbish bins with Head Office and they cannot take on the Healthy Schools programme because they may not ban junk food dispensing machines imposed by their business partners.

The so-called dynamic business partnerships between the public and the private sector have been revealed as the capitalist relationships they really are. Through a series of corporate take-overs and mergers, one enormous property company, Land Securities Trillium, now owns 25-year contracts for 150 schools, replacing original PFI partnership firms such as Investors in Education and Jarvis. Land Securities Group, the fifth largest property company in the world, has acquired school grounds and buildings with a £1.9 billion replacement



Academies: state subsidies for private interests

value. The control and management of school premises and school budgets is being transferred to more and more distant multinational corporations whose first responsibility is to their shareholders. Some partnership!

Academies – 'an idea I had sitting in Downing St'

Tony Blair's farewell tour and photo opportunity took in a 10-minute visit to Northampton Academy school, one of the 46 existing academy schools. There he proudly claimed his legacy, the invention of city academies, and his wish for 400 more such schools. Out of the 3,800 schools in England this is a modest but significant aim. Academy schools are newly-built 'private state schools', handed over to individuals, businesses or institutions like the Church of England. For a £2 million contribution the academy owners receive new school buildings (average cost £50 million) and the management of the school. They also get money from the Department for Education and Skills, but unlike 'state state schools', academies are raking in the cash, receiving an average of almost £1,600 more per pupil in standard funding than neighbouring comprehensives. Almost £50 million has been spent on advisers for 46 academies, more than £20 million on consultants and £28 million on project managers. This is in-

deed Blair's legacy – generous funding for the few, commercialisation of learning, patronage by big business and sectional interests, and an attack on the idea of state provision and local democratic control.

Brown's passion

Leader Brown says that his 'passion is education' – a feeling not shared by the estimated 100,000 pupils who truant each day from lessons. 135,000 candidates will fail to turn up for this summer's GCSE exams. The number of 'neets' – young people aged from 16 to 24 not in education, employment or training – stands at 1.3 million, an increase of 15% since Labour took office in 1997. A survey has concluded that of the estimated 150,000 children 'educated at home', 35,000 get little or no teaching.

The oppressive system of endless testing has made education an unpleasant experience for a growing number of students who are repeatedly told that they have failed to make the grade. Brown's passion will not help them. Tory Leader David Cameron says he supports comprehensive, not grammar, schools. He will not help either. Both party leaders endorse selection by ability and teaching in ability sets from an early age and in English schools streaming takes place from the age of four. A recent study by Sussex University found that 88% of children placed in sets or streams at the age of four remain in the same groupings until they leave school. Professor Boaler concludes that: 'If the Labour Party really cares about promoting social justice [it must] support grouping policies that promote high achievement for all and reduce, rather than reproduce, social inequalities.' There can be no 'ifs' and no 'buts' – the Labour Party is not the party of the working class but the party of PFI contracts.

Susan Davidson

Scottish elections: no advance for the working class

JOSEPH ESKOVITCHL

The elections to the Scottish Parliament on 3 May saw the Labour Party defeated in Scotland for the first time since 1955. Amid electoral incompetence and confusion, which saw the largest number of rejected ballots – 142,000 – in British electoral history, the Scottish National Party (SNP) emerged as the biggest party, winning 47 seats to Labour's 46. SNP leader Alex Salmond was appointed as First Minister to lead a minority government in coalition with the Greens.

While the defeat of this imperialist, racist Labour Party is to be welcomed, an SNP government will see no real change for the working class in Scotland or for those oppressed by Scottish-owned businesses abroad. The nationalists have received political and financial backing from millionaire capitalists such as RBS chief Sir John Mathewson and Stagecoach owner Brian Souter. The heads of some of Britain's biggest monopolies only support the SNP because they see an independent Scotland providing better conditions for exploitation and profit-making. The SNP's manifesto promises to cut corporation tax to just 20% and says it wishes to join the 'Arc of Prosperity' which includes Ireland.

The most notable result for the left in this election was the complete eclipse of Scotland's two social democratic parties – the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity. In 2003 when the SSP got six MSPs, it polled 117,709 votes (6.2%) in the constituency vote and 128,026



Tommy Sheridan of Solidarity which received 1.5% of the vote

(6.7%) in the regional votes. In 2007 the SSP received just 525 votes in the constituencies and 12,731 (0.6%) in the regionals. None of their MSPs will be returning to parliament. SSP policy co-ordinator Alan McCombes exposed the SSP's political bankruptcy when he complained that 'we also fought a highly political campaign, with a 450-point manifesto, including the boldest and most radical policy of any party in this election – free public transport', and acknowledged that 'most of those who voted SSP in 2003 swung behind the SNP in this election'.

More significant than the SSP's collapse was Tommy Sheridan's failure to get re-elected as MSP for his new Solidarity party. At Solidarity's founding conference in September 2006, Sheridan claimed that: '[The SSP] can fight over the 3% of voters if they want, Solidarity will be chasing 53% to join Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the People's Republic of Cuba in a new international socialist alliance'. The result exposed this for the hollow bombast

that it was: Solidarity got 31,066 votes, 1.5% of the vote.

Despite laying claim to the title 'Scotland's anti-war party', Solidarity's entire existence was geared towards Sheridan remaining an MSP, and thus towards respectable electoral campaigning. In recent months Sheridan's focus has been a parliamentary campaign for a ban on airguns – rather than the imperialist guns blazing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

When the SSP's six MSPs were elected in 2003, we wrote in FRI that: 'New Labour in Scotland will have its own Old Labour opponent: an SSP for whom anti-imperialist principles are to be sloughed off whenever it is an electoral necessity.' This is what has happened for the last four years. SSP and Sheridan failed to effectively attack and expose the Labour Party's brutal wars, and increasingly abandoned any talk of socialism in favour of Scottish 'independence'. The result is that we have not seen any advance in the building of a working-class anti-imperialist movement.

Imperialist surge means more misery for Iraq

On 1 May 2003 President Bush stood on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln in front of a banner proclaiming 'Mission Accomplished' and announced that 'major combat operations are over'. Four years later to the day Bush vetoed a US Congressional bill calling for combat troops to

be withdrawn from Iraq next year and refused to set any date for the end of the occupation. Since the war began over 650,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed. 3,401 US and 148 British service personnel had been killed by early May 2007, 104 US and 12 British troops were killed in April. The so-called 'surge' of 20,000 extra US troops that began in mid-February is failing in its proclaimed objective to establish security by this summer. A further two US military brigades are to be deployed. **JIM CRAVEN** reports.

At the beginning of April the Iraqi government said civilian deaths had increased by 13% and the US military admitted that suicide and car bombs in the whole of Iraq had jumped 30% since the surge began. The year to the end of March was the bloodiest of the war so far, accounting for 50% of all Iraqi civilian deaths; 78% up on the previous year. Fatal suicide bombs, car bombs and roadside bombs had doubled and fatal mortar attacks had quadrupled. Even the heavily defended Green Zone in Baghdad, considered a sanctuary for imperialist and Iraqi puppet officials, was not safe. Resistance fighters attacked it on six occasions in the last week of March. Rocket attacks there killed a US soldier and a contractor. On 12 April a bomb attack by resistance fighters shook the Iraqi parliament building. On 24 April nine US soldiers were killed and at least 20 wounded in an attack on the US headquarters in Diyala.

April's casualty toll was the greatest that British forces have suffered since the war began. General Sir Michael Rose, former commander of British forces in Bosnia, said it was time to pull out of Iraq to prevent more lives being lost. For the first time resistance fighters managed to penetrate the armour plating of a British Challenger tank, indicating that the new armoured vehicles ordered for both Iraq and Afghanistan to replace the Land Rover patrol vehicles will not offer sufficient protection. As Britain continued ostensibly to hand over control of operations in the south to Iraqi forces, a British government spokesman claimed 'mission accomplished in Southern Iraq'. Reality is more reliably gauged from blogs posted by British soldiers serving there. Private Paul Barton wrote: 'Basra is lost. It's a full-scale riot and the government are just trying to save face. We were getting mortared every hour of the day. Every patrol we went on we were either shot at or blown up by roadside bombs. It was crazy. It's a lost battle. We should pull out and call it quits.' The Ministry of Defence admitted that suicides in the armed forces rose by 49 last year.

Tours of duty for US troops have had to be extended from 12 to 15 months. Defence Secretary Robert Gates agreed that US forces were stretched. Mid-ranking officers are being offered \$20,000 bonuses to stay in the armed forces. A poll indicated that over half the US population had no faith in the official military portrayal of the war. The Pentagon has banned all internet postings from personnel serving in war zones, supposedly for security reasons but more likely because of the increasing levels of criticism being voiced by US soldiers.

More imperialist atrocities

The imperialist forces and their stooges continue to extend their long list of war crimes. In March more than 20 Iraqis were killed and wounded by US



Najaf: demonstrations against the government in April 2007

troops in Sha'ourah Wajider village. Another 16 villagers were killed by US war planes in Sabaa west of Baghdad. Reports from Anbar province say US and Iraqi forces have been seizing people in home raids and executing them and killing others in random fire. Six women and children were injured when a US helicopter fired on a hostel in Diwaniyah during intense fighting with resistance fighters. A curfew imposed by the US and Iraqi forces meant wounded and dead bodies could not be removed from the streets and local people were running out of food and essential medical supplies. In the Sunni Al Wihda district of Tal Afar, Iraqi police were reported to be among a gang that went on the rampage killing up to 60 people. The Iraqi police are complicit in many of the sectarian killings and reprisals. The number of prisoners held without trial in Iraq has risen from 10,000 in 2003 to 18,000. An Amnesty International report criticised the Iraqi government for having executed more than 100 people and having another 270 under sentence of death. The report claims many prisoners only confessed under torture. At the beginning of April US Private Campbell pleaded guilty to being an accessory to the rape and murder of a 14-year-old Iraqi girl and to murdering her family. He was given a 27-month prison sentence. In a Pentagon survey 10% of US troops

admitted mistreating civilians and unnecessarily damaging property. One third of them said they believed torture should be allowed in order to save the life of a fellow soldier.

The Iraqi people were told the 'surge' would improve security, but they know it has done nothing for their safety. When four bombs killed more than 170 people in Baghdad in mid-April it was the US and Iraqi forces who were pelted with stones by local people for failing to protect them. The occupying forces are not concerned with civilian security. Their aim is to establish Iraq as a strategic base in the region. They are doing this by building at least four huge military bases in the country together with a massive fortified embassy in Baghdad. This military domination is essential to their primary objective of securing control of resources in the region. Recent reports suggest that oil reserves in Iraq may be twice as great as previously thought. To gain access to the oil, the imperialists, in collusion with the IMF, are imposing an oil law on the Iraqi people that would give western multinationals the opportunity to control over 80% of Iraqi oil with the prospect of huge profits. Only the problem of exploiting and getting the resources out of the country forces the imperialists to have any concern about problems of security and political stability.

Protracted war

Although the use of the term 'surge' was meant to suggest a short, sharp action before a phased withdrawal, the true plan is very different. The US has no intention of pulling out of Iraq in the foreseeable future. Anything that suggested a retreat would be a major blow to the US imperialist strategy of global domination through the use or threat of overwhelming military power. General David Petraeus, commander of the occupying forces in Iraq, has emphasised that the surge strategy will take time to achieve results. In a very revealing analogy he said, 'Iraq is going to have to learn – as did Northern Ireland – to live with some degree of sensational attacks'. A former Pentagon official said 'The timescale to succeed is years'.

The US plan is based on the counter-insurgency document FM3-24, drawn up by General Petraeus and Lt-General James Amos of the Marine Corps. This document proposes clearing resistance fighters from small areas of an occupied country one at a time and then ensuring the areas are held while efforts are made to build support for the occupation among residents in each zone. It warns that 'Clear-hold-build objectives require lots of resources and time. US and host-nation commanders should prepare for a long-term effort'. It says the propaganda war – what it calls 'con-

trol of the narrative' and 'shaping the information environment' – are primary objectives. 'Discredit insurgent propaganda and provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative', the document suggests. One chapter is entitled 'Lose moral legitimacy, lose the war'. Marines are described as 'armed social workers', while insurgents are labelled 'amoral and often barbaric enemies'. The ultimate purpose of these operations is revealed at the end of a flow chart, where a big arrow points to 'Establish a free market economy'.

Putting the plan into operation, the US forces are attempting to create ghettos in 30 out of the 89 districts of Baghdad. Each area is to be surrounded by walls or barriers of rubble and rubbish and continuously patrolled. Movement into and out of each area will be controlled by issuing ID cards, though movement outside the ghettos will also be restricted. In nine of the 30 areas joint US/Iraqi bases are being established. In the Adhamiya quarter of Baghdad work has started on a wall three miles long and 12 feet high to separate Sunni and Shia communities. It is a plan that will almost certainly fail. Quite apart from the impossibility of the imperialist and puppet forces gaining the moral high ground, FM3-24 proposes manning levels of 20-25 members of the security forces for every 1,000 residents, which would require the whole of the occupying forces stationed in Baghdad. The Iraqi police cannot be relied upon, for residents fear becoming their victims in sectarian arrests and killings. No amount of patrolling can keep out resistance fighters or prevent residents, angered by the restrictions within the zones, becoming new recruits to the struggle. Similar plans by imperialist occupiers in Algeria and Vietnam failed for these reasons. One Vietnam veteran said each zone in Baghdad would become a mini-Islamic republic.

The plan was tried out in the Iraqi town of Tal Afar; the local mayor told the US commanding officer, 'What you are doing is an experiment and it isn't right to experiment on people.' Although President Bush proclaimed the trial in Tal Afar as a shining example of what could be achieved, the town quickly reverted to a resistance stronghold when the US forces withdrew. On 23 April, 2,000 Sunnis marched in protest at the Adhamiya wall saying their district was being turned into a big prison. One resident said 'We'll be like the Palestinians and we will not accept that'. The protest prompted Iraqi puppet Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki to ask the US to stop building the wall. A US spokesman said, 'Construction of security barriers across Baghdad will continue without exception', though the new US ambassador Ryan Crocker is reported to have said the US military would respect the wishes of the Iraqi government. In a bizarre attempt to make the concrete barriers more palatable the Iraqi government has had some of them painted with Alpine-like mountain and meadow scenes. The residents have responded by painting scenes of the daily horrors they suffer.

Other aspects of US plans include placing up to five mechanised brigades – about 40,000 men – south and east of Baghdad, with at least three between Baghdad and the Iranian border in case of a US or Israeli strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. At least four senior Israeli officers attended the US staff course at which the plan was drawn up.

Resistance grows

A poll carried out by the BBC and several US media organisations in April showed that opposition to the occupation of their country is growing among the Iraqi people. 78% of the population now oppose the presence of US forces and believe they are making the security situation worse.



May Day in Basra

This total includes almost all Sunnis and more than 70% of Shias. Three out of every five Iraqis believe that the US manipulates the levers of power. For instance, the Iraq National Intelligence Service is almost entirely funded by the CIA, receiving \$3 billion since 2004.

In early April local people in Al Fadhil joined resistance fighters in a street battle against US and Iraqi forces after they had raided the local mosque and killed two men at early morning prayers. At least 36 civilians, including women and children were killed in the fighting. On 9 April Iraqis demonstrated in Najaf calling on US forces to leave the country. Some reports claimed hundreds of thousands were on the march, filling seven kilometres of highway. In a show of unity belying the so-called sectarian divisions, Sunni and Shia clerics marched together. Six ministers who are supporters of Moqtada Al Sadr withdrew from the Iraqi government because of Al Maliki's refusal to set a date for withdrawal of occupying forces. Moqtada's followers in the Mehdi militia had been involved in heavy fighting against the imperialist forces during the first years of the occupation and had become the prime target for the US 'surge'. Moqtada's response was to withdraw the Mehdi from direct confrontation, though many continued to fight. But on 22 April 800 Sadrists, including one of their leaders, Sheikh Qais Khazadi, were arrested by US and Iraqi troops. Moqtada accused Al Maliki of reneging on an agreement not to pursue the Mehdi and called on his followers once again to take up arms but to concentrate their effort against US military personnel not fellow Iraqis.

Democratic Party - war party

The US Congressional bill vetoed by President Bush was to provide a further \$124 billion for the war. What Bush opposed was that the Democrat majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate had added amendments setting a date for US troop withdrawal from Iraq next year. Bush has since vetoed another Democrat amendment calling on funding to be granted in stages according to progress made. The amendments are not what they seem. They do not represent any genuine opposition to the war. The Democrats did not try to cut off the war chest (indeed Bush got more than he originally asked for) and the withdrawal amendment allowed troops to remain for non-combat purposes. The Democrats knew there was no chance of receiving the two-thirds majority needed to force Bush to accept the amendments. With support

for the war and Bush's approval rating down around 30% the Democrats are electioneering ahead of next year's Presidential race. It was their apparent opposition to the war that gave them their Congressional majorities in last autumn's elections. However, the Democrats want to continue the war in Iraq and expand the war in Afghanistan. They are at one with the Bush administration in blaming the Iraqis and wanting to impose benchmarks on the Iraqi government, including opening up Iraqi oil to imperialist exploitation. They removed the stipulation from the bill that Bush needed congressional approval before attacking Iran.

The Democrats' concern is that present tactics in Iraq are damaging the wider interests of US imperialism. They want to defuse opposition at home and find better ways of stamping out anti-US resistance and Islamic fundamentalism. 70% of the US population opposed the sending of more troops to Iraq; the Democrats are misleading them. In the US, as in Britain, the only way to help stop the war is by independent mass political action.

Diplomatic manoeuvres

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al Moualem in early May during a conference of representatives from Iraq, its neighbouring countries, the US and other members of the group of eight industrialised countries in Egypt. Rice encouraged Iranian representatives to attend. Such talks were rejected by Bush when first suggested by the Iraq Study Group last year. But the US administration is being forced to respond to the concerns of sections of the US ruling class and is now adopting a diplomatic approach alongside its raw demonstration of military power. It aims to create greater co-operation among all those with a vested interest in preventing radical changes in the region whilst using this unity to bring pressure on 'rogue states' such as Iran and Syria to fall in line. US imperialism's chief ally in the region, Israel, is playing an important role in this strategy.

The Kurdish region of Iraq is due to hold a referendum on autonomy this year. Although this is the only region that supports the occupation, the US does not want to see the Kurds gaining control of the oil reserves there. Israeli intelligence officials have been working with Kurdish leaders to use the region as a base for Israeli operations in Iraq and to try and get a permanent US military base established there. The Turkish government also does not want to see an oil rich autonomous Kurdish state for fear that it will inspire the Kurdish libera-

tion movement within Turkey's borders. Turkey has massed troops on the Iraq border. Israeli war planes and commandos train in Turkey and the two countries co-operate on defence industries and intelligence. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert recently visited Turkey to discuss co-operation against Iran's nuclear programme and ways of avoiding Turkish intervention in Kurdish Iraq. The US then announced it would attack PKK (Kurdish guerrilla) bases in Iraq.

Britain follows the line of equating anti-western interests with radical Islam. Gordon Brown recently told a meeting of Labour Friends of Israel that he wanted a new 'cultural Cold War' against Islamic fundamentalism, 'not too dissimilar to that of the cultural cold war against communism in the 1940s, '50s and '60s - backing what we do in security, military and intelligence'.

Rich profit from Iraqi suffering

A UN Population Department survey found a third of Iraqis were living in poverty with one in five totally destitute. Half a million people in Baghdad have no water for most of the day and electricity is available for three hours. A report by Save the Children said infant mortality in Iraq had increased by 37% since the invasion. In 2005, one in eight Iraqi children, a total of 122,000, died before their fifth birthday and more than half of these deaths were of new born infants. 900,000 Iraqi children have been orphaned since the invasion. Over one in five children's growth is stunted due to malnutrition. Four million Iraqis, one in eight of the population, have been displaced from their homes since 2003. Half of them have fled the country. Now Jordan and Egypt are closing their doors to refugees and

Syria is refusing to accept Palestinians who had been living in Iraq. Half of Iraq's 15 central and southern governorates are also turning away Iraqis displaced from other parts of the country unless they can prove they were born there.

While the horrors of life deepen for the poor in Iraq, sections of the imperialist ruling class and the Iraqi elite are enjoying huge benefits from the so-called 'war on terror'. Since 9/11 pay for the Chief Executives of the top 34 US defence contractors has doubled. The boss of United Technologies 'earned' \$200 million in that period. US Vice President Cheney received \$24 million for ensuring Halliburton would be the main military contractor. Scores of contractors have pocketed millions of dollars out of Iraq.

British arms manufacturer BAE Systems is set to make a fortune from taking over the US firm that makes Humvee armoured vehicles. A new generation of machines is due for the imperialist wars. The British Government Accountability Office estimates there are 48,000 private military contractors working in Iraq. These mercenaries have the same immunity from prosecution as the regular occupying forces. Some have been filmed driving through Baghdad shooting randomly at people in the street. Yet Britain has spent £165 million on these security firms, a quarter of the so-called Iraqi aid budget. The Armor Group gained half its £129 million revenue last year from Iraq and is headed by Conservative MP Sir Malcolm Rifkind.



US soldiers under bombardment

Imperialists launch Afghan offensive

In Afghanistan occupying imperialist forces and puppet government troops have launched a major exercise to prevent the spring offensive by the Afghan resistance. Code-named Achilles, the operation has been focused on Helmand Province in the south and in the western part of the country towards the Iranian border. Both the US and Britain have claimed that Iran is supplying weapons to the resistance, but the move is no doubt associated with preparing for a possible strike on Iran.

Controlled by US commanders, Operation Achilles has involved 4,500 troops backed by air strikes and Apache helicopters. The imperialists claim to have killed 145 resistance fighters in battles in Shindbad and the Sangin Valley and to have killed the main Taliban leader in the area. They always describe all resistance fighters as Taliban but the reality is that large numbers of the Afghan people now support the resistance because of the poverty and misery they are suffering under the corrupt puppet regime of Hamid Karzai and because of the war crimes committed by the occupying forces. In March, US forces went on a killing spree after one of their vehicles was hit by a suicide bomb. They fired indiscriminately at anyone fleeing the scene. Ten civilians were killed, including a four-year-old girl, a baby boy and three elderly villagers, and 33 were wounded. The US military banned media reports of the event. In the US the family Sergeant Patrick Till-



man, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2004, accused the Pentagon of lying about his death. The Pentagon had said Sgt Tillman had died in a heroic action when in fact he had been killed by US forces in a so-called 'friendly fire' incident.

British troops in Helmand have been trying to clear resistance fighters from the poppy growing area. Eradication of the heroin industry was used by the imperialists as one justification for their occupation of the country and they claim the resistance is funded by opium sales. But at the end of April a British spokesman issued an advertisement to local people saying it was all right for them to grow poppies. The advert had to be hastily revoked after complaints from the Afghan government. However, of the top 25 opium

smugglers in Afghanistan, at least three are known to be members of that government and both police and government officials take bribes to turn a blind eye to the drugs trade. Last year poppy cultivation was up by 59%. Some 2.9 million Afghans, 13% of the population, are involved. The trade supplies 90% of the world's heroin, worth £1.2 billion to the drug barons. Rich farmers will pay bribes of £200 per hectare to be allowed to continue growing poppies. Poor Afghans, however, have no money and use opium as cash. Save the Children say 40% of Afghan children are malnourished. Less than half have access to safe water. The infant mortality rate at 257 deaths per thousand live births is the second worst in the world. One in six Afghan women die in childbirth.

Palestine: Zionist terror continues as people starve

The outbreak of fighting between Hamas and Fatah forces in Gaza in May was predictable. Imperialism wants to see Hamas and the resistance option it represents destroyed. President Mahmoud Abbas and his allies in Fatah are openly collaborating with imperialism and are being financed, trained and armed in the hope that they can take on and defeat Hamas. Imperialism's economic boycott of Palestine continues despite the establishment of the Hamas-Fatah National Unity Government on 17 March. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

Such aid that the EU and other governments are sending to Palestine is being directed to Abbas and Fatah, bypassing the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority (PA). A report issued by Oxfam in April, *Poverty in Palestine: the human cost of the financial boycott*, shows how the imperialists are using aid in an attempt to bolster the pro-imperialist forces around Abbas and undermine the influence of Hamas. 'The fact that Western donors have channelled aid to Fatah-led institutions, such as the Office of the President, has increased tensions between Fatah and Hamas', the report says. The report shows the appalling effect of the blockade:

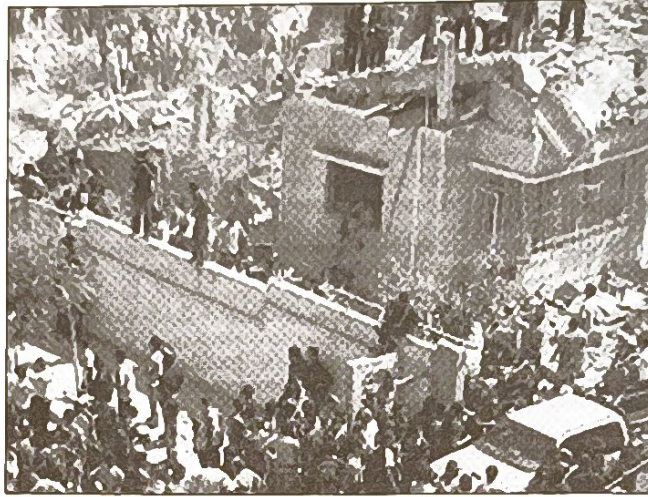
- The number of Palestinians living in poverty has risen by 30% since the start of the blockade in April 2006.
- It has caused the income of the PA to drop by over 60%. Now over 70% of the 161,000 PA workers, with an estimated one million dependants, live in poverty.
- The number of Palestinians living in deep poverty, defined as existing on less than 50 cents a day, nearly doubled in 2006 to over 1 million.
- 46% of Palestinians do not have enough food to meet their needs. Since the formation of the National Unity Government, Israel has still not released any of the customs revenue

and taxes it is illegally withholding from the PA, and the US refuses to have any direct dealings with the new government. On 23 April a meeting of the European Union Foreign Ministers reiterated their ban on direct aid to the PA. They declared that they would only deal with non-Hamas members of the government and stated that their Temporary International Mechanism aid programme for Palestine, bypass-

Zionist forces killed 660 Palestinians in 2006, including 141 children. This was three times as many as in 2005. In 2005, 50 Israelis were killed in Palestinian actions. In 2006 this fell to 23.

ing the PA, would continue for a further three months 'to ease the humanitarian crisis in the territories'. The cruelty of the imperialists knows no bounds as it is their support for Israel and their blockade which is the cause of the humanitarian crisis.

The twin-track policy of the imperialists, of squeezing the Palestinian people through the continuation of the economic blockade and the daily terror of the occupation, while at the same time building up the military capabilities of pro-imperialist forces continues apace.



Devastation from an Israeli bombing raid on Gaza

From the date of the formation of the National Unity Government on 17 March until the end of April, Israeli forces had killed at least 27 Palestinians including nine over the weekend of 21/22 April. This attack provoked the Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, to announce the end of their ceasefire and launch a series of rocket attacks on Israel. Their spokesman declared: 'The Israeli occupation forces have killed the truth that we gave as a gesture of goodwill although we never trusted our enemy. The world must blame the Israeli occupation government for breaching and undermining the calm'.

In mid-April details emerged of the so-called Dayton Plan, designed by General Keith Dayton, the US Security Coordinator attached to the PA.

It allocates \$59m for the training and arming of Abbas's Presidential Guard and was discussed and agreed with Israel. As the Israeli Deputy Defence Minister brazenly says: 'Bolstering PA security forces loyal to Abbas and supplying them with weapons and ammunition will pose no security threat at all to Israel as the purpose of arming those forces is to develop their capabilities in facing the growing military power of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip'.

In mid-May under the guise of combating growing levels of crime and unrest, Fatah-dominated Palestinian National Security forces were deployed in Gaza. However, they were first deployed in the north of the Strip, where the resistance forces are engaged in attacks on Israel, and their

first actions were against members of Hamas's military wing. Within two days nine Palestinians were dead in the ensuing clashes and on 13 May the Interior Minister, Hani Al Qawasmeh, resigned saying he had no control over the security forces. His plans to coordinate and bring together Hamas and Fatah forces were undermined by the Gaza Preventative Security Chief Rashid Abu Shabak, an ally of US favourite Mahmoud Dahlan. It was Shabak who ordered Fatah forces out on the streets of northern Gaza without the agreement of either Qawasmeh or Hamas. Hamas has accused Shabak and other Fatah heads of the security forces of being Israeli collaborators. As it became rapidly clear that Fatah could not match the military expertise of Hamas, Israel openly intervened on its side, launching an air strike on 16 May on a building in Rafah which was a base for the Hamas-run Executive Force, killing four and injuring over 20. On 17 May, Israel allowed up to 500 members of Abbas's security forces to cross into Gaza from Egypt where they had been receiving military training. The same day Israeli F-16 jets launched an air strike against the Gaza City headquarters of Hamas's Executive Force.

On 20 May a ceasefire was agreed between Hamas and Fatah after over 50 Palestinians had been killed in the fighting between the two sides. The same day the Israeli cabinet agreed to ratify a decision to liquidate Hamas and Islamic Jihad military and political leaders who they accuse of involvement in 'terrorist attacks'. Following this decision an Israeli air strike on the home of a leader of Hamas in Gaza City killed at least nine members of his family. On 24 May, Israeli forces stormed into Nabulus on the West Bank arresting 33 Hamas politicians, including the Education Minister and two members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Israeli jets pounded other targets in Gaza so that in the week 17-23 May their forces had killed 32 Palestinians including 17 civilians and seven children. Zionist terror is set to continue. ■

Winograd Committee report

'I have had my Bay of Pigs. Now I'm waiting for a missile crisis' Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, responding to the Winograd Report.

On 30 April the Winograd Committee, a panel of five judges appointed by the Israeli government, delivered an interim report on the 33-day war on Lebanon in summer 2006. Committee chair Eliyahu Winograd spoke of 'severe failures' and declared that 'We put the responsibility for these failures on the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the former Chief of Staff.' The report says that 'The Prime Minister did not adapt his plans once it became clear that the assumptions and expectations of Israel's actions were not realistic and were not materialising.' Hizbullah leader Hassan Nassrallah commented that: 'Today the climate in the whole of the Zionist entity is that the war was a failure...the first important outcome of this commission is that it has finally and officially decided the issue of victory and defeat...this commission spoke about a very big defeat.'

The report criticises:

- Dan Halutz, then Chief of Staff, for leading the country to war unprepared and in an 'impulsive manner' and for not offering the government any alternatives, even accusing him of preventing senior officers who disagreed with him from expressing their opinions to the Cabinet;
- Amir Peretz, the Labour Minister of Defence, for being unaware of the army's lack of preparedness;

- Olmert, for taking the country to war 'without systematic consultation with others, especially outside the Israeli Defence Forces';
- The cabinet, for approving the war without understanding its implications.

While Olmert's testimony to the Committee covered more than 200 pages, only 89 of these have been made public. In his testimony, Olmert said that Condoleezza Rice had been in contact with him before he discussed the war with the cabinet. Olmert told the Committee that the cabinet's main goal was the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 1559, sponsored by Washington and Paris, which called for, among other things, the disarming of Hizbullah. This demonstrates Israel's role as a proxy for US imperialism. A report in the Israeli *Haaretz* newspaper on 8 March 2007 says that Olmert first discussed preparing for a war against Lebanon on 8 January 2006, four days after he became acting Prime Minister, asking for detailed plans in March 2006. This was months before the Hizbullah's abduction of two Israeli soldiers on 12 July which was the pretext for the invasion.

The Winograd Committee has no comment on the war crimes committed in the onslaught which killed thousands, destroyed Lebanese infrastructure and created over 500,000 refugees.

Manal Darwish

Imperialists attempt to destabilise Lebanon

The days since 19 May have seen the Lebanese army ruthlessly pound the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr Al Bared outside Tripoli in an effort to destroy Fatah Al Islam, a group that is linked to Al Qaida. The Lebanese government blames the organisation for two bus bombings in a Christian area outside Beirut last February. The death toll of the clashes is at least 79, including many civilians, but the actual toll may be higher as there are no accurate figures for casualties inside the camp.

Palestinian factions inside and outside Lebanon have condemned Fatah Al Islam. Lebanese representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Abbas Zaki said: 'Palestinians ought not to be drawn into the matter because they, as much as the Lebanese, consider Fatah Al Islam a dangerous terrorist group that threatens their safety'. Hamas political chief Khaled Meshal called Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora on 22 May to urge him to 'protect Palestinian as well as Lebanese souls' inside the Nahr Al Bared camp. It is possible that sections of the Siniora government have deliberately provoked the confrontation. The previous week Siniora had called on the UN to set up the Hariri tribunal, which is opposed by the mass of the people as an attack on Lebanese sovereignty. Both President Emile Lahoud and parliament, whose approval is required, are against the measure. The tribunal would be the first international



Lebanese Army soldiers outside the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr Al Bared

jurisdiction established exclusively with the task of enforcing a national law.

On 20 May 2007 Hizbullah condemned any attack by any group on the Lebanese army as an attempt to destabilise Lebanon: 'We are sensing an attempt to drag the Lebanese army into this bloody conflict that might not end easily...We are also hearing calls for further escalation and fighting, which would ultimately lead to more chaos and to a generalisation of conflicts in Lebanon.'

The Bush administration immediately backed the Siniora government. But as US journalist Seymour Hersh revealed on 5 March 2007 in *The New Yorker*, the US has been 'pumping money, a great deal of

money, without congressional authority' for covert operations in the Middle East where it wants to stop the spread of 'Shi'ite influence', writing that 'in Lebanon the administration has cooperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hizbullah'. Hersh also revealed that 'the Siniora government and its allies allowed some of the aid to end up in the hands of emerging Sunni radical groups in northern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and around Palestinian camps in the south. These groups, though small, are seen as a bulwark to Hizbullah; at the same time, their ideological ties are with Al Qaida'.

Manal Darwish

VENEZUELA

The fight for a United Socialist Party

ALVARO MICHAELS

President Chavez is determined to establish a new United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), dissolving the current governing party, the Movement of the Fifth Republic (MVR). He has offered open discussions on the new party's constitution with all members of other parties presently supporting the government. In March the first groups of 'promoters' of the new party were sworn in; then 16,000 more activists began their task of motivating and registering members. A target of 70,000 promoters was set for 26 May; they will constitute socialist battalions. Discussions about the new party will be organised across the country. The State National Electoral Council has been asked to supervise party registration. At the end of June PSUV members will elect representatives to a Founding Congress to design its political programme: a socialism for the 21st century.

The December announcement shocked the three bigger parties that have worked

with the MVR. Patria Para Todos and the Venezuelan Communist Party which won 590,000 and 340,000 votes respectively in the last elections, subsequently agreed to join the discussions which anticipate their organisations' dissolution. However, Podemos, a 'moderate' left party that gained 750,000 votes, has rejected the idea. Chavez makes clear distinctions between socialists and liberal democrats so he has called on the electorate to recall two Governors, of Sucre and Aragua, leaders of Podemos now opposing the embryonic socialist party.

Not only is imperialism and the small middle class in Venezuela concerned with this extremely significant step, but all the US's political allies throughout Latin America are also becoming alarmed. On 27 May the broadcasting licence of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) expired, its renewal refused by the government. RCTV's owners exploited its popular soaps and game-shows to transmit gross lies about the government. It supported every attempt to unseat President Chavez, including the defeated 2002 business-class coup and the economic sabotage of 2003. The loss of this ugly propaganda

machine has infuriated the reactionary class of wealthy owners.

The Venezuelan government's fight to deny super-profits to global corporations has struck a deep chord in Latin America's masses, giving an example to new governments in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, and threatening the region's traditional pro-US parties. With profits seized back from global corporations, the percentage of Venezuelan families in poverty dropped from 25% in 2003 to 9.1% in 2006, and the minimum wage is now US\$238 per month, the highest in Latin America after Chile, higher if food supplements are included.

National and regional development

Repossessing national resources is central to the fight against imperialism. In Venezuela three sectors are now centre-stage: oil, electricity and telecommunications. The national telephone company (CANTV, privatised in 1991) is under state control from 4 June and to be removed from the New York Stock Exchange. New contracts with all foreign oil corporations mean that taxes are now 75% of every barrel produced, in contrast to 32% in 1995. The National Development Fund has already invested US\$20.15bn in housing, energy, popular defence, health and civil infrastructure.

Seven years ago Venezuela proposed the formation of the Banco del Sur. At the March meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank it announced the Banco del Sur would start operations on 1 June. With a capital of \$7bn, it initially included Argentina, Venezuela and Ecuador, now Nicaragua and Brazil will join. In 2006 Argentina, with Venezuela's help, paid off its IMF debts, and Brazil is following the lead. By pooling much of their reserves into the new Banco del Sur these states can avoid

paying high interest to western banks, or being strangled by the IMF.

Promoted by Venezuela, in March eight states formed the South American Organisation of Gas Producers and Exporters (Oppegasur) a natural gas cartel with technology co-operation and exchanges for development. Venezuela has the world's third largest gas reserves and in April proposed a global gas cartel, similar to OPEC for oil, at the Gas Exporting Countries Forum in Doha. The US sees this as a 'threat to world energy supplies', the US Congress calling OPEC 'a global organisation of extortion and racketeering'.

In April, ten of the 12 South America presidents met in Venezuela for the first South American Energy Summit and discussed economic unification of the continent, including the Great Gas Pipeline of the South and the Trans-Caribbean pipeline. Only the presidents of Uruguay and Peru were absent. The Union of South American Nations (Unasur) is the name chosen by these states, which will elect a permanent executive secretary and locate its HQ in Quito, Ecuador.

Venezuela is in the process of joining Mercosur which opened its Regional Parliament in Montevideo in May to replace its 1991 Joint Parliamentary Commission. With 90 legislators this is further sign of the profound influence Venezuela is having in Latin America.

Venezuela founded the Bolivarian Alliance, which now includes Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador, and which has allowed a strengthening of the fight against the bullying global corporations. Venezuela is breaking the immoral US blockade of Cuba as Venezuela's national oil company PDVSA supplies Cuba and will help it build a new refinery. Venezuela has promised more than £500m in investment and exploration in Bolivia's gas fields and offered to help Bolivia build its military, and to intervene against any attempted coup. Cheap oil is being supplied to local authorities in Nicaragua, and aid is being provided to impoverished Haiti, long a horrific example of imperialist oppression. No one should dare say that the political changes in Venezuela are not dramatic. The government of President Chavez has had a profound effect in the region, one that can only accelerate with the formation of the PSUV.

ECUADOR

Fighting for the Constitutional referendum

ALVARO MICHAELS

President Correa won the Presidency with 56.8% of the November 2006 vote, as leader of Alianza Pais (AP). Yet AP ran no congressional candidates, being a political alliance based principally on the Ecuadorian Socialist Party. Correa's central aim was to quickly build a new Constitutional Assembly. Defeating a determined effort to prevent it happening, a 15 April referendum approved the establishment of a 130-seat Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution. 5,354,595 people voted 'yes', 81.72% of the ballots cast. The victory clears the way for elections to the new body in June 2007.



Workers demonstrate against corruption

Correa is fighting the corrupted and 'dollarised' political classes that have seen seven presidents rejected by mass protests in ten years. The President is hugely popular amongst the poor. His policies centre on meeting their needs: reclaiming the country's oil from foreign corporations; objecting to draft US trade agreements and closing the US military base at Manta. Correa rejects IMF formulae, expressing solidarity with his partners in the new Banco del Sur, saying that it would end the region's subjection to IMF and World Bank control: '...they don't need aircraft carriers or bombers, only dollars'.

Correa's reactionary opponents held 50 of the 100 Congress seats, and he did not have reliable support among the other 50 representatives. On 18 March 77 of them opposed Correa's proposal for a referendum on a Constitutional Assembly. The opposition tried to impeach four of seven Electoral Tribunal members to halt the referendum. The Electoral Tribunal in turn removed 57 members who voted against the proposal. Opposition demonstrators then tried to force their way into Congress. Congress was suspended for two weeks.

21 substitutes were sworn in on 22 March, and 20 more by 24 March, so, with 58 representatives present, Congress could continue to discuss the matter. More than 1,000 police surrounded the Congress building in Quito to prevent the sacked legislators from disrupting the session, 24 of whom were then accused of sedition for impeding a meeting of the Congress. The motion for a referendum was then passed following an agreement with minority parties. Most opposition members walked out before the vote.

At least 11 of the sacked MPs fled to Colombia, pleading political persecution when warrants were issued for their arrest. On 23 April the Supreme Court declared the dismissals unconstitutional and reinstated 50 of the representatives. Police surrounded Congress to prevent disturbances. The majority in Congress retaliated by sacking the Court's nine top judges. The struggle in Ecuador is advancing.



Venezuelan oil workers celebrate May Day

CONGO

Nothing changes after DRC elections

IRENEE KAYEMBE

In December 2002 a peace agreement to put an end to five years of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was signed in South Africa. It set five main targets:

- reunification of a country torn apart by different rebel factions
- rebuilding the country
- restabilising state power across the whole country
- national reconciliation
- formation of a trained and integrated national army.

These were preconditions for the organisation of free, transparent and democratic elections in 2006 to bring about new and reliable structures for a safe and stable country.

By 2006 none of the recommendations had been implemented. There were plenty of warnings of the lack of will to effect change. The opposition called on the population to boycott the elections, but underestimated the force imperialists were prepared to use to ensure it happened.

The so-called CIAT (Comité International d'Accompagnement de la Transition), made up of the US, UK,

German, French and Belgian embassies, spent more than \$450 million supporting the government. Only President Kabila had the right to use UN vehicles, planes and helicopter for campaigning.

It was easy for CIAT to manage the

There is a plot sustained by imperialism against the country, which begs the question of the role of the United Nations mission in DRC. The imperialist strategy is very simple: prevent the country organising and unifying so that plunder and looting continue unhindered.

While the population waits to see the promised change from the elections the nightmare continues unabated. In January 2007 more than 200 people had been massacred in the southwest of Congo (Bas-Congo) alone. Neither the newly elected President nor his Prime Minister bothered to send their condolences to the victims' families. In March 2007 a fight broke out in the mid-

the opposition continues with over 80 people arrested without trial. Countless journalists, human rights activists, opposition leaders, university lecturers and scientists have been killed, and girls and women raped daily in the east. Those who do this dirty work are known, but are untouchable by the so-called government or the international organisations meant to bring peace.

A range of reports by the UN, World Bank and NGOs such as Global Witness, RAID etc condemn the looting in DRC and conclude that this is the reason why they can't help the country organise itself. Ahead lies a total paralysis of government, fewer and fewer government meetings and weakness of the state allowing militias to continue terrorising people in the east. The main imperialist actors are: Belgium, the former colonial power with geo-strategic interests; the UK, now the largest aid donor; the US with growing economic interests; and France which funded the election campaigns. Puppet countries are South Africa, seeking to keep regional political leadership; Angola, which formerly controlled the region's mining and oil sectors; Rwanda and Uganda, under the pretext of chasing forces responsible for genocide now hiding in the east, plus China, the third largest buyer of Congolese minerals and other resources.

With rising mineral prices, these countries are struggling to impose their influence on the DRC and take its resources. So now there is a corporate battle over who is going to get the big returns between Eskom SA, Phelps Dodge, Adastr, Banro, First Quantum, De Beers, BHP Billiton, AngloGold Ashanti, Kinross Forrest and Mwana Africa.

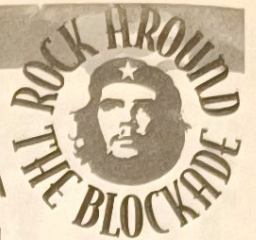


Congolese refugees from the Congo Support Project demonstrate in Manchester

polling booths, especially in the eastern part of DRC where Rwanda has more control than the government. The outcome of the elections is that Kabila's alliance controls Parliament, the government and ten out of 11 provincial governments. The July and October 2006 elections were a cover to legitimise recolonisation.

dle of Kinshasa to disarm an opposition militia. Over 600 civilians were killed, with the knowledge of the UN mission troops who only managed to pick up the corpses afterwards.

Why aren't the UN doing or saying anything about the increasing human rights violations when they are mandated to protect civilians? Harassment of



From 21 April to 4 May, 14 Rock around the Blockade activists went to Cuba to learn about Cuban socialism. They visited workplaces, schools, universities and hospitals; took part in an international conference for the Freedom of the Cuban 5 and joined six million Cubans to celebrate International Workers' Day on May Day. Sam Rae and Annie Richards report.

Cuban workers in the vanguard of the Revolution

We're at a state farm in Caimito, a rural municipality in Havana Province. A huge mural across one side of a warehouse reads, 'Citrus growers in the vanguard of the Revolution'. Workers inside are selecting the best-looking produce to be sent for use in the tourist industry. We interrupt to ask 'How do you feel that all the best produce is sent to be consumed by tourists?' For a moment it looks like it might all go wrong; that our questions aren't going to be appreciated. Then, without stopping the production line, the workers take turns to answer: 'Look, the tourist industry is vital to Cuba's economy. It needs the best-looking produce, and when we send it we are the ones who reap the benefits, because in Cuba the revenues from tourism are fed back into benefits for everyone, especially those who need it the most.'

This anecdote epitomises the experience of our brigade: over two weeks we talked with Cubans in every walk of life and asked hundreds of questions. The picture that we came away with is of a reality richer than any theory. Cuban society has contradictions, but these are being addressed with the participation of the vast majority of Cubans, who are committed to their socialist revolution. As events since Fidel Castro fell ill last year have shown, the question of 'What will happen when Fidel dies?' so obsessed over in the British media is a diversion. Cuba has competent leaders at every level, and will continue building socialism after Fidel Castro.

Our brigade was made possible by the hard work of volunteers in the Union of Young Communists (UJC) which aims to make Cuba a more just society based on socialist principles. The UJC has 609,000 members in 53,000 grassroots chapters, representing the most committed revolutionaries among the Cuban youth.

Our guide and translator for the two weeks was a 20-year-old student and UJC activist. Seven other UJC members, aged from 17 to 24, joined our group for the first week to organise the programme of activities in Caimito. Several of them were teachers and used creative techniques to help us analyse what we were learning, not just about Cuba, but also about ourselves and how we organise as a group.

These young revolutionaries grew up during the height of the Special Period, an economic crisis sparked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Cuba

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE IN CUBA Cuban socialism in action



Brigade members with their hosts, Union of Young Communists members, in Caimito

lost 85% of foreign trade overnight, and exacerbated by the tightening of the US blockade. In 2000, in response to the contradictions and alienation that had arisen during this time, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) initiated the Battle of Ideas. Over 7,000 projects were initiated to address inequality in society, for example, by reducing class sizes in schools, providing access to computers, TVs and videos for all students, and improving local health care facilities. Tens of thousands of Cubans were retrained and re-entered the workforce. The young Cubans we met in Caimito are living proof that the Battle of Ideas is working.

Participatory democracy

Contrary to what is written in the biased British and US press, Cuba has a vibrant participatory democracy, with elections at every level. The electorate can recall their representatives, who continue to draw their normal salary, at any time, and the UJC and PCC do not participate in elections as organisations, although individual members can stand on an equal footing with non-Party members.

Cuban democracy is further strengthened by the existence of the mass organisations – the unions, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and the students' organisations. All students are organised to take an active role in the running of their schools through the Federation of Middle Grade Students (FEEM) or the Federation of University Students (FEU). Students elect representatives in their place of study, some of whom represent them at the municipal and provincial level. The FEU has seats in the National Assembly of People's Power and there are formal mechanisms for FEEM representatives to consult with government officials about national education policy.

Trade unions in Cuba are completely independent of other state institutions. The federation of the 19 industrial unions, the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) predates the triumph of the Revolution and derives all its funds from members' fees. Although member-

ship is completely voluntary, 97% of Cubans choose to join. As well as having seats in the National Assembly of People's Power, the CTC is consulted on changes to economic policy. For example, in 1996, in response to the Special Period, the introduction of income tax for all Cuban workers was proposed. After consultations with two million CTC members in workplaces throughout the country, income tax was only applied to the self-employed.

The Federation of Cuban Women

The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was set up in 1960 to fight for equal rights for women in Cuban society. At that time only 12% of the workforce were women. Now it's 44%, with equal pay for both sexes. FMC volunteers help women of all ages deal with problems at home, at work, school or university and elected FMC delegates sit in the national, provincial and municipal assemblies. We visited a local FMC centre in Caimito municipality where 87% of women are members. The branch secretary talked about advances made for women, while admitting there was still much room for improvement. However, progress has been made against machismo, which has long been a part of Cuban culture, and it is now increasingly common for men to share childcare and domestic work.

Committees for the Defence of the Revolution

A highlight of our week in Caimito was a visit to a Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). These are local grassroots organisations and in cities there is one for every few streets. They organise volunteers to patrol the community at night, to ensure housing is in good condition and to assist with health and education programmes. Each CDR has an emergency plan in the case of invasion. They have arms to defend the neighbourhood and once a month they have a defence training day. Only

eight out of 145 local residents had chosen not to join this particular CDR, but the CDR president made it clear that people who don't join are treated the same as anyone else and no distinction is made in terms of access to local services.

'To be cultured is the only way to be free' – Jose Marti, Cuban national hero

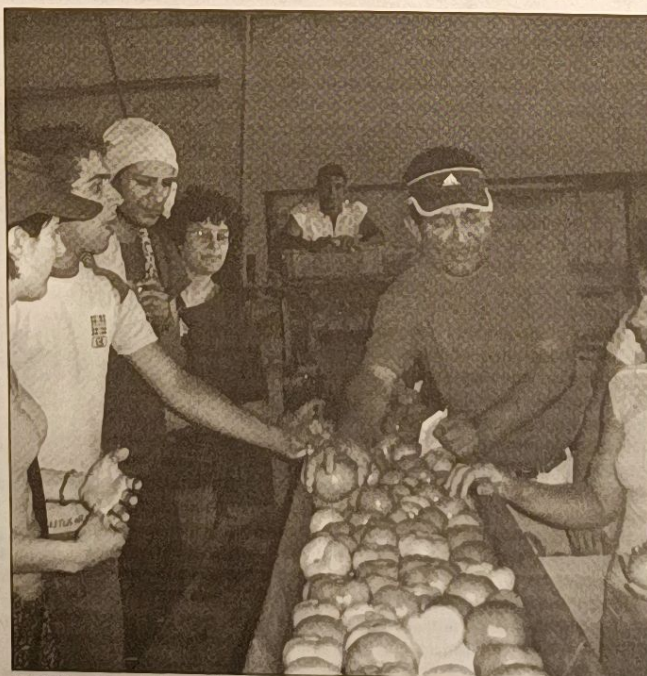
Education in Cuba is holistic and grounded in real life. From a young age children learn about different jobs and their value for society, not just through books and TV, but by meeting workers in different sectors. 12-16 year olds have a 'circle of interest' as part of their curriculum. The aim is to learn about different jobs in a practical way. We met young people studying subjects as diverse as gastronomy, homeopathy, nursing and aeronautical engineering – a far cry from a week's token work experience at age 15 in Britain. The young people we met were very clear about their future contribution to society.

For the first week we stayed in Escuela Vicente Perez Noa, a pre-university teacher training school in rural Caimito. It was opened in 2001 in response to the need for more teachers. 500 students aged 16 and 17 study here for eight months to prepare for teaching in primary schools in their own community. After graduation students complete four years of teacher training part-time at micro-universities, recently set up throughout Cuba, as part of the Battle of Ideas. Vicente Perez Noa is one of hundreds of pre-university schools throughout Cuba which students attend between the ages of 16 and 18. They board during the week and everything is provided for free, including books, uniforms, transport, meals and healthcare. All pre-university schools combine study and work, usually in agriculture.

We also visited Yuri Gagarin Secondary School where the headmaster was just 24 years old, a clear indication of the responsibility held by young people in Cuba. When we arrived the children were cleaning the school in preparation for May Day. They were organised into teams to see who could complete their chores first. Likewise, in the classroom, the emphasis is on co-operation and emulation. For example, in each subject the students elect a monitor for their class who helps other students with their learning. As a student explained, 'You always have someone who is particularly good in a certain subject so it makes sense that they help the other students'. This is not a token role: once a month the monitors are given support to plan their own lesson and deliver it to the rest of the class.

Investing in the Revolution

As Cubans told us many times during our visit, Cuba should not be idealised. They acknowledge that there are problems, of food production, of public transport and housing. However, 16 years after the start of the Special Period, the Cuban economy is growing. This means that money can be invested in infrastructure to alleviate these problems. However, it also means that Cubans will not see an immediate rise



The fruit and vegetable packing plant in Caimito

Cuban biotechnology

in their personal standard of living in terms of access to commodities. All the Cubans we spoke to understood and were supportive of the need to prioritise state spending on infrastructure. As we saw for ourselves, the recent investments in a decentralised energy grid have already made a huge difference to the quality of life in Cuba. In the mid-1990s, at the height of the Special Period, extended power cuts were a daily occurrence. We experienced just one local three-hour power cut during the two weeks we were there.

The message our brigade brought back from Cuba is clear: the Cuban people have survived the worst of the Special Period and continue to build on the gains of their socialist revolution, and their model of participatory democracy makes the British political system look like a sick joke. Cuba shows that a better world is possible and this is the message that we will continue to promote through our campaigning on the streets of Britain.

Rock around the Blockade would like to thank comrades of the Union of Young Communists in Cuba for the effort that they dedicated to organising our 2007 brigade. The comrades who worked tirelessly with us all contributed to making the brigade an inspiring learning experience that we will never forget. We have returned with a deeper understanding of the Cuban Revolution and more energy for the political tasks we face here.

Miembros de Rock around the Blockade quisieran agradecer a nuestros compañeros de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas de Cuba por el esfuerzo que han dedicado a organizar nuestra brigada. Los compañeros que trabajaron sin descanso con nosotros contribuyeron para hacer de la brigada una experiencia de enseñanza inspirante que nunca olvidaremos. Hemos regresado con conocimiento mas profundo de la Revolución Cubana y mas esforzados por las tareas políticas que llevamos a cavo aquí.

The pharmaceutical industry is one of the richest industries in the world today, with the biggest firms such as GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and AstraZeneca among the top ten profitable corporations in the world. Yet millions of people die of common preventable diseases each year because they are unable to afford the expensive drugs made by these companies. With profit the driving motivation behind the efforts of 'Big Pharma' as they are called, most scientific and pharmaceutical research funds go into developing technology for military and 'life style' research such as impotence (Viagra), obesity, veterinary drugs (for agribusiness) and the cosmetics industry. Most of the rest goes into the maladies of the rich advanced capitalist countries with populations that can afford expensive therapies. The needs of the poor are secondary – research funds follow the 'market', ie profits, with the US, Canada, the EU and Japan representing over 80% of the world's drug market, and Africa 1%.

In Cuba, however, scientific research is geared towards addressing the health and social needs of Cuba's population and those in the underdeveloped world. Cuba has developed one of the most advanced and productive biotechnology industries in the world since the 1980s, when the biotechnology industry was in its infancy. Cuba precociously developed an industry that has produced drugs and vaccines including a hepatitis B vaccine, the world's only effective meningitis B vaccine in 1989, a Hib vaccine – the first fully synthetic vaccine to succeed in all clinical trials – in 2004 and a cancer vaccine that has been licensed for use in the US despite opposition from anti-Cuban politicians. About two dozen foreign firms, including GSK, are now considering exploiting other Cuban products.

Under the leadership of Cuba's revolutionary government, over \$1bn of state funds have been invested in the

'Scientific Cluster' of western Havana – a complex of 50 or more applied research centres and their industrial offshoots – that makes up the bulk of Cuba's biotechnology industry. Each centre houses research, development and commercial production under one roof, creating a more holistic approach. Chief among these is the Finlay Institute, which we visited.

The Finlay Institute alone has developed 11 patents and seven vaccines for Cuba's health system, including typhoid, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and meningitis C and B. The meningitis B vaccine, pioneered by Dr. Concepción Campa, was developed in response to an outbreak of the disease in Cuba in 1983, when the only commercial treatment available was rifampicin, an expensive treatment used for TB. Cuba's meningitis B vaccine went from research to mass production in six years (the capitalist pharmaceutical industry claims it takes 10-15 years to develop a drug), and is now part of Cuba's mass vaccination programme. The needs of the population, not profit, drove the work.

With over 4,500 biotechnology firms worldwide, 40% in the US and 40% in the EU (mainly British and German), biotechnology is even today still in its infancy. More than half of the US firms that emerged since the 1980s failed to achieve profitability and most have ended up being acquired by large pharmaceutical firms. In April 2007, AstraZeneca spent \$15.6bn buying US biotechnology firm MedImmune, just to keep up with its rivals who all have 'vaccines businesses'. Cuba's success is not coincidental but a direct result of its socialist principles and priorities. The success is based on its highly literate and numerate population, a highly skilled and politically-conscious scientific workforce and its revolutionary and insightful leadership working towards the betterment of humanity.

Charles Chinweizu



On May Day in Havana demonstrators carried pictures of the victims of Posada Carriles' terrorist attacks

May Day in Havana

On 1 May, brigadistas rose before dawn to join 1.5 million Cubans to march through Havana's Revolution Square as part of an international contingent of 1,645 representatives from 74 countries. The march denounced the continued incarceration of the Cuban Five and the outrageous decision of a US court to free bomber Posada Carriles. Many marchers bore images of the 73 victims of his bombing of the Cubana flight in 1976. Nationwide, six million marched that day. It was an inspiration to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Cuban people against imperialism and in defence of their socialist revolution.

US court frees terrorist Posada Carriles

On 4 May, US District Judge Kathleen Cordone declared that the 'shocking and outrageous' tactics of the US government in 'manipulating the legal system' in the case of Luis Posada Carriles left her with no choice but to dismiss the indictment against him for immigration fraud. Mass murderer Posada, already on bail since 19 April, was free and the US government, in essence, off the hook.

Cordone made it clear that, while aware that Posada was a 'political hot potato', she could not indict him on terrorist charges if the government refused to bring them. 'The realm of this case is not terrorism. It is fraud'.

Posada is known to be guilty of:

- a significant role in the assassination of Chilean Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier and his assistant Ronni Moffat in the US in the 1970s;
- blowing up a civilian Cubana aircraft in 1976, killing all 73 people on board, with the documented knowledge and support of the CIA and FBI;
- playing a leading role in the US Iran-Contra debacle, aimed at destabilising the Nicaraguan government in the early 1980s;
- implementing the CIA-run Operation Condor throughout Latin America in the 1980s, involving the torture, repression and assassination of progressive political activists;
- orchestrating a campaign of sabotage and bombings against Cuban tourist facilities in 1997, resulting in the death of an Italian tourist;
- an attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro in Panama in 2000.

The US administration ignored Posada's illicit arrival in the US in 2005 until, in his arrogance, Posada gave an interview to the *New York Times*, unre-

pentantly claiming responsibility for the 1997 bombings as 'an act of war'. Forced to act, their sole concern was to prevent at all costs a public trial where Posada could expose the extent to which his every crime had been sanctioned by the CIA. To the same end, the US has consistently refused to extradite Posada to Venezuela to face trial, in breach of existing treaties, using the lie that he will be tortured there. In February, a court ordered that Posada should be deported to a third country, but none will take this notorious terrorist.

Ironically for a government that, in its post 9/11 clampdown, swept up hundreds of Muslims and Asians on suspected immigration irregularities, only to accuse them of cooked-up 'terrorist' offences, the charge brought against Posada was nothing other than a cynical manoeuvre to protect their own. Indeed, in April, US lawyers had sought a court order to gag Posada and prevent him saying anything about his connection with the CIA. On the contrary, argued Posada's lawyers, his 25-year service with the CIA, as its agent and master saboteur, would form the core of his defence should he come to trial.

For the moment, both Posada and his political masters appear to have got away with it. But mass protests have taken place across Latin America, particularly in Cuba. Even within the United States outrage is growing at the US's hypocrisy in its 'war on terror' – while hundreds of alleged 'terrorists' are held incommunicado in Guantanamo for years, subject to torture and inhumane treatment, for want of evidence to charge them, this self-confessed terrorist walks free. The campaign is growing to see a man referred to as 'the Bin Laden of the Western world' brought to justice.

Cat Wiener

Free the Cuban Five

On 29 and 30 April, brigadistas from Rock around the Blockade and the RCG attended the International Solidarity Conference to Free the Cuban Five in Havana. The event was organised by the Union of Young Communists and attended by over 500 delegates from more than 70 countries.

Gerardo Hernandez, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Ramon Labanino have been held in US prisons since 1998. Between them they have been sentenced to four life sentences and 75 years imprisonment on trumped-up espionage and conspiracy charges. The five men were indeed collecting intelligence, but not about the US government or its activities; instead they were infiltrating and investigating counter-revolutionary groups in Miami that were plotting terrorist activity against Cuba.

The political level of the conference was inspirational. Major contributions included a detailed history of the concerted terrorist campaign waged by the CIA and others against Cuba ever since the Revolution, a rousing speech from veteran communist Armando Hart about the need for a revolutionary dialogue between generations and a determined message that the struggle will go forward until the Five are free from Roberto Gonzalez, brother of Rene.

In addition to the Cuban comrades, in every session there were international speakers, representing the solidarity movement in their countries. Understandable prominence was given to the representatives from the belly of the beast – the US, where it was made clear



Brigadistas with family members of the Cuban Five

the campaign to free the five must be concentrated. Other speakers were from Mexico, Venezuela, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Ukraine and elsewhere. The RCG was proud to be invited onto the platform as a representative of solidarity in Britain with the Cuban Five. Our contribution affirmed the responsibility of progressive people in imperialist nations to build solidarity with Cuban socialism and not to restrict the campaign to free the Cuban Five to the legal battle in the US courts.

Plenty of time was allocated to contributions from the floor. A comrade from Western Sahara spoke about how the education he was being given free in Cuba represented true internationalism,

while a representative from Barbados spoke movingly about the suffering caused in his own country by the 1976 downing of the Cuban passenger plane by Posada Carriles and his terrorist cronies.

The hypocrisy of the US keeping the Five in prison while releasing Posada was a recurrent theme and was stressed in the closing session by Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban National Assembly, who also reaffirmed the need



for a campaign to increase international pressure in the build-up to the next court hearing in Atlanta on 20 August.

Roberto Gonzalez told FRFI: 'Politics establish the limits of the judicial process... politics has entered the courtroom and is part of a governing system which puts limits on the legal process. The arrest of the five was based on politics; it is ideology which limits the fight for legal justice and that's what allows five men to be in prison for saving lives. That's why international solidarity is important.'

Paul Mallon

RCG speech at the conference: www.ratb.org.uk/brigade07/rcgspeech5/conference0407.mp3
Interview with Roberto Gonzalez www.rcgfrfi.plus.com/downloads/cuba5/interview.mp3

The rise of New Labour

On Tuesday 15 May, Gordon Brown was confirmed as the new Labour Party leader, having received 308 MP nominations. Only 27 MPs had supported the great left hope John McDonnell, far short of the 44 needed to get on the ballot paper. The result confirmed that the left within the Labour Party is a spent force. As prime minister, Brown will serve the interests of the City of London and British imperialism with the same dedication as his past ten years as Chancellor of the Exchequer. This did not stop McDonnell from wishing Brown every success: loyalty to the Labour Party for the Labour left always overrides political principle.

McDonnell's campaign was based on an illusion shared across the opportunist left that the Labour Party was once and could still be a party that represents working class interests. That week *Socialist Worker* (19 May 2007) had editorialised: 'The left wing Labour MP John McDonnell should be on the ballot paper for Labour leader. *Socialist Worker* has consistently supported his challenge.' No socialist should have supported McDonnell since he is committed to sustaining Labour as a ruling party, and that means as a party running the British state and British imperialism.

McDonnell and his supporters yearn for the days of the post-war boom when it was possible to guarantee the relatively privileged conditions of higher paid workers and the petit bourgeoisie while sustaining adequate living standards for the mass of the working class. However, this social democratic consensus broke down in the mid-1970s when the Labour government set monetary targets and cut state spending, and when, in the 1978-79 'Winter of Discontent', low-paid workers fought back, driving the higher-paid skilled workers and the petit bourgeoisie into the arms of the Conservative Party.

Behind this were changes in the economy. As long as sufficient profits were produced to give an adequate return on capital and to finance state welfare then the social democratic consensus of the post-war years could be maintained. However as soon as inadequate profits were produced – an inevitable consequence of the process of capital accumulation – the consensus began to break apart. Unemployment and poverty started to grow. And at the very moment when increased state spending was needed, state spending was blamed for the crisis. British imperialism turned to its most dynamic sectors – in particular commerce and financial services as epitomised by the City of London – to resolve its problems. Parasitism became increasingly evident.

The days of the post-war boom cannot return. This means it is not possible for capitalism to meet the interests of the mass of the working class. Far from

it: all economic developments since then confirm that British imperialism will seek to satisfy only the interests of the petit bourgeoisie and labour aristocracy to ensure the relative social peace it needs while it defends and extends its interests throughout the rest of the world. For the mass of the working class there is only increasing repression, deteriorating state service, poorer conditions of work and unemployment.

These economic developments and the consequent social changes have moulded Labour, changing it from one reactionary form – so-called 'Old' Labour – into an equally reactionary form – 'New' Labour. 'Old' Labour was a continuation of the alliance between the labour aristocracy – a small, privileged stratum of the working class organised in skilled trade unions – and a radical section of the petit bourgeoisie that founded the Labour Party to represent its interests. The trade unions were the major force in the alliance, bankrolling the party and dominating conferences with the block vote. Under 'New' Labour the petit bourgeoisie has become the predominant force: public sector managers and directors, accountants, management consultants, lawyers, journalists, the upper echelons of the media, NGOs and so on. The trade union leadership is important only for its financial backing, even though the unions continue to organise more affluent workers particularly in the public sector. Why and how this happened, and its political significance, is a closed book for the opportunist left.

The 1974-79 Labour government and the crisis

The 1974-79 Labour government inherited a serious economic crisis. By 1975, it faced a huge balance of payments deficit, a 24% inflation rate and a lengthy run on the pound. Its response was a wages policy, the first stage of which restricted wage increases to much less than the inflation rate. Although the limit was hardly breached, the balance of payments deficit continued into 1976, as did the run on the pound. A second stage from 1 August 1976 limited increases to 4.5%, again in agreement with the TUC. The result was an unprecedented 10% cut in real wages. By April 1976, the government had exhausted an IMF loan negotiated the previous December. Substantial cuts in state spending produced no fundamental change and, in autumn, Labour obtained a second loan, agreeing to further cuts of £3 billion. In October that year Prime Minister James Callaghan told the Labour Party conference 'we must get back to fundamentals'.

'For too long... we postponed facing up to fundamental choices and fundamental changes in our society and in our economy... We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession, and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all honesty that that option no longer exists...'

Chancellor Denis Healey's letter of intent to the IMF in December 1976 declared that:

'...an essential element of the gov-



In 1997 Labour had a programme which met the needs of British imperialism

ernment's strategy will be a continuing and substantial reduction over the next few years in the share of the resources required for the public sector...[and] to create monetary conditions which will encourage investment and support sustained growth and the control of inflation.'

This signalled the Labour government's acceptance of monetarism. Opposition from the trade union leadership was muted, but when further stages in the wages policy were imposed in 1977-78, it was without TUC agreement. As unemployment rose by a million, the strain for wide sections of the working class was too much, especially in the public sector where such policies could be more effectively imposed. In December 1978, low-paid council manual workers lodged a 40% pay claim, and on 22 January 1.5 million came out in the first of a series of one-day strikes.

Although the better-off sections of the working class and the middle class were able to recover their earnings position by 1979, this was insufficient to stop them from supporting the Conservatives in the June general election. At the October 1974 election, 26% of all skilled workers had voted Conservative, and 59% Labour. In 1979, the figures were 41% for either party. This translated into the loss for Labour of a large number of constituencies in London and the south east. Meanwhile, poorer sections of the working class abstained, amongst them significant numbers of black and Irish workers alienated by a government which had failed to represent their interests, operated racist immigration laws and sanctioned a regime of torture in the north of Ireland.

Rampant parasitism

It was during this period that the parasitic characteristics of British capitalism became more and more evident as the London Eurocurrency market became a central source of loan capital throughout the world. Overall, the private external assets of British imperialism grew from £61 billion in 1973 to £119 billion in 1977; in 1962, such assets had made up some 40% of GNP; in 1977, they had risen to 93%, a position achieved in

it uncompetitive; by 1983, there was a net trade deficit in manufactured goods for the first time. In 1977, profits, interest and dividends from overseas investment had represented less than 25% of gross trading profits (excluding profits on North Sea oil). By 1982 this had risen to over 50%. Private overseas investment grew from the equivalent of just under 50% of manufacturing investment to more than 175% over the same period. In 1993, following the 1990-92 recession, British investment overseas (direct and portfolio) at £101.9bn, was greater than the total capital investment in Britain at £94.2bn and more than eight times the investment in manufacturing industry. In 1996 even after the recovery in domestic investment and following a fall in portfolio investment abroad, British overseas investment was equivalent to 77.9% of total capital investment in Britain and nearly six times that invested in manufacturing industry.

Changes in the workforce mirrored the structural changes in British capital. Between 1975 and 1979, manufacturing employment fell by half a million. Over the next 18 years it was to fall by a further 2.6 million, from 7.1 to 4.5 million. In the same period, jobs in finance and business services rose from 2.9 million to 5.0 million, a 67% increase. Many of these jobs were highly paid: a new petit bourgeoisie emerged whose increasingly affluent lifestyle depended directly on the success of British imperialism. On the other hand there was also a growth in low-paid, casualised, part-time and temporary employment, especially in distribution, hotels and restaurants, which rose overall from 5.5 million to 6.6 million: workers to serve the expanding consumption needs of the new petit bourgeoisie. Finally, and despite Conservative rhetoric, employment in the state sector also rose, from 5.7 million to 6.7 million. Again many of these were well-paid management jobs – for example, to run the internal market in the NHS.

With these changes came increasing poverty for the working class. The proportion of people living in poverty (ie below half average income) rose to 24% in 1995/7 or 14.1 million people, 9.1 million more than in 1979. By 1997, 34% of all children, 4.6 million, lived below the poverty level, 3.2 million more than in 1979. 3.3 million households were workless, compared to 1.2 million in 1979. Only 35% of the workforce was in full-time tenured work compared to 55% 20 years earlier. Inequality grew: in 1979 the richest 10% had more than four times the income of the poorest 10%. By 1995/97 it was nearly eight times. Income and wealth inequalities had returned to Victorian levels.

The Conservative government 1979-83

Although the Conservatives came to power in 1979 promising cuts in public spending, they were unable to deliver them to any significant degree. This was in major part because social security expenditure rose as unemployment soared to four million by 1982. Whilst pauperising large sections of the manual



Labour Party successfully isolated the miners and the working class communities who supported them.

THE LABOUR PARTY

'It is not a question of whether "New" Labour is more or less reactionary than "Old": it is merely the form that Labour has had to take in order to remain a party fit for imperialism in the 21st century. It has become an openly bourgeois imperialist party.'

working class, the Conservatives assiduously cultivated the support of the petit bourgeoisie and labour aristocracy through a succession of bribes and subsidies: council house sales, cheap shares from privatisations, growing wage differentials. Privilege for these sectors became mediated more and more through the market, paid for through the impoverishment of millions of workers.

The Conservatives were able to create and sustain a new social base of support for Britain's vastly-extended parasitism. This was essential given the massive onslaught on the working class which required both the introduction of draconian anti-trade union laws and the destruction of basic employment rights.

Labour offered no effective opposition. Although Labour conference policy seemed to indicate a radical move to the left (triggering the defection of four senior Labour Party figures to form the Social Democratic Party in March 1981), Labour leader Michael Foot distanced Labour from any acts of working class resistance. In 1981 Labour opposed the Irish hunger-strikers, with Don Concannon visiting Bobby Sands on his deathbed to make Labour's position absolutely clear. When working class youth rose up against police racism in the summer of 1981, Labour left and right condemned them. Despite the blatant racism of the police, Tony Benn declared 'the Labour Party does not believe in rioting as a route to social progress nor are we prepared to see the police injured during the course of their duties' - at a time when the opportunist left was supporting his deputy leadership campaign. His defeat at the October conference marked the beginning of the end of the left as a significant force in the Labour Party.

By 1982 Labour and its allies in the trade unions were in headlong retreat. Ken Livingstone's capitulation when the Law Lords ruled against the Greater London Council's Fare's Fair policy showed the impotence of municipal socialism. Meanwhile, the two major rail unions, ASLEF and NUR, had rejected joint action over a pay dispute with British Rail. In the summer, a pay dispute involving nurses and NHS ancillary workers was allowed to drag on for months whilst the TUC refused to organise any support. In April Labour gave its support for the Malvinas (Falklands) War, whilst Benn argued for sanctions rather than military action, proclaiming in Parliament that there was 'unanimity on the right of self-defence against aggression'.

Labour went into the 1983 general election with a manifesto promising a 'fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families'. This was anathema to the petit bourgeoisie and better-off sections of the working class who were already benefiting from the Thatcher regime: such strata either voted Conservative or for the SDP or the Liberals. Labour's share of the vote of social classes A, B and C1 fell from 24% in 1979 to 16%; of the C2 skilled manual workers, from 40% to 32%. Its overall share of the vote at 28% was only 2% more than that of the SDP and Liberal Alliance.

To 1997

Prior to the 1997 election, FRFI pointed out that Labour had become the party of big business and the banks, and that its victory, far from bringing any benefit to the working class, would be the prelude to attacks on democratic rights and state welfare. We also said that the ruling class would expect Labour to defend its interests in a world of intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries. We have been proved correct, and the opportunist left, which supported Labour in the election, have been proved wrong. We had understood how Labour represented reaction all along the line, and how every development within the party after 1983 underlined this.

The Labour Party faced disintegration following its defeat that year. If it did not recover the electoral support of wide sections of the petit bourgeoisie and labour aristocracy it would never run the country again. That was the clear message of SDP's election result. Labour had to refashion itself so that it could both win the confidence of the ruling class and build the electoral coalition necessary to win a general election. Replacing Foot as leader, Kinnock laid down the requirement for Labour very clearly:

'...we can only protect the disadvantaged in our society if we appeal to those who are relatively advantaged. The apparent over-concentration of our energies and resources on those groups like the poor, the unemployed and the minorities - does a disservice both to them and ourselves...if we are to be of real use to the deprived and insecure we must have the support of those in more secure circumstances - the home own-

ers as well the homeless, the stable family as well as the single parent, the confidently employed as well as the unemployed, the majority as well as the minorities.'

In other words, a Labour victory would depend on the extent to which it could secure the support of the upper layers of the working class and the growing petit bourgeoisie. In the meantime Labour would abandon in words, as it had always done in practice, the interests of the poorer sections of the working class. The 1983 Labour Conference which elected Kinnock as leader also voted to expel Militant. Many left Labour MPs, seeing the writing on the wall, started their odyssey to the right.

The defeat of the 1984/85 miners' strike was to be the next decisive step in the refashioning of Labour. It both ended any significant trade union resistance to the restructuring of British capital and, in the longer run, undermined the central role the trade union leadership played within the Labour Party. The strike was defeated, not by the state alone, but with the support of the trade union movement and the Labour Party who successfully isolated the miners and the working class communities who supported them. Crucial unions scabbed by moving coal supplies, whilst the Labour Party at first did nothing to support the miners and then denounced the miners for defending themselves.

From then on, Labour determinedly pursued a path of wooing the support of corporate and financial capital and that of the petit bourgeoisie and labour aristocracy. General election defeats in 1987 and 1992 merely spurred its endeavours. Under Kinnock a series of organisational

changes concentrated power with the leadership, reducing the influence of the trade unions and annual conference.

By the 1987 election Labour was talking about a share-owning democracy and supported council house sales. Its membership was reflecting the privileged interests to which it was trying to appeal: in 1987, 60% of its members had a degree or equivalent higher educational qualification compared to 11% amongst the general population. The next step was to overhaul Labour policies. In 1989 it abandoned unilateral disarmament, the restoration of lost trade union rights and renationalisation, and then supported Britain's entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism, signalling the end of a commitment to full employment. Labour also became soft on the rich, committed to a maximum tax rate of 50%.

In March 1990, Labour condemned poll tax protesters in London when their 200,000-strong demonstration was attacked and broken up by the police. Kinnock condemned the 'minority' for 'causing this dangerous uproar' and said 'they should be dealt with severely'. The following year, the first Gulf War allowed Labour to re-assert its imperialist credentials. The Labour leadership was, if anything, more rabid than Thatcher.

Following the defeat of 1992, Ken Livingstone argued that 'We must be able to build socialism without taxing middle income families till it hurts', and continued 'If you analyse the result I suspect that we just failed to win seats we should have because people on middle incomes were concerned. In London and the South East, £21,000 is average earnings and should not have been a target for higher tax. I have always argued the figure should have been £26,000'. In other words, yet more concessions were needed to the petit bourgeoisie.

In 1993, Kinnock's replacement, John Smith, reassured business leaders that any future Labour government would not introduce a shorter working week although Britain worked the longest hours in Europe. At the 1993 party conference Labour agreed to institute a policy of 'one member, one vote', a direct attack on the trade unions' domination of the party and possible because the unions had been so enfeebled by anti-trade union laws, their constant capitulations, and the loss of more than 40% of their members since 1979. The petit bourgeoisie - accountants, management consultants, lawyers, journalists, lecturers, managers, professional politicians - was now in the driving seat. Tens of thousands of them joined the party over the next few years.

From 1994, under Blair's leadership, social authoritarianism now matched economic liberalism as Labour proposed:

- Targeting of benefits to achieve cuts and force people into low-paid work or training. It dropped any commitment to restore the link between pension and wage rises.
- Increased powers for the police and further attacks on civil rights. Blair said Labour would become 'the party of law and order'.
- No new top rate of income tax. Echoing Livingstone, Blair said 'there are top-rate tax payers now who are hardly in the super-rich bracket and I think we have to be extremely sensitive to them'.

Sealing the political defeat of the Labour left and its radical petit bourgeois allies, a Special Conference in April 1995 voted to replace Clause 4 with an endorsement of 'the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition' and a 'thriving private sector'. In a striking demonstration of their class origin, 90% of constituency delegates voted in favour, along with 54% of union delegates. In February 1996 Blair secured union agreement to ending trade union sponsorship of MPs, and in October the membership voted 95% in favour of Labour's utterly reactionary election manifesto.

In an act of obeisance Blair flew to

Australia to address a conference of News International executives, to be rewarded with the support of Murdoch's press, including the *Sun*. The final flourish prior to the 1997 election was a promise to keep to the Tories' stringent public spending plans if Labour was elected.

Labour now had a programme which met the needs of British imperialism, and with the constant exposure of Tory sleaze and disarray over Europe, it was able to assemble the electoral coalition necessary to win the May 1997 election. A Tory lead amongst A, B and C1 voters, which had never been less than 32% since 1974, was cut to 5%. Amongst C2s, Labour recovered all the ground it had lost in 1979, posting a lead of 23%. Wide swathes of the petit bourgeoisie and the better-off sections of the working class felt that Labour provided a surer defence of their narrow material interests.

Conclusion

Two weeks after the election, Chancellor Gordon Brown handed control of the Bank of England over to the City of London. Parasitism remained rampant: by 2005, British imperialism's total external assets had risen nearly two-and-a-half times since 1997, standing at £4,837 billion, 395% of GNP. Labour has fought five wars to protect Britain's global interests. More than 1.1 million extra jobs have been created in the finance and business sector as a result, whilst jobs in manufacturing have fallen by the same number. The reactionary petit bourgeoisie has consolidated its grip of the Party. The Labour left, unable or unwilling to understand economic and social reality, has been reduced to a pitiful rump.

It is not a question of whether 'New' Labour is more or less reactionary than 'Old': it is merely the form that Labour has had to take in order to remain a party fit for imperialism in the 21st century. It has become an openly bourgeois imperialist party. Those on the opportunist left who imagine that Labour can be returned to a mythical past, or who believe that an alternative in 'Old' Labour's image can or should be built are merely creating an illusion that Labour's opportunist past is worth fighting for. It reinforces our point that breaking with Labour and its apologists is the only way a new party representing the mass of the working class will be built.

Robert Clough



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Turkey Fascist stands as President

DEVIRIM TEKOL

Abdullah Gul, the Turkish foreign minister and member of the reactionary religious Justice and Development Party (AKP), has declared his candidacy for the office of President. Secular forces in Turkey from both left and right are now seeing the AKP as a real threat.

The Turkish General Staff has emphasised its continuing ability to intervene militarily in Turkish politics. It sees the religious movement and its political gains as dangerous to the secular regime of the Republic of Turkey and has declared that the Turkish armed forces will always be the defender of secularism.

Abdullah Gul is a neo-liberal, pro-US, far right politician. As a university student he was involved with the National Front. He has a deep involvement with pro-US, EU and Israeli forces. What Abdullah Gul wants in Turkey is a system based on Islam and the free market. He favours money, commerce and US business interests.

The AKP is not a democratic party and its rise has created concern about the future of secularism and of democracy, such as it exists, in Turkey. A section of the liberal intelligentsia would support military intervention against the AKP should it become necessary.

In the past the Turkish army has supported the fundamentalist religious movement against trade unions and against the workers', youth and communist movement. When the Turkish army came to power in 1970 and 1980, the army opened religious schools as part of a war against the communist movement; they killed communists and progressives and arrested revolutionaries. The very reason that the reactionary movement has managed to reach its current level stems from the US-backed Turkish ruling class's fear of communism. The right-wing religious movement has been built up specifically in order to weaken left-wing politics within the



working class.

Turkish progressives now face a difficult struggle against both religious fascism and the fascism of the military and so-called 'democratic' regime.

*Down with the reactionary movement!
Long live socialism and revolution!*

Long live May Day

On 1 May 1977, 500,000 Turkish working class people assembled in Taksim Square in Istanbul. Counter-revolutionaries opened fire on the demonstrators, resulting in 36 deaths. Since 1978 the Turkish government has not allowed unions or political parties who demand democracy, peace, equality and freedom to hold demonstrations in Taksim Square on 1 May, although whenever fascist, reactionary groups or football fans want to hold a demonstration, permission is granted by the police without difficulty.

This year the Revolutionary Workers Union (DISK), State Workers' Union (KESK), Turkish Medical Association (TTB) Central Council and progressive political parties decided to hold a rally in Taksim Square on 1 May. Following reactionary tradition, Muammer Guler, the fascist governor of Istanbul City, again banned the demonstration and deployed 17,000 police to prevent the event from taking place. There were 700 arrests and a large number of people were wounded. ■

Anti-communist witch-hunt intensifies across eastern Europe

JOSEPH ESKOVITCH

'[The law of lustration]* makes the McCarthyites of the United States in the 1950s look like amateurs at the practice of anti-communism.' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2007

Almost 20 years after the collapse of the socialist bloc, a new wave of anti-communism has swept across much of Europe, as the gangsters, capitalists, fundamentalists and fascists who make up the leadership of the new 'free, democratic and prosperous' eastern Europe combine economic liberalisation with fierce repression of all progressive and working-class forces. A key part of this is a criminalisation of the history and theory of socialism: justification for the slavish pro-imperialism of today.

On 15 March, Poland enacted the law of 'lustration and decommunisation'. This law requires all Poles in positions of responsibility in politics, the media and teaching, as well as senior civil servants, lawyers and journalists, to fill in a form and answer the question: 'Did you secretly and knowingly collaborate with the former communist security services?' Anyone who refuses to take part or is proven to have lied may be banned from their profession for ten years; journalists in the public service who 'collaborated' will be sacked.

Since the ultra-reactionary Kaczynski brothers and their Law and Justice Party (an alliance of fundamentalist Christian and nationalist parties supported by the trade union *Solidarnosc*) came to power, Poland has seen steadily increasing state repression. The regime has threatened to prosecute secondary school pupils for protesting against the education minister, to conscript striking doctors into the army and to set the police on miners planning to converge on Warsaw. Roman Giertych, deputy prime minister, recently tabled a bill demanding that any person disclosing their homosexuality or 'any other sexual deviation' in any educational institution be fined, dismissed or face a term of imprisonment. In February his father, Maciej Giertych, an MEP for the League of Polish Families, published an anti-semitic pamphlet, paid for by the European parliament and issued with its logo, which included statements such as 'the Jews create their own ghettos' and 'anti-semitism is not racism' ('Polish Witchhunt', *Le Monde Diplomatique*).



On 26 April, the Estonian state removed a war memorial in the capital city Tallinn commemorating those who died in the struggle against fascism in the Second World War. This was a calculated insult to the Soviet Red Army and to its own Russian minority. One person was killed in protests, and 40 injured.

According to *Le Monde Diplomatique*: 'these anti-communist purges and attempts to re-impose an authoritarian moral order in Poland – and also to some extent in Ukraine, Lithuania and other countries formerly in the eastern bloc – conceal a worrying nostalgia for the period before the second world war, when racism was blatant. Some of those caught up in the current wave of revisionism go as far as extolling collaboration with the Third Reich against the Soviet Union'.

The attempt to identify the Soviet Union as being as bad as or worse than Nazi Germany, to equate communism with fascism, involves many European countries. In February 2005 a group of MEPs from Lithuania, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia urged the EU to match a proposed ban on Nazi insignia with one on communist symbols like the hammer and sickle. In January 2006, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), introduced Resolution 1481: 'Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes.' The resolution complained that 'public awareness of crimes committed by totalitarian communist regimes is very poor' and that the 'authors of these crimes have not been brought to trial by the international community'. The resolution also condemns, but does not name, 'totalitarian communist regimes... still active in some countries of the world'.

Unsurprisingly, the PACE, which includes parliamentarians from Britain, has failed to demand resolutions condemning the crimes of imperialism. On 16 October 2006, the Czech Republic's Interior Ministry banned the Communist Youth Movement (KSM), despite demonstrations of thousands of people, solidarity from Czech student organisations, groups of former anti-fascist fighters, political parties and civic associations, and international solidarity from workers and communist groups worldwide. The Ministry cited the KSM's mission

statement which calls for socialist revolution and the abolition of private property, as justification for the ban. Jaromir Stetina, a former 'anti-communist dissident' and a member of the Czech senate said: 'I think nobody, not even the Interior Ministry, is against the KSM's right to hold opinions. The Interior Ministry's reservations are against the KSM's methods of achieving its political goals, namely Marxism-Leninism, because it is an appeal for violence and terror'.

'The bourgeoisie turns everything into a commodity, hence also the writing of history... And the best-paid historiography is that which is best falsified for the purposes of the bourgeoisie.' (Friedrich Engels) Ever since the Russian revolution in 1917, the imperialists have poured incalculable amounts of time and money into falsifying and criminalising the history and reality of the socialist countries, in order to hide from the working class the example of a different world not based on exploitation.

At a meeting of the United Nations Council for Human Rights on 12 March 2007, Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt hypocritically condemned the governments of Sudan, Myanmar, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Belarus, Cuba, Uzbekistan, and Iran for human rights violations. He attacked the governments of Iraq, Iran and China for use of the death penalty but failed to mention its use by the United States. He also failed to condemn the Swedish troops in Afghanistan who recently carried out the extra-judicial targeted killing of the Afghan militant, Matou Nematullah.

Cuba's representative to the council, Rodolfo Reyes Rodriguez, exposed the imperialist propaganda of the Swedish minister:

'The cynicism, hypocrisy, and complicity of his [Bildt's] words is astonishing... How can one speak about human rights without mentioning the torture centre in Guantanamo? How can one do so without referring to the war crimes being carried out by the US occupiers in Iraq? How can one speak in this room about human rights and not mention the secret flights and the ghost torture centres established in several European countries?... A process and practice that Sweden no doubt has been part of.'

We must follow the example of the Cuban Revolution and expose at every step the lies of the paid hacks of imperialism. ■

* to lustrate: to purify

Yeltsin mourned

TREVOR RAYNE

Boris Yeltsin died in Moscow on 23 April 2007. He lay in state beneath the golden domes and painted icons of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (demolished in 1931 but fittingly rebuilt during his presidency); Yeltsin's funeral was honoured by the attendance of two former US Presidents, Bush Sr and Clinton, the former British Prime Minister John Major and royalty in the person of the Duke of York. Prime Minister Blair declared himself 'very saddened' at the death of a 'remarkable man' who played a 'vital role' in Russian history. Yes, indeed, they were more than willing to show their gratitude to the man they credit with finally burying Bolshevism.

This hero of the failed coup d'état of August 1991, posing as the liberator astride a Russian tank outside the parliament building before the Soviet Union was dissolved. Yeltsin, the populist, promising Russian people that they would wake from the Soviet Union to find themselves enjoying a Manhattan lifestyle or strolling down the Champs Elysées, but who presided over an economy that shrank to half its former size

and a people whose life expectancy, once exceeding that of the US, fell to that of Egypt. President Gorbachev ideologically cleared his path:

'There are no alternatives to the market. Only the market can ensure the satisfaction of people's needs, the fair distribution of wealth, social rights, and the strengthening of freedom and democracy. The market would permit the Soviet economy to be organically linked with the world's, and give our citizens access to the achievements of world civilisation.' Mikhail Gorbachev, cited by Istvan Meszaros, *Monthly Review*, April 2007.

And so the glittering 'achievements of world civilisation' were enjoyed by former Soviet citizens: a handful of them engaged in one of the biggest legally sanctioned robberies ever conducted: capitalism restored – with gangsters seated at the high table. Within a year of Yeltsin becoming Russia's president trade with Cuba was cut, subsidised oil supplies to Cuba were halted and military supplies slashed. Russia's inflation reached 2,000% in 1992. In 1993 Yeltsin dissolved parliament and sacked his vice-president, although he had no constitutional right to do either. When Russian MPs decided to stay in the parliament building Yeltsin ordered tanks to



Yeltsin, hero of the imperialists, directing operations outside Parliament

open fire on them. About 150 people were killed. In 1994 Yeltsin ordered Russian soldiers into Chechnya against separatists. 30,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed. Russia became effectively bankrupt in 1998, wages were not paid; barter replaced cash. When he resigned at the end of 1999 Yeltsin asked for Russia's forgiveness 'because many of our hopes have not come true'.

Yeltsin's successor, President Putin, said the collapse of the Soviet Union 'was the greatest geo-political catastrophe' of the twentieth century. We are beginning to witness in the savagery unleashed on the world the dimensions of that catastrophe. 'Communism has collapsed... It is a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing' said *Socialist Worker* on 31 August 1991. And how fitting it would also have been if the Socialist Worker Party were there too, beneath the gleaming cupolas, paying Yeltsin their last respects. ■

Hands off John Bowden!

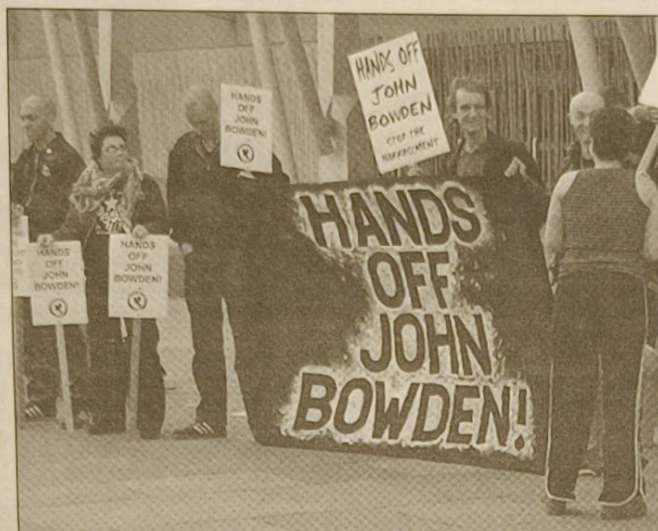
On 18 April 2007, after nine months in an open prison and shortly before a parole hearing to decide his suitability for release after 25 years in prison, John Bowden was placed in solitary confinement. The next day he was moved to a closed prison. **NICKI JAMESON** writes.

itself has undergone many changes. John has always been quick to seize the opportunities presented by 'liberal' moments but has never been taken in by the promises of reform. In 1989-91 John worked within Long Lartin maximum security prison to organise a series of forums at which outside speakers, prisoners and prison

On the day of John's transfer the *Dundee Courier's* front-page headline proclaimed 'Castle Huntly killer has terror links'. The article begins: 'A Castle Huntly prison social worker fears a brutal killer, due for parole in two weeks, has links to terrorists. A report by the social worker claims that low-security inmate John "Ginger" Bowden is in continual contact with "eco-terrorists or paramilitary members" and has received visits from "people involved in terrorism".'

The 'social worker' in question is Matt Stillman, whom John describes as 'a right-wing American entrenched in punitive ideas about the role of the parole and probation system', and who appears to have been chosen specifically for this reason for the task of writing a vital report for consideration by the Parole Board panel that will determine if John is to be released.

The alleged 'terrorists' are in fact Brighton Anarchist Black Cross (ABC). ABC is a longstanding organisation, with small but active groups in many countries, dedicated to supporting 'class struggle prisoners'. FRFI has worked with ABC groups for many years, united by our shared understanding of the importance of the struggle within prison. ABC's main activities are writing to prisoners, organising benefits to raise funds for prisoners' welfare and supporting or organising solidarity pickets of prisons. To label Brighton ABC as 'terrorist' is ridiculous and easily refutable; however this attack on John Bowden and ABC is intended to send a message to prisoners in British gaols that they stand up for themselves and others at their peril, and to prison support activists to back off or risk being blamed for decisions not to release. Neither John nor ABC are bowing to this pressure and are fighting the attack politically. All FRFI readers in and out of prison are encouraged to support their campaign.



Demonstration in support of John Bowden outside the Scottish parliament

John Bowden was imprisoned for murder in 1980, and has been in contact with FRFI since 1983. In 1984, following a trial resulting from a protest at Parkhurst the previous year, he wrote: 'I was banished from open society for a serious infringement of criminal law - yet here I am deprived of any legal or civil protection from the murderous intentions and actions of a barbaric and antiquated penal system... I shall continue the struggle in every way possible to tear down that cloak of state secrecy and reveal the gross inhumanity that it seeks to hide.'

John has been good to his pledge, taking every opportunity that has presented itself to organise, educate and empower prisoners, to encourage political activists outside prison to be interested in and understand the use of prison as a weapon of oppression against the working class, to write for radical publications and to correspond with political and politicised prisoners around the world.

During this time the prison system

staff would openly debate aspects of imprisonment. The prison responded well initially, allowing John and others to invite in guests who would never ordinarily have been permitted, including representatives of FRFI, but, just as the first and biggest forum was about to take place and the prison was basking in the reflected glory, the 'liberal' governor had John ghosted to Winson Green prison, where he was viciously assaulted by screws. The forum went ahead without him and John later successfully sued the Prison Service for the attack.

After the 1990 Strangeways uprising, John wrote a manifesto for prisoners' rights, which he and other Long Lartin prisoners submitted to the Woolf Inquiry into the revolt. He also contributed to Larkin Publications' 1995 book on the uprising: *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*, writing:

'Within a prison system that had

relied so heavily on brutality and an institutionalised denial of basic human rights, the Strangeways uprising represented an eloquent statement that things would never again be quite the same... Prisoners had shown that even one of the most brutal gaols in England, a true bastion of screw power and authority, could be reduced to a burning wreck if and when prisoners said enough was enough. The lesson was certainly not lost on those who manage and administer the prison regime... The liberal façade of Woolf was coupled with a hidden agenda motivated by revenge and a determination to eradicate protest on the scale of Strangeways for ever more.'

Indeed, between 1990 and 2000 the British prison system was completely overhauled and hundreds of new divide-and-rule measures introduced, with the aim of preventing resistance on the scale of Strangeways ever occurring again. This attack has had a significant degree of success and by 2000, when Turkish prisoners were on hunger-strike, and John and Mark Barnsley were attempting to initiate solidarity within the British prison system, the smallest of group actions had become something many prisoners would shy away from for fear of loss of privileges, bad reports and ultimately denial of release.

In this climate John continued to operate politically, organising where possible and talking at length with

his own possible release. Prior to April he had spent two years working unsupervised in the outside community as a volunteer on projects for the mentally ill and socially vulnerable, and had qualified as a literacy tutor for people with learning difficulties. He had been allowed frequent home leaves. As he wrote recently: 'The two fundamental criteria determining a life sentence prisoner's suitability for release, the expiry of the recommended period of time served in the interests of retribution, and the absence of any risk to the public, were both sufficiently established in my case'.

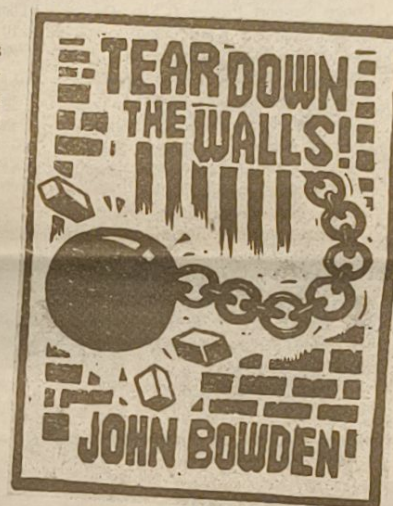
However, two decades of exposing and confronting the reality of British prisons were not going to be forgiven. John writes: 'The truth is that my treatment is politically motivated and inspired by a determination to continuously punish me for having fought the system in the past and encouraging others to do so, and also by a determination to render me intellectually and politically compliant and submissive. As far as the prison system is concerned, the imperative now is not about negating any genuine risk that I might pose to the community - that stopped being an issue many years ago - but primarily about eradicating my political identity and spirit. From this point on, therefore, my continuing imprisonment is nakedly political and centres wholly on what I continue to represent to a prison system ever fearful of a politically awakened and militant prisoner movement.'

Join the protest by sending cards reading 'Hands Off John Bowden' to Scottish Prison Service Headquarters, Communications Branch, Room 338, Calton House, 5 Redheughs Rigg, Edinburgh, EH12 9HW, Scotland.

Letters of support can be sent to John at: **John Bowden, 6729, HMP Glenochil, King O' Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3AD, Scotland.**

Tear down the walls!, a pamphlet containing two pieces by John Bowden, with an introduction by Mark Barnsley, is available from Leeds ABC, PO Box 53, Leeds, LS8 4WP, price £1.50 plus 50p postage; free to prisoners.

Join the demonstration in support of John, on Friday 8 June 12-2pm outside the Parole Board headquarters at Grenadier House 99-105 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2DD.



younger prisoners, encouraging them to read about and understand the alienating and oppressive situation they found themselves in. At the same time, he began to prepare himself for

Officer throws dice while prisoner dies

A recent London inquest heard a list of 'systematic failings' by Pentonville prison over the death of Paul Calvert in October 2004. Paul, a 40-year-old heroin addict from Hackney, was the father of two children. The court heard he had made many attempts to stop using illegal drugs. The jury was told he had a history of depression and self-harm.

The original allegations against Paul had been dropped but he was arrested for breach of bail conditions. Two days after he arrived at Pentonville, Paul climbed up pipes; after pressing the emergency button, he hanged himself from the cell window with his belt. Witnesses testified that they warned officers he was depressed, yet they moved his cellmate into another cell, leaving him alone.

The alarm could not be heard because the mute button was held down by sticky tape. It was normal practice for prisoners' and not offi-

cers to answer alarms. Former prisoner James Manning testified that he was teaching an officer to play backgammon when he noticed a warning light and went to check Paul's cell. This was at 2.20-2.30pm but the light could have been on from 1.40pm. Paul had wet himself and he had been there long enough for the urine to partially dry.

The jury returned a majority verdict of misadventure and criticised the prison for systematic failures, breach of security, lack of communication and disabling the cell bells. Paul's inquest had been delayed to enable the Crown Prosecution Service to consider prosecuting junior staff. As per normal in these cases nobody is being prosecuted. No-one who was a senior manager at the time at Pentonville was called by the coroner to explain the behaviour of their staff or how they allowed the alarm to be disabled. This culture comes from the top. Currently

there is a bill before Parliament called the Corporate Manslaughter Bill. The Lords have amended it to include prisons and police stations. The Labour government has threatened to withdraw the bill if the Commons accepts this amendment.

Jim Wills

Prisoner wins compensation in Germany

FRFI is also read in Germany and I'm really glad that your paper does not forget people in prison. Two months ago, a court in the south of Germany found the state guilty of violating the rights of a prisoner here in Bruchsal prison. He lost his job in the prison store (where he was paid €70 a month), but the court ruled that this was a wrong decision by the warden. So the state was ordered to pay him €2,000 for his financial damage. Well, only a little victory - but still a victory! Thanks to all of you who help prisoners read FRFI for free.

Thomas Meyer-Falk
www.freedom-for-thomas.de

Obituary Chris Tierney

Last year we reported that Chris Tierney, who was released in March 2005 after serving 18 years of a life sentence, following diagnosis of a terminal brain tumour, had been recalled to prison for apparently swearing at staff at a care home. Chris was by then paralysed down one side, losing his sight and displaying behaviour that medical experts on brain tumours said was symptomatic of the condition and not something he could control. Vindictive to the last, the Probation Service, who had instigated the recall, was not prepared to agree to his re-release, and he died in Norwich prison on 7 May, aged 56.

Chris was imprisoned for life for murder in 1986. Throughout his sentence he always had a deep understanding of the iniquities of the system and always stood up against its excesses with unbending principle. In the 1990s when prisons began in-

sisting that life sentence prisoners undertake 'offending behaviour courses' to demonstrate their readiness for progression and release, Chris refused to participate. Having long given up alcohol and drugs, acknowledging and understanding their role in his conviction for murder, he refused to engage in 'hoop-jumping'; instead he spent his time studying sociology, psychology and politics. He was a militant atheist, who campaigned against the use of religion by the prison system to obtain compliance.

Chris was a subscriber to FRFI for nearly 20 years and in 2002, when Erlestoke prison tried to ban the paper on spurious grounds, took a successful complaint to the Prisons Ombudsman, which other prisoners have been able to use to argue against similar censorship ever since. We send our condolences to Chris' friends.

FRFI ROUNDUP

'Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways... The point however is to change it.'
Karl Marx

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! has been organising events around the country in support of those struggling against imperialism, whether resisting occupation and oppression in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan or suffering racist attacks here in Britain.

Asylum seekers fight back

FRFI comrades in the Northeast continue to work to strengthen Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR). TCAR is an organisation made up of different groups and individuals. Over the past two months FRFI has fought to ensure democracy within TCAR. At a general meeting to review the principles of TCAR, FRFI successfully proposed that TCAR's remit should include raising awareness of British involvement in countries that asylum seekers were escaping from. FRFI has also countered a proposal to ban the sale of political literature at events and is fighting against a trend towards censorship.

TCAR members have produced a leaflet to urge people to take a pledge of resistance, to stand in solidarity with asylum seekers against immigration snatch squads, and asylum seekers have been joining FRFI comrades in going door to door in local communities with leaflets and petitions.

On 5 May TCAR had a 'right to work' contingent of over 30 people on the Tyne and Wear May Day March. A TCAR member from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) spoke on the platform at the rally about the destitution forced on asylum seekers by the Labour government and finished her speech by leading the crowd in a round of chanting against deportations and for the right to work.

In response to the threatened deporta-

tion of leading TCAR member Guler Akdogan and her family to Turkey on 11 May, TCAR members and supporters from the local community mobilised around the clock in defence of the family. Led by a group of courageous young women from the family's neighbourhood TCAR organised a mass petition collection in the centre of Newcastle on 7 May.

On 9 May a 30-strong TCAR contingent held a lively demonstration and occupation at Government Offices North East. On 10 May the family was informed that their deportation had been halted, and they have since begun new legal proceedings for asylum. Another leading TCAR member, Joy Bowman, whose attempted deportation to Jamaica in March was halted with the help of a national media campaign, has now been granted the right to stay in Britain. The struggle against other families' deportation continues.

On 28 March and 12 April, FRFI comrades around the country joined the national days of action called by the Congo Support Project (CSP). On 12 April FRFI and North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) joined a march in Manchester to demand an end to deportations to DRC and to denounce the biased British media. About 200 people, mostly Congolese, attended this, the fourth in a series of Congolese demonstrations in Manchester. Demonstrators vented their anger at the racist British state and staged sit-down protests at the major junctions, stopping cars and trams. A NWASDG speaker pointed to British involvement in the Congo and the need to unite asylum seeking communities in Britain with each other, and with the local population.

NWASDG has kept up the campaign in support of Halima and Bailey Junior, a

20-year-old pregnant mother, and her one-year-old baby under threat of deportation to Cameroon. Their case was highlighted in the *Manchester Evening News* twice in a month. At Halima's final hearing at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal on 15 May, she was informed that she will receive the decision on her deportation through the post. Her baby is due in early June.

FRFI members and supporters in London attended the CSP demonstrations outside the Home Office in protest against the forced removal of people to the DRC where they risk torture and death. FRFI comrades in London are also continuing to hold monthly demonstrations at Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre.

Stop the war!

FRFI continues to campaign against the brutal occupation of Iraq by British and US forces. Weekly stalls have taken place around the country calling for the immediate withdrawal of imperialist troops. On the May Day rally in London we joined Kurdish and Turkish revolutionary groups to celebrate International Workers' Day.

Victory to the Intifada!

FRFI activists in London have kept up their weekly activity on the streets in support of Palestine. Pickets of Marks and Spencer, Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel, continue every Thursday evening. The Boycott Marks & Spencer campaign is now in its seventh year and we have seen off four years of organised

Zionist counter-protest. We will be joining the 9 June Enough! national demonstration for Palestine, and to mark the 40th anniversary of the annexation of East Jerusalem, the Victory to the Intifada campaign will be organising actions nationwide on or around the 28 June.

Come and join us in action!



Demonstration in support of asylum seekers outside Communications House, London

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 5 June and 3 July, 1-2pm
Demonstration **Defend asylum seekers!**
Stop deportations!
Communications House
210 Old Street roundabout, EC1
(Nearest tube Old Street)

Wednesday 20 June, 7-9.30pm
LSE FRFI society public meeting
Palestine 1967-2007 - 40 years of resistance
London School of Economics (LSE),
Room S421, St Clement's Building,
Houghton Street, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn)

Wednesday 18 July, 7-9.30pm
LSE FRFI society public meeting:
Ten years of Labour
LSE, Room S50, St Clement's Building

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Picket of Marks & Spencer
Oxford Street
(Nearest tube Marble Arch)

For further details phone 020 7837 1688
Or email eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com or
northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com

MANCHESTER

Saturday 16 June, 12 noon
North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group street stall Market Street

Monday 18 June, 12 noon
Demonstration **Defend asylum seekers!**
Close down Dallas Court Reporting Centre!
Dallas Court, South Langworthy Road, near
Broadway tram stop, Salford

Saturday 30 June, 12-3pm
Boycott M&S picket
Market Street

For further details phone 07816 547 066
Or email mcr@rcgfrfi@fmail.net
Website: www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk

To contact NWASDG, phone 07779 189 794
Or email fightback_05@yahoo.com
Website: www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk

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

NEWCASTLE

Thursday 28 June 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada protest
commemorating **40th anniversary of annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel**
Northumberland St

Every Saturday, 12-2pm
Street action

Every Saturday, 3pm
Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) weekly meeting
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop, bottom of
Westgate Road

For further details call 07857 323 523
Or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com
Website: www.frfi-northeast.co.uk
For TCAR contact tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk

SCOTLAND

For information email
frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk



The Cubans are coming!

'Our best brigade yet!' was the consensus when 14 members of Rock around the Blockade (RATB) and the Revolutionary Communist Group returned from the campaign's 10th brigade to Cuba in early May. Being exposed to all sectors of Cuban society and many aspects of Cuban life we had the chance to deepen our practical and theoretical knowledge of the socialist Revolution and had daily opportunities to discuss the problems and benefits of the Revolution (for report, see pages 8/9)

On 7 April, RATB held a day of action to demand freedom for the Cuban Five and an end to US occupation of Guantanamo Bay. Lively actions were held in Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester and London. As well as public speaking and distributing information about the case of the Five and the achievements of Cuban socialism, in London and Newcastle we used street theatre to expose the hypocrisy of the US's war on terrorism and its plans for transition to a 'free' Cuba. Activists dressed in orange suits, with black hoods and chains to symbolise prison conditions in the US military's concentration camp in illegally occupied Cuban territory in Guantanamo Bay. The powerful image stopped passers by in their tracks. In Manchester the public queued up to throw wet sponges at one volunteer dressed as Tony Blair.

On 19 May, London RATB jointly organised a solidarity event with the North London Cuba Solidarity Cam-

paign, the Communist League and the Young Socialists. With stalls, banners, speeches and slogans, protesters paraded around the square with placards demanding the immediate release of the Cuban Five, an end to the illegal US blockade and opposing the shameful release in Miami of self-proclaimed terrorist Luis Posada Carriles who is responsible for a campaign of terror against Cuba (see page 9). The demonstration concluded with a march to 10 Downing Street.

By mid-June, brigadistas will have held six brigade report-back meetings about the latest developments in the process of socialist construction in Cuba. Meetings in London and Newcastle on 16 May attracted good turnouts. In London, brigadistas' reports were accompanied by video footage of interviews taken on the brigade, including one with the brother of

Rene Gonzalez, who drew a parallel between the injustice against his brother and the barbarity of the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

This is an important and exciting moment to get involved in our Cuba solidarity work, as we build up to a speaking tour planned for February-March 2008. We will be privileged to be touring Britain with Orlando Borrego, Che's closest collaborator in the Ministry of Industries in Cuba 1961-1965, and Rogelio Polanco, director of daily youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. If we can raise enough funds, we will invite another representative of the UJC. It is a wonderful opportunity to participate in these events in the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Our Cuban comrades will address audiences across the country, explaining, debating and discussing. Planning for the speaking tour begins now, so contact us as soon as possible to get involved, suggest a venue (schools, colleges, workplaces, community centres), organise a meeting, set up a branch of RATB, or to help fundraise for this historical event.

Let everyone know - the Cubans are coming!



EVENTS

MANCHESTER

Friday 1 June, 8 till late
Rebel Music fundraising gig, with music from Congo to Wythenshawe
Sofa, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield
£2.50/donation on door

Sunday 3 June, 2pm
RATB eyewitness report from Cuba
Cross Street Chapel, Central Manchester
email ratb@riseup.net or
tel: 07940 961 169

LEEDS

To get involved with RATB in Leeds email
frfi_leeds@yahoo.co.uk or tel: 07899 983 131

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 16 June, 12 noon
Free the Cuban 5 street theatre and protest
Grey's Monument, Newcastle
Email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com or
tel: 07857 323 523
website: www.frfi-northeast.co.uk

LONDON

Thursday 7 June, 7pm-2am
Movimientos - RATB eyewitness reports from Cuba

Salmon and Compass pub, 58 Penton Street, N1
Nearest tube Angel.

Free/donations before 9pm, £3 after.

Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 June, midday
9.30pm
Carnival for Cuba, Southwark Park
RATB stall

Phone/email for details of this and other weekend stalls & fundraising events
020 7837 1688
office@ratb.org.uk

Scotland GLASGOW

Thursday 31 May, 7-9.30pm
First-hand accounts of Cuban socialism today
George Moore Building, Caledonian University,
Glasgow (behind Buchanan bus station)

Thursday 7 June, 7-9.30pm
First-hand accounts of Cuban socialism today
Room 506, Boyd Orr Building, University Avenue,
Glasgow University (no 44/44A bus or Hillhead Underground)

Email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

Check www.ratb.org.uk for updates of events in your area, speeches by Cuban revolutionaries, articles and analysis.

I would like to be involved in building for the Cuban Speaking Tour 2008

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Phone number.....

Email

I enclose £..... donation towards the

speaking tour (cheques payable to Rock around

the Blockade).

I would like to join Rock around the Blockade and enclose a cheque for £2 (unwaged, students) £4 (low waged) £10 (waged) (annual membership).

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Phone number.....

Email

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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London WC1N 3XX

A Black Panther writes

I hope this finds you all well. I received the February/March and April/May 2007 issues of FRFI that you sent me.

Thank you very much as I very much enjoy the newspaper.

Best wishes to all those at FRFI.

SUNDIATA ACCOLI # 39794-066
(Squire) PO Box 3600,
USP Allenwood
White Deer PA 17887 USA

Sundiata Accoli is a Black Panther and the co-defendant of Assata Shakur. He is serving a life sentence.

DEBATES ON THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

Latin America and Cuba

Thanks to Sam Rae for an interesting, thorough and quite favourable review of my book *Democracy and Revolution: Latin America and socialism today* in FRFI 196 (April/May 2007). I would like to respond briefly to his more critical points.

1. **Cuba, Venezuela and democracy.** With regard to my view that Venezuela may be able to build a more open socialist democracy than Cuba, Sam says that 'Venezuela may find that if it is to face down the threat of imperialism it has to settle for something less than a perfect democracy at the present time', and that while I clearly support Cuba I sometimes 'verge on being apologetic about its political system', when 'the Cubans have good reason to be concerned about protecting revolutionary power'.

You can't have it both ways. I strongly defend the grassroots democracy of People's Power at a local level in Cuba, but express reservations about the limitations on open debate and popular participation at national level (while recognising that this may be necessary in the context of imperialist blockade). Venezuela may find itself obliged to take similar measures in the future, although the context (oil, and the

general analysis. After all, in this country it's not long in historical terms since the massive polltax protests, the miners' strike or the so-called 'winter of discontent'. Granted, none of these upsurges of protest and militancy was able to generate an organised revolutionary movement, but prolonged periods of political frustration and disorientation are typical of the working-class movement in most countries.

Our essential disagreement is about the impact of imperialism and the labour aristocracy. I accept that the reality of imperialism implies a radically different situation in this country as compared to Latin America, but not to the extent that we should abandon the British working class as completely corrupt and sold-out. As signs of both economic and political crisis multiply, there are large sectors of the working and popular classes in this country who feel increasingly alienated and are ripe for an alternative. If we do not provide it, then the fascists will, and however much we support Cuba and Venezuela, revolutionaries in those countries will not thank us if we abandon the struggle here.

DIANA RABY

The party does not stand candidates in local or national elections, which means that non-party members are elected at all levels, and allows for separation of party and state. At the same time, because party members are drawn from the most politically advanced and capable people, they also make up the majority of the Provincial and National Assemblies. The outcome of the party's internal debates can therefore direct basic policy at the National Assembly, so that the party acts as 'the highest leading force of society and of the state', as stipulated in the Cuban constitution. I don't see a problem with that.

2) To be clear, I do not think that the British working class has completely sold out.

However, there is a split in the working class, with a privileged section that benefits from imperialism (see Steve Palmer, 'Labour Aristocracy mythmakers and their mistakes', FRFI 195, for a detailed discussion of this). This gives rise to opportunism: attempts to divert the oppressed classes away from revolutionary politics and towards reformism. If we analyse revolutions elsewhere with a view to learning from them, we have to take this difference into account.

The demise of the anti-war movement is a short-term development, but it has a lesson for



absence of Soviet influence) may give it greater freedom of manoeuvre. But if we say that limitations on socialist democracy, whether in Cuba or (hypothetically) in Venezuela, are necessary in response to imperialist hostility, then we can't say that these countries have a fully democratic socialist system.

2. **On popular movements in Britain and other imperialist countries.** Where I see hope in the massive protests against the war four years ago and the emergence of forces like Respect or Communist Refoundation in Italy, Sam points to the collapse of the anti-war movement and the sell-out of Communist Refoundation in office.

But these are very short-term developments and cannot in themselves form a basis for a

Reply

Thanks for engaging with my criticisms. Here are my responses:

1) In my review I accepted your point that the large degree of Cuban Communist Party (PCC) influence at the National and Provincial Assemblies is a democratic limitation, but justified it as a necessary concession. Since going to Cuba and talking with people there (see pages 8/9) my response would be different.

As you say in your book, 'recruitment to the party is by popular nomination, in which workers in each enterprise propose for party membership those individuals they consider to be most outstanding'. This, together with the fact that party members hold no privileges, means that the PCC represents Cuban workers as a whole.

us, one that is unique to an oppressor country. The groups who control the Stop the War coalition have consistently denied the imperialist role of the Labour Party, putting the blame on Bush (who is characterised as just plain evil) and his so-called poodle, Blair. The million or more people who marched against the war went home not having learnt about British imperialism and even more cynical about the prospect of political change. They are made to feel that their desire for peace is just a pious wish, and, without an analysis of imperialism, this is exactly what it is.

I agree that we have to be prepared now so that we can put forward an alternative when the revolutionary conditions exist. An essential part of this is recognising the destructive role of opportunism.

Sam Rae

The imperialist countries

I would like to point out some inconsistencies in Steve Palmer's article 'Labour Aristocracy II: reformism and reaction' (FRFI 197).

Firstly, you say that 'The working class inherently tends toward internationalism and toward socialism'. Later you state that the labour aristocracy is 'part of the working class' and also that it 'acts as a brake on the overall struggle'. I don't see how the labour aristocracy can simultaneously 'act as a brake' and 'inherently tend towards internationalism', which is what you say the working class does. In addition, if this were true there would be no point in engaging in class struggle of any kind as conditions for a revolution would be ripe, and the labour aristocracy would not exist (as it clearly does). It is necessary to convince people to become internationalists, since we have a racist and imperialist government which most people willingly submit to.

I strongly disagree with your analysis of political struggle and the need to 'raise the class consciousness' of the rest of the class. As I understand it, class consciousness is the awareness of the working class of their own oppression and exploitation by the ruling class. It is not an abstract mentality which can be raised or lowered. The quote from the *Communist Manifesto* that you use to support your argument says only that 'The Communists are...practically the most advanced...'. Communists are best suited to lead the working class because they have gained experience in practical, political struggle, not because they have attained a 'higher' state of thought, whatever that would be. In fact I don't like your emphasis on consciousness at all as it smacks of idealism and a belief in the primary value of mind.

Taken together, these statements about the 'inherent' socialism of the working class and about 'raising' consciousness show a worrying tendency towards aristocracy within your own organisation. Aristocrats believe that the 'best' (Greek: *aristos*) people should rule. But a revolution is necessary not because the working class are intrinsically the 'best' people, but because we are oppressed, exploited, and separated from the means of production. Vive la revolucion!

PS Could you explain what exactly you mean by 'reformism'?
MATTHEW HOLBOROW
(by email)

A brief response

First, simply to take the current state of the working class for its true nature is to miss the point. As Marx observed:

'It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole

proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do.' (Marx, *Holy Family*)

Unlike the ruling class which has its property, its territory and its state and is therefore tied to its country, the working class has nothing and therefore no country of its own:

'The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.' (Marx)

These are not just fine words, but historically the case until imperialism was able to corrupt a section of the working class. While the class as a whole tends toward internationalism, a section of it has been privileged by imperialism and tries to hold the rest of it back, acts as a brake. What's the difficulty with that?

Matthew thinks that emphasising the role of consciousness 'smacks of idealism' etc. He needs to look at his own argument, where he wants to 'convince people to become internationalists'. Frustrated by the apparent lack of internationalism of the working class, Matthew wants to hurry it up by...addressing their minds! If the working class were not inherently internationalist, this would be a completely utopian project. Communist theory meets the working class to become aware, not only, as Matthew recognizes, of their oppression and exploitation by the ruling class, but also of the possibility and necessity of throwing it off and replacing it with a classless society and of the way forward to do so.

As for 'raising consciousness', the whole point of communism is to unite theory with practice: Marx and Engels did not set up the Communist League – they were invited to join by this workers' organisation because they provided the theory the workers needed to advance their practice, and they wrote the famous *Manifesto*. Marx wrote about communists as 'theoreticians of the proletarian class' (*Poverty of Philosophy*); in 1892, Engels described its origin in 'two independent currents' – 'a pure workers' movement' and a theoretical movement stemming from the disintegration of Hegelian philosophy – 'The *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 marks the fusion of both currents' (*Socialism in Germany*). It is not a question of theory versus practice, but the unity of the two. An old communist dockworker drove this home to me with a story. A comrade is standing outside a pub in the freezing snow one evening, with snowflakes swirling round, on New Year's Eve, selling the paper. Two of his friends are walking by. 'Hey, Joe', one of them calls. 'Come inside and have a drink – you know that socialism is inevitable!' 'Sure' responds Joe, 'but it's only inevitable so long as I stand here selling the paper'.

Steve Palmer, US

Brilliant exposé

Thanks for David Yaffe's wonderful analysis of British capitalism (FRFI 194, December 2006/January 2007) and his succinct yet comprehensive comment on Brown's budget (FRFI 196, April/May) which was indeed for a decaying and parasitic capitalism. Hardly less notable than this brilliant exposé has been Steve Palmer's total refutation of Charles Post's sophisms. It really is

amazing to observe the wilful self-deceits of those who covertly support the existing order but claim to be its critics.

FRFI continues to give me (and others) a powerful sense of capitalist reality – a sense carefully denied to us by the entire bourgeois press.

JOHN O'HIGGINS
Leicester

Organising against Labour's racist immigration laws

On 19 May a successful day of action took place in cities throughout England and Scotland in protest against the British government's continuing attacks on asylum seekers. The event was called and co-ordinated by Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR), who organised a 200-strong demonstration in Newcastle city centre on the theme of 'You will not snatch us silently!'

The demonstration was anything but silent. Participants brought pots, drums and whistles and there was constant chanting. The march culminated in an open mic rally, where speakers included members of the RCG, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Zimbabwean opposition group MDC and many more members and supporters of TCAR. At least three speakers were under the age of 14 and young people were the main participants in the street theatre. Young members of TCAR, some of who have witnessed dawn raids themselves, acted out an immigration snatch squad, kicking down a door and dragging out mother and child, to boos and hisses from the audience.

Comrades in TCAR report that the

last year has shown a distinct shift in attitudes about asylum seekers with a lot more open support being shown in communities and on the streets. The organisers of the 19 May events were inspired by the support the demonstration received from working class residents of Newcastle, who spoke spontaneously and passionately on the open mic about the racism of the current system and the need for solidarity with asylum seekers.

In Manchester FRFI and the North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) organised a march, starting from Strangeways prison where asylum seekers are detained. Over 80 people rallied outside the prison, including asylum seekers and refugees from the Congo Support Project (CSP), International Organisation of Iranian Refugees, and Ethiopian, Eritrean and Kurdish communities, as well as by the Sukula Must Stay Campaign, Rhythms of Resistance samba band and local working class people and students. They then marched to the city centre, where CSP speakers

highlighted the treatment of asylum seekers in Britain by the racist Labour government, denouncing Britain for supporting Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) President Kabila just as it supported the late despot Mobutu. A speaker from Ethiopia spoke about the government's deliber-



On the march against deportations

ate policy of using destitution to force asylum seekers to leave this country. A 10-year-old Kurdish girl spoke about how people in her country were being attacked and her family were not allowed to live in peace - 'that's why we had to run away'.

In Glasgow, 60 people marched from the immigration courts to the city centre, with banners demanding equal rights for all. Members of Unity handed out leaflets informing the public of the reality of asylum seekers' lives and the march chanted against dawn raids and detention. At the rally asylum seekers spoke out against criminalisation and vowed to resist deportations back to Turkey, Rwanda, DRC, Algeria and other countries deemed 'safe' by the Home Office. An RCG comrade spoke, stating the real criminals are those British politicians who support the brutal occupation of Iraq, the genocidal war in DRC and the fascist state in Turkey. He urged Scottish people to unite with asylum seekers in the struggle against poverty and racism. The demonstration fin-

ished with chants of 'the Home Office is the real criminal!'

In London Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! held a lively demonstration outside Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre on Friday 18 May, supported by London No Borders, Crossing Borders, Crossroads Women's Centre, All African Women's group and the Médécins du Monde London Project. The following day North London FRFI and Nottingham No Borders held street events in support of the day of action, a march took place in Coventry, and Leeds No Borders held an Asylum Solidarity Day at a social centre, attended by about 60 people. FRFI is proud to have participated in this day of action and looks forward to more unity in struggle against Britain's racist immigration laws.

**No detention! No deportation!
Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!**

**An injury to one is an injury to all!
Together we are stronger!**

Deliberate policy of enforced destitution

The Labour government continues its assault on the human rights of those already marginalised, vulnerable and made desperate by racist immigration policy.
ALYSE THOMSON reports.

A recent inquiry by the Joseph Rowntree Trust branded the Labour government's policy on asylum 'appalling and inhuman'. Even the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the two Houses of Parliament has concluded that: 'by refusing permission for most asylum seekers to work and operating a system of support which results in widespread destitution in the treatment of asylum seekers in a number of cases reaches the Article 3 European Convention on Human Rights threshold of inhuman and degrading treatment'. Most sickeningly, this treatment is not merely neglectful, but intentional - the same Committee found evidence that the government has a deliberate policy of destitution that falls below the requirements of a 'common law of humanity' and 'international human rights law'. Labour is trying to starve asylum seekers into leaving the country.

In the absence of official statistics showing actual numbers of destitute asylum seekers, numerous independent local studies stack up to provide a disturbing body of evidence. The Scottish Refugee Council identified 154 destitute asylum seekers in Glasgow alone, including 24 children. There are reported to be 1,000-2,000 destitute asylum seekers in Birmingham. Many refused asylum seekers find themselves destitute for long periods of time, the average being 21 months. These snapshots give some idea of the extent of the problem but cannot convey the real human suffering endured by asylum seekers who find themselves deprived of all income or benefit, food, shelter or support.

Destitution can occur at any stage



An estimated 19% of refused asylum seekers are left with no choice but to sleep rough in phone boxes, public toilets and parks.

in the asylum process. Support can be withdrawn as a result of legislation such as Section 55 (for those who do not register their asylum claim 'as soon as is reasonably practical'). While under Section 9 families with failed asylum claims who do not agree to 'voluntary return' to their country of origin can have all support severed. Some families become destitute by 'going underground' in order to avoid arrest and detention. Asylum seekers, many of whom have already endured

horrific suffering, torture, mental and physical persecution in their country of origin, have justifiable fears of immigration snatch squads, detention without access to adequate legal support and forced deportation.

79% of cases of destitution arise due to 'end of process' or refusal of final claims. Under the present system financial support and accommodation for asylum seekers are cut 21 days after a final claim for asylum has been refused. After this point the only offi-

Growing up too soon

A report has revealed that social workers are routinely disqualifying unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from foster care and school places by assessing them as older than they actually are. The report says social workers are under pressure from managers to exaggerate children's ages, and concludes that a

'culture of disbelief' pervades the system, with children as young as 13 denied adequate care, even when they present documentary evidence of their date of birth. (When is a child not a child? Asylum, age disputes and the process of age assessment Immigration Law Practitioners' Association, Swansea University.)

Protests in detention centres

Early May saw renewed protest in immigration detention centres. On 3 May women in Yarl's Wood Removal Centre began a protest, following a threat by SERCO (the company which in April won a £87m contract to run Yarl's Wood) to introduce new measures, including 7pm-7am lock-up, confiscating mobile phones and cutting access to TV news. According to a press release issued by the Black Women's Rape Action Project (BWRAP) women took to the corridors shouting 'We won't be locked up' and made banners out of bed sheets saying 'We want freedom', 'We demand Human Rights' and 'We want justice'. One woman, Jacklyn Edwards, was then moved to Holloway prison from where she told BWRAP: 'I am being punished for speaking out about the

inhumane conditions we have to suffer in Yarl's Wood'.

Some of the women involved in this protest went on hunger strike, and three days later over 100 male and female detainees in Yarl's Wood staged another hunger strike.

At Colnbrook detention centre a peaceful protest was brought to an end by force. On 20 May about 17 men were moved to prisons or other centres. The detainees were protesting at access to the church and library in the immigration prison being reduced. The official explanation is shortage of staff, but it is considered to be a manoeuvre to further limit association and movement within the centre, and particularly association between detainees from different wings.

Nicki Jameson

cial support available is under Section 4, the so-called 'hard case' support which can provide food vouchers and hostel accommodation. However, provision under Section 4 only applies if the asylum seeker fulfils certain criteria, including agreeing to 'voluntary return' to their country of origin, even if it is clearly not safe. Over 90% of asylum seekers feel it is unsafe to return: hardly surprising when many are asked to return to war zones such as Iraq or Afghanistan, or countries where persecution, torture, systematic rape and ethnic cleansing occur, such as Rwanda or Democratic Republic of Congo.

Even where the asylum seeker fulfils criteria to apply for 'hard case' support, it is not always given. Claims often encounter administrative delay and error. Furthermore, the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) does not publicise the availability of 'hard case support' so often asylum seekers are unaware of this 'tattered safety net' (Joseph Rowntree Trust). In a sickening twist, Section 4 support is sometimes refused if it is deemed that the asylum seeker cannot really be destitute if they have survived so far.

An estimated 19% of refused asylum seekers, without a wider support network, are left with no choice but to sleep rough in phone boxes, public toilets and parks. This figure would be far higher if it were not for the solidarity of family, friends and the work of

charities and voluntary organisations.

In addition to the physical hardship caused by lack of shelter, adequate diet and access to health services, destitution has a seriously damaging impact on mental health. Researchers, clinicians and support agencies identify serious risks to the mental health of those asylum seekers who fall victim to Labour's inhumane treatment. Recent research shows high levels of anxiety, depression and disempowerment because of forced dependency on NASS, resulting from denial of the right to work. The Refugee Council warns that sleeping rough, fear of harassment and the inability to get adequate help and diet were causes of deteriorating health both mental and physical; 83% of asylum seekers they interviewed had experienced serious health problems since entering Britain, over half of which related to mental health.

Despite Labour's relentless campaign to drive asylum seekers out or underground by preventing them working, recent polls indicate that over 65% of the public support the right to work for asylum seekers.

We must fight against Labour's racist policies and show support and solidarity with all asylum seekers and immigrants.

Defend asylum rights! No to destitution! Support the right to work for asylum seekers! Oppose Labour's state racism!