

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Part of the concerted attack by police on demonstrators at the G20 protest in the City of London, see page 5

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BRITISH DEMOCRACY THE STENCH OF CORRUPTION

It is a truth acknowledged by working class people all over the world that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Three weeks of daily exposure of the corruption of the British Parliament by the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper has driven home the point. So far the *Telegraph* has examined the expense accounts of fewer than half of the current 646 Members of Parliament. As we go to press, ten of the worst offenders have announced that they will not stand at the next election. Many more will face the wrath of their constituents and are trembling in their (hand-made) boots at what is to come. The European elections are imminent and a general election is looming.

As you would expect of this Mother of all Parliaments, buried up to its neck in capitalist exploitation, imperialist plunder and priding itself on purveying democracy and self-righteousness, the British Parliament has always been a den of thieves, iniquity and corruption. From the rotten boroughs of the 18th and 19th centuries to the rotten parties of the 20th and 21st, the MPs have nodded through an extraordinary list of vicious measures to torment the working class and poor and to reward the rich and privileged.

Feathering nests

There are 646 MPs (2005 general election) who are paid £64,766 a year. Despite the fact that this is around three times the average wage, most MPs don't think it is enough. In December 2006, before corporate greed became unpopular, backbench MPs were demanding a salary of £100,000 'in line with GPs and council executives'. On top of their salaries, all MPs can feather their nests with expenses: staffing allowance £100,205; incidental expenses £22,193; communications allowance £10,400

and several more. With the exception of MPs for inner London constituencies, they are also allowed to claim £24,006 a year tax-free 'additional allowances' for second homes, and it is the operation of these expenses as a slush fund that has caused the scandal.

The Green Book, which stipulates how these expenses are to be claimed, warns: 'claims should be above reproach and must reflect actual usage of the resources being claimed'. Furthermore, 'the requirement of ensuring value for money is central in claiming for accommodation, goods or services – members should avoid purchases which could be seen as extravagant or luxurious.' Clearly it is called a Green Book rather than a rule book because, in fact, there are no rules. Up to now the details of the expenses have been secret and Parliament has devoted time to trying to avoid publication. But the cat is now out of the bag.

As has become clear from the *Telegraph's* revelations, the claims range from the sublime to the ridiculous. Many MPs have used this 'allowance' to gentrify their homes and embark on property speculation

costing the taxpayer thousands of pounds. The extraordinary claims of Tory grandees fall into a particular category: restoring the moat (Hogg, Sleaford); building the servants' quarters (Butterfill, Bourmouth West); gardening fees and a duck island (Viggers, Gosport). Labour's John Prescott (Hull) reclad his home in mock Tudor timbers and Margaret Moran (Luton) notoriously repaired the dry rot (£22,000) in her partner's home, 100 miles from her constituency.

Some MPs have cleverly made 'flipping' an art form: swapping the designations of their homes from 'main' to 'second' in order to double their money. Star prize goes to Conservatives Andrew Mackay and his wife, Julie Kirkbride, who separately designated their main home and constituency homes differently to reap extra rewards. Both are standing down at the next election. Others have made fortunes selling their newly-improved properties, and then started again.

Luckily for the MPs who are being forced to stand down, if they manage to hang on until the next election their efforts will be rewarded by further tax free allowances, worth tens of thou-

sands of pounds, for 'winding up' and 'resettling', so that their return to 'normal' life is as untraumatic as possible.

In an analysis of MPs' previous occupations at the 2005 election, 242 MPs came from professional backgrounds (72 barristers/solicitors; 44 university lecturers) and 118 from business backgrounds. 75% were university graduates (25% from Oxford and Cambridge). Only 38 of the total had been manual workers. The vast majority of MPs are middle class and schooled from birth to calculate every asset minutely. Yet an extraordinary number claimed to have 'made a mistake' by claiming for mortgage interest on mortgages they did not have, for properties they did not occupy and for expenditure they did not make. Much of this is undoubtedly fraud for which, unlike their working class counterparts who 'make mistakes', they are unlikely to go to prison.

The revelations are just the tip of the iceberg. This greedy lot are not satisfied with a large income and practically unaudited expenses, many of them also have second jobs, paid directorships and shareholdings. MPs

continued on page 2

Labour government presides over worsening poverty and inequality

Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell told us as he introduced Labour's latest proposals for welfare reform that 'Today, when the national effort is about a global downturn, we can no more afford to waste taxpayers' money on those who play the system.' He was clearly not thinking of those who 'play the system' like Sir Fred Goodwin, or Labour ministers like himself and MPs with their second home fiddles – the rich and the admirers of the rich. Instead, he was asking us to endorse Labour's brutish attack on the poor, those who face a daily struggle to survive, and those who will join the dole queues this year as unemployment grows to three million. But that strategy is now backfiring, as millions compare the pittance they receive in income support with the vast benefits Labour politicians receive by reason of being in parliament. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

Purnell (salary £142,000 per annum) has milked the House of Commons expenses system to the utmost. Over a five-year period, clearly regarding his salary as insufficient to feed him, he claimed £9,094 on groceries, and since 2001 has received £145,000 for utilities, council tax payments, fixtures, fittings and cleaning as second home allowance in London. In 2006 he sold his then London flat but avoided paying capital gains tax because HMRC regarded it as his primary residence. In his first speech as Works and Pensions Secretary in January 2008 this free-rider said there would be 'no free-riding on the welfare state'. His predecessor, Peter Hain, was of the same opinion, saying in the same month just before he resigned: 'We have had great success in cutting benefit fraud by more than half since 2000...but we know that thieves are intent on stealing money from those most in need', even as he received £103,000 in undeclared support for his bid to become Labour's deputy leader.

Whilst squeezing the most out of

their own benefits system, Labour MPs since 1997 have endorsed a policy which has continuously impoverished the unemployed and those on income support. One of the earliest actions of Labour on coming to office was the implementation of cuts in state benefits to lone parents which the outgoing Tory government had proposed in its final budget. It also proceeded with the draconian Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime, and over the years continued to tighten eligibility for the miserly income it provides. Today's £64.30 a week JSA (£50.95 for the under-25s) has fallen by 25% against average earnings since 1997 and now stands at 10.5% of average earnings. This is half what unemployment benefit was worth on average from its introduction in 1912 until 1979 when the Tories tied it to inflation.

What is also staggering is the extent to which income support levels for those who are not working have fallen under Labour. This is especially so for those without children but even families with children on income support



James Purnell and Lord Mandelson: Labour ministers whose personal fortunes have grown while their policies have forced the working class into deeper poverty and inequality

Income support levels in relation to poverty thresholds by family type (after housing costs)

Income support level as % of poverty line	1997-98	2008-09
Single aged 18-24, no children	52	40
Single, aged 25+, no children	65	50
Couple, working age no children	60	46
Couple, 1 child aged 3 and 6	67	66
Couple, 2 children aged 3, 8, 11	67	75
Couple, 3 children aged 3, 8, 11	71	81
Single parent, 1 child aged 3	81	81

Drawn from *Towards a more equal society?* Hills, Sefton and Stewart (eds), Policy Press 2009, Table 2.4, p30

are still forced to live well below the poverty line:

People on income support are the 'undeserving poor' and are amongst the seven million people who are no better off than they would have been in 1998/99. Over half a million are subject to fraud investigations each year to ensure they get no more than the pittance they are due. The imposition of greater poverty on the unemployed has been accompanied by a stream of punitive measures: the ASBO regime; the proposals that unemployed people in council housing could risk losing their homes if they don't prove that they are looking for work; and the current Welfare Bill which says that in the future 'virtually everyone' claiming benefits will have to do something in return for their money, meaning that most people on incapacity benefit will be required to

Child poverty and inequality

In 2007/08 there were 4.0 million children living in poverty (2.1 million in 1979), of whom nearly half lived in persistent poverty (defined as being below the poverty line in three out of four successive years). Labour failed to meet its initial target – reducing child poverty by 25% by 2004/05 – by a considerable distance, and is nowhere near its second target – halving child poverty by 2010. Indeed, as increases in state expenditure on child-related tax credits and benefits tailed off from 2004, the proportion living in poverty started to rise again.

Income is not the only measure of inequality. Labour also committed itself to reducing health inequalities by 10% by 2010, as measured by infant mortality – a very modest target which would have seen infant mortality amongst the poorest fall from 13% above the national average to 12% over a 13-year period. In fact the gap has widened: in 2004-06 infant mortality among manual workers was 5.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, 17% higher than the national average of 4.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.

attend job interviews and the unemployed would be expected to do four weeks' full-time activity after a year out of work.

Peter Mandelson, who infamously declared that 'we are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich', demanded in 1997 that 'doubters' as to Labour's commitment to reduce inequality 'judge us after ten years of success in office'. Since then Mandelson has become one of the 'filthy rich' he so admires. He started with an undeclared loan of £373,000 to buy a house in London, moved on to become an EU Commissioner on £182,000 a year, before receiving a £234,000 golden handshake to enable him to live on a ministerial salary of £104,000 with a London home worth £2.5 million. For the rest of us, inequality has consistently increased during the years of the Labour government. Between 1996/97 and 2007/08, the income share of the poorest 20% fell from 5.9% to 5.3% whilst that for the richest 20% rose from 43.2% to 45.6%. The ratio of the income share of the richest to the poorest 20% rose from 7.3:1 to 8.7:1.

Whilst there have been reductions in poverty, these have been limited and as early as 2004/05 had started to reverse. The number living in poverty (defined as below 60% of median household income after housing costs) in 1979 was 7.9 million; by 1997, it had risen to 14 million. After 12 years of Labour, it is still 13.5 million and growing. Pensioners fared better: 29.1% were living in poverty in 1996/97; this fell to 17.6% in 2004/05 but is now rising and stands at 19%. Improvements for children were far more limited: although the proportion living in poverty fell from 34.1% in 1996/97 to 28.4% in 2004/05, this has also started to rise, and by 2007/08 had reached 31%.

Despite record levels of GDP and average income growth at least until 2007, Labour has been unable to recreate conditions of the post-war boom when successive governments were able to guarantee the privileges of the middle class and better-off sections of the working class whilst maintaining an adequate standard of living for the mass of the working class. The result is an explosion of working class rage at Labour corruption, an anger that is shared by swathes of the middle class facing an uncertain future, shattering the electoral coalition that handed Labour three successive general election victories. With Labour now facing disaster in the 4 June European elections, the left has issued a coded call to come to its support by urging us to vote against the BNP. Socialists should be taking a stand: no vote for Labour! ■

BRITISH DEMOCRACY THE STENCH OF CORRUPTION

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think, like bankers, that they work harder than other people and therefore deserve vastly inflated pay packets. The reality is that their holidays are long and working days short. Proof of this is that many MPs have second jobs, continue practising as barristers, solicitors, doctors and dentists, or act as company directors. In 2007, Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague sat on two boards, earned up to £100,000 as a consultant for three further companies, earned £120,000 as an after dinner speaker and made up to £245,000 in advances for a book. It is not only the Tories who make extra money this way: David Blunkett listed more than £150,000 'other remuneration' and Charles Clarke three consultancies and up to £50,000 worth of other ventures in the Register of Members' Interests.

Readers should not imagine that this luxurious living is confined to the House of Commons. The Lords do not receive a salary, but do get attendance allowances. Anyone in receipt of unemployment or other state benefits, calculated on what a person needs to survive, should take note. Overnight

accommodation allowance: £174.00; day subsistence: £86.50; office costs: £75.00 – all tax free. Most of the Lords have pensions, directorships and other sources of income. Understandably the MPs threatened with eviction from the Commons are queueing up to be considered for peerages.

When the Commons MPs were looking for a scapegoat for the scandal they fortunately happened upon the Speaker, Michael Martin, who notionally controlled the oversight of the expenses, persistently blocked any reform of the system and more importantly, perhaps, was originally from the Glasgow working class. For the first time in more than 300 years a Speaker was forced to resign. Normally the Speaker is automatically elevated to the House of Lords but, ironically, a cabal of ex-Thatcherite ministers led by Lords Lawson and Lamont have decided that Martin does not come up to scratch even in a pit of dubious sleaze-ridden peers.

'It's the economy, stupid'

These are extraordinary times. Waging war on Iraq, justified on the basis of a tissue of lies, detention without



Delusions of grandeur: Tory grandees are trying to 'blackball' Speaker Martin's entry into their House of Lords club

trial and torture of opponents, systematic inroads into civil rights, have barely caused a ripple among the present cohort of MPs and the electorate. It has been clear for years that MPs have been rewarding themselves with high salaries and pensions, supposedly in line with other fat cats who benefited from the years of debt-stoked economic boom. What has changed? Why is there now such a furore?

With the onset of the current deep capitalist crisis in 2008, the bankers faced public opprobrium and shareholder rage over the bonus systems which rewarded incompetence and greed. When things seemed to be going well, nobody cared. These men were the entrepreneurs, the money-spinners, the good guys. But now that the system has crashed, while Sir Fred Goodwin of RBS bank and the departing director of BT's IT operation, Francois Barrault, to name but two,

have been able to walk away with millions, the MPs are more vulnerable. What is more, the next Parliament will have the job of ensuring that not only the working class but also large sections of the middle class pay for this crisis. To do so, Parliament will have to appear to be above reproach.

The sudden, unprecedented interest in parliamentary reform among leading Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians stems from this alone. All of them knew about the expenses fraud, most of them personally participated. They have only started to criticise parliamentary procedures because they want to continue to rule in the interests of their class. Their wealth and privileges depend on the survival of British imperialism. If it is necessary to sacrifice the careers of a few (or even many) backbenchers, or sack their most favoured advisers, they will do it. If it is necessary to talk about the constitution, proportional representation, fixed-length parliaments, more devolution, it will be done. Just don't be deluded into thinking this has anything to do with real democracy.

One of the conditions for a revolutionary period has been met: the ruling class cannot go on ruling in the old way. Desperately it has to find a new means to maintain its rule. What is required to stop them is not constitutional reform but a working class movement determined to oppose imperialism and seize control for itself and its allies.

Carol Brickley

Years and years of austerity ahead

Gradually but relentlessly the world economic crisis is deepening. The OECD, organisation of the 30 richest capitalist countries, warns that unemployment in its member economies could rise by 25 million as the crisis progresses, with economic growth falling by an average of 4.3% this year. International trade is in freefall with trade volumes expected to fall by a huge 13%. The 16-nation single currency eurozone's GDP fell 2.5% in the first quarter of 2009 and a record 4.6% on a year ago. Unemployment across Europe could reach 26 million in 2010 or 11.5% of the labour force. The US economy fell at an annualised rate of 5.7% in the first quarter of 2009. The British economy is expected to slump by around 4% this year with unemployment reaching three million by the end of the year. Growth in the underdeveloped countries will fall from 5.8% in 2008 to just 2.1% this year, driving millions more into desperate poverty. DAVID YAFFE reports on the growing impact of the crisis.

With interest rates in the main imperialist economies close to zero, the risk of deflation is ever present. Prices are falling in the US (-0.62%), Japan (-0.3%) and Britain (-1.2%), and are no longer rising in the eurozone. Deflation can be ruinous for highly indebted borrowers, as the real value of their debts will rise.

The IMF estimated in April that global financial sector losses had reached close to \$4,400bn and they will almost certainly increase. To avoid immediate financial meltdown governments have so far provided around \$8,900bn to prop up the banks. This is less than a third of their financial needs. The bounce in the world stockmarkets since early March 2009 is the result of the unprecedented intervention by central banks and governments of the main capitalist nations, in what one financial commentator has called 'the most far-reaching socialisation of market risk in world history' (Martin Wolf *Financial Times* 22 and 29 April 2009). Yet the unwinding of the unprecedented debt in the public and private sectors of the main capitalist economies has barely begun. This 'deleveraging' process, when it really gets underway, will have devastating social and economic results and the imagined 'green shoots' of recovery will rapidly wither away.

The G20 summit came and went. It achieved very little other than giving the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, the principal role on a world stage for a few days. Divisions between the major imperialist powers were played down or hidden. Although it has been claimed that new money of \$1,100bn would be injected into the global economy, including a \$500bn increase in funding available to the IMF, an increase in Special Drawing Rights of \$250bn and a total of \$250bn for trade assistance, the *Financial Times* (3 April 2009) has argued that new commitments appear to be below \$100bn, and most of the money was in train before the G20 summit anyway. In addition extra money, created through the imperialist-dominated IMF, generates serious problems for underdeveloped countries because of the conditions placed on their loans. Sharp budget cuts and trade surpluses demanded by the IMF are exactly the reverse of the fiscal expansion being promoted within the rich imperialist nations. In addition around 44% from the IMF's Special Drawing Rights funding goes to the richest G7 imperialist nations.

British crisis deepens as divisions widen

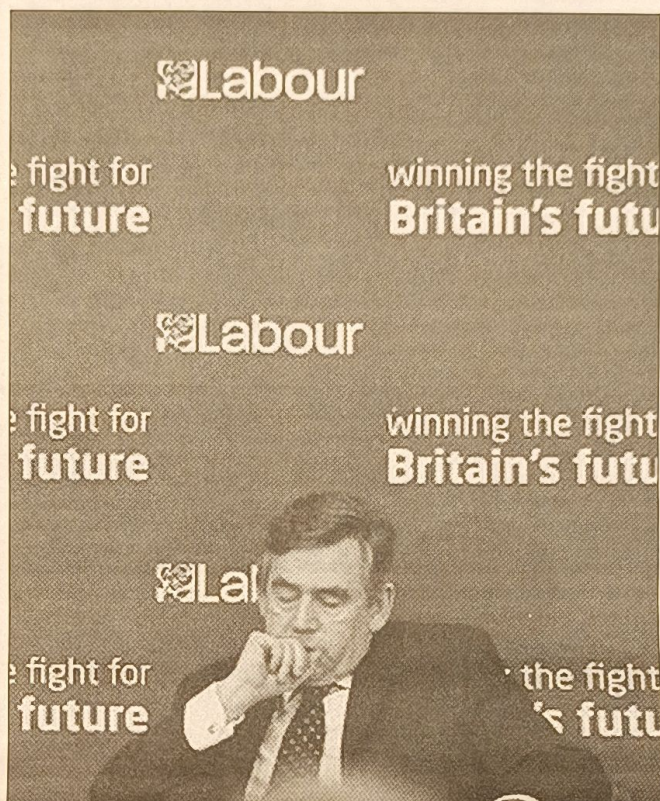
The British economy has been in recession since the last quarter of 2008. Predictions for the decline in national income in 2009 range from the government's optimistic -3.5% to the National Economic and Social Research's -4.3%, which would be the fastest fall since 1931. Britain is experiencing a deep recession which will have serious economic, social and political consequences for the majority of the British population.

Unemployment increased by 244,000 in the first quarter of 2009 to reach 2.2 million, 7.1% of the labour force. This is the highest unemployment rate since Labour came to power in 1997. In March alone the increase in unemployment was 115,000, a record rise, with half the increase amongst the under-25s. The jobless rate for 18-24-year-olds is now 16.1%, up 3.9 percentage points on a year ago; more than double the increase among 29-40-year-olds. By the end of the year around 1.25 million under 25-year-olds could be unemployed, as overall unemployment reaches 3 million.

House prices continue to fall and are now 22.5% below the August 2007 peak. Mortgage lending crashed to an eight-year low in April 2009, 52.4% lower than in the same month last year. House prices are expected to fall a good deal further, with one economist expecting them to fall by another 12% to 15% (*The Guardian* 28 May 2009). House building is at its lowest level since 1953.

Deflation hit the British economy in March when the Retail Price Index (includes certain housing costs, such as mortgage interest payments and council tax) fell below zero (-0.4%) for the first time in almost 50 years. In April it stood at -1.2%, the lowest level since 1948. The Consumer Price Index (excludes certain housing costs) is now falling rapidly and was 2.3% in April, down from 5% last summer. Average earnings in the first quarter of 2009 were down 0.4% on a year ago. This was mainly due to lower bonuses. If these are excluded, average earnings rose 3%, the lowest rise since 2001, when comparable records began.

These broad figures conceal growing inequality and class divisions. Britain is a more unequal society than at any time since records began in the 1960s. Poverty and inequality rose for three successive years up to 2007/08 according to the latest report from the



The electoral choice will be between Brown's fagged-out Labour Party or a bunch of Old Etonian Conservatives. For the working class it will be no choice at all.

Department of Work and Pensions.¹ Since the last election the number of people living in poverty (below 60% of the median income after housing costs - AHC) has increased by 1.4 million, from 12.1 million in 2004/05 to 13.5 million in 2007/08, from 21% to 23% of the population. This includes 400,000 more children and makes risible the Labour government's pledge to halve child poverty by 2010. The poorest 10% of the population have seen their share of household income (AHC) fall from 1.7% to 1.4%, while the top 10% have seen their share rise from 29.1% to 30.8%. The ratio of the top 20% to the bottom 20% of household income per week has increased from 4.8:1 to 5.2:1. The deepening crisis can only exacerbate these developments as millions more people are driven into poverty.

The budget plans for years of austerity

Chancellor Darling's second budget had to take into account two important matters. First was the need to contain and then turn around the explosive increase in government debt, both to retain the confidence of those investors expected to finance it and to ensure that the British economy remains a 'world centre for finance'.² The urgency in doing this was revealed a month after the budget when Standard & Poor, the rating agency, downgraded Britain's economic outlook from 'stable' to 'negative', calling into question Britain's top-tier credit rating. A lower rating would push up the cost of borrowing. Second was a likely General Election in May or June 2010 and with it the importance, despite rapidly deteriorating economic conditions, of keeping on side a substantial section of the coalition which voted Labour back into office in 2005. The problem was to

reconcile these two increasingly contradictory requirements.

The budget measures attempted to deal with this by postponing a dramatic squeeze on public finances until after a General Election. So after the £20bn stimulus to the economy already announced in the pre-Budget report in November 2008,³ any further stimulus in this budget had to be nominal. Pay back time would come later in the form of years and years of austerity after the election. Overall, Darling said, that there would be a fiscal easing (stimulus) of 0.5% of GDP this year followed by a tightening (squeeze) of 0.8% of GDP per year until 2013-14. On this basis, and with wildly optimistic growth projections for the economy - a decline of 3.5% this year, growth of 1.75% next year,⁴ 3.75% in 2011 and trend growth of around 2.75% thereafter - the deficit will be £175bn in 2009-10 or 12.4% of GDP, falling to £173bn, then £140bn, £118bn and £97bn or 5.5% of GDP in 2013-14. Total government borrowing will be more than £700bn over a five-year period. Net debt figures are expected to be 59% of GDP in 2009-10, rising to a dramatic 79% in 2013-14, shattering Labour's neo-liberal fiscal limit of 40% of GDP of previous budgets. Debt servicing costs will be between £35bn and £47bn a year, more than the annual transport budget and half the education budget (*The Guardian* 23 April 2009).

Public sector current expenditure is expected to grow in real terms by only 0.7% a year. However, costs have historically tended to rise faster in the public sector than in the economy as a whole by 2% per year. This means, on present budget plans, cuts in public services of around 1.3% a year. In addition, public sector capital investment will be halved (in cash terms) from £44bn this year to £22bn in

2013-14. As *Financial Times* journalist Chris Giles so graphically put it: 'Get ready for dirty hospitals and crumbling schools' (23 April 2009).

To get public sector borrowing down to levels acceptable to the financial markets, either taxes have to be raised and/or public spending cut to the extent of 5% to 6% of GDP. In this budget Darling not only squeezed public spending but also raised taxes, for the present, on high earners. The rate of tax on those earning £150,000 and above, around 350,000 people, would be raised to 50% from April 2010. Pension tax relief for these high earners will be gradually reduced from April 2011 to the basic rate of 20% that the majority of people receive. In addition personal allowances, worth twice as much as those of basic tax payers, will be withdrawn for those earning over £100,000 from April 2010. These measures will raise £1.2bn in 2010-11, £2.2bn the year after, increasing to £7bn by 2013-14. Even if these sums were raised, and high earners didn't find ways of avoiding paying them, they would barely dent the overall deficit.

Economic commentators have called the measures pointless. London mayor Boris Johnson said they were a tax on London and Arsene Wenger, the Arsenal manager, worries that they would make the Premier league less attractive to professional footballers.

The Prime Minister even told the CBI conference that it was not something that he and Darling wanted to do. But, he said, 'we have to have a plan for sustainable public finances and included in that must be decisions we made about taxation' (*The Guardian* 21 May 2009). This is a clear signal to the better off sections of the working class and middle classes that they are next in line for serious tax increases, but after the election when massive cuts in public borrowing will have to be made. The tax on the rich few is not designed to raise large amounts of revenue but to set a precedent for serious tax increases on a much wider section of the population.

The present crisis has already shown that the ruling and political elites have lost all credibility. They cannot continue to rule in the old way. Greed and corruption is being exposed in a context of falling living standards for increasing numbers of people. So far, however, there has been little sign of increased activity by the mass of people at the receiving end of the deepening crisis. Whoever wins the next election, the years of austerity ahead will change this situation as millions of higher paid workers confront the brutal realities of capitalist crisis already hitting the poorer sections of the working class. ■

¹ Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 1994/95-2007/08

² In his budget speech Darling said: 'A successful economy needs a strong financial sector. We don't want to throw away the many advantages that have come from our position as a world centre of finance. I intend that we retain that position.'

³ See 'Desperate times desperate measures' in FRFI 206 December 2008/January 2009. Online on our website.

⁴ The IMF, however, predicts that GDP will fall again by 0.4% in 2010.

Education notes

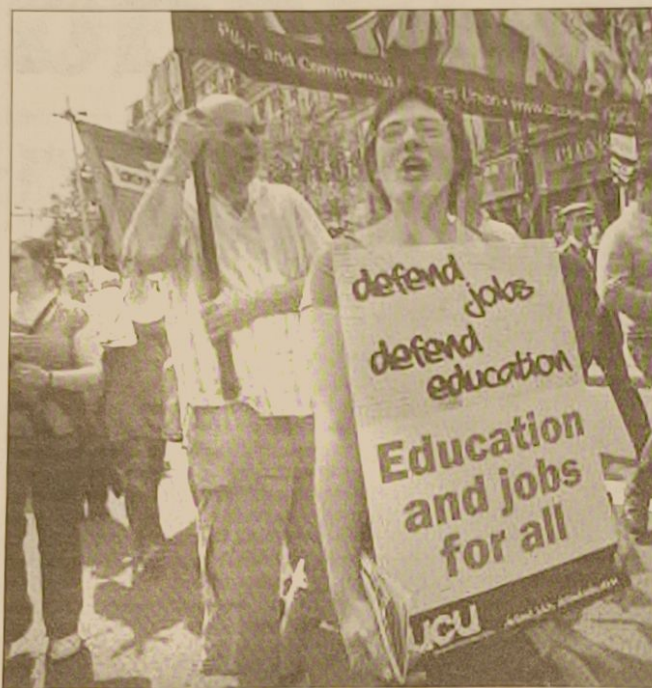
The education profiteers

The plan and the unplanned

Michael Binyon OBE, Master of the Royal Livery Company of Leathersellers in the City of London, has many interests in defence of the British establishment, as diplomat, spy watcher, *Times* and *Times Educational Supplement* columnist. In 1984 he published a commentary, *Life in Russia*, in which he attacked what he called 'the tyranny of the plan'. But events at Lewisham Bridge School tell us all we need to know about the chaos of the unplanned. Leathersellers is owner of the Lewisham school site, a small primary in the heart of the deprived south London borough. Both Leathersellers and Lewisham Council want to demolish the primary school. They have ambitions for the future of the site, namely a new all-through 3-16 years Foundation school. The existing Special Needs Unit and Travellers' Education Service will have no place in the scheme. Foundation schools are not run by the local authority. They are public/private schools where the governors are selected by the Foundation, which decides admissions, employs staff and owns the land and building. The parents, children, teachers and community want Lewisham Bridge School to be kept as it is. After campaigning for over a year against threatened closure, they had some good luck. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport designated the school building a Grade II listed status, which means that it cannot be knocked down. Labour Mayor of Lewisham, Sir Steve Bullock, was furious at this threat to his chance of handing over a brand new Foundation school to Leathersellers by 'an undisclosed civil servant with no regard for local need'. On 23 April parents seized the opportunity and occupied the roof of the school in opposition to the Council's proposed closure of the school and bussing of the children to a temporary centre, one-and-a-half miles away. Meanwhile the Council is appealing against the Department's listing and preparing for demolition. Parents led a demonstration in Lewisham on 9 May. The community's fight for the survival of its local school continues, but will have to be determined to overcome Labour's commitment to privatised education.

Illegally large classes

Grabbing school sites and discarding small schools has created havoc in the primary school sector. Schools in England are being closed at the rate of 100 a year, leading to a growing shortage



March to defend jobs, services and education, Holloway, North London, 23 May

of school places and increased overcrowding. Britain's primary school classes are the fourth largest of the 30 most developed Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, with only Japan, Korea and Turkey having larger classes. The 1997 Labour government outlawed infant classes of over 30, but in the last 12 months alone, the number of young children in illegally large infant classes increased by 50%. Schools in the private sector have 13 fewer infant pupils per class than the state sector. In primary school the average class size is 26.2, but averages are deceptive. Over 10,000 children are crammed into classrooms and denied the space and teaching time they need.

Business is failing business schools

At the other end of the education scale university students who are told that they are the brightest and the best enrol not for science, medicine or the humanities but for the Master in Business Administration (MBA). Management studies at Harvard, London, Dubai, etc have grown and in many universities are often the richest and largest departments. As might be expected, business schools are suffering

in the economic crisis. Amazingly, this is not because they have been exposed as a costly waste of time and money. No MBA course has (yet) been accused of hyping up 'marketing communication and competitive intelligence' as phoney baloney. None of the 'experts' have been called upon to explain why their economic modelling and future profitability strategies failed to predict, let alone explain, the credit crunch. No, it is the income stream of company spending on programmes for their executives that is declining. About 60% of organisations have reduced training and development budgets and have stopped buying into business school 'expertise'. The perks and freebies of the corporate lifestyle, travelling to residential international conferences to participate in 'new visions of excellence', are being cut. In the words of Don Skull, Director of the London Business School, 'Google is closer to the future of business education than business education is to the future of business education.'

London Metropolitan University

There is trouble also, not amidst Oxford's dreaming spires or Cambridge's pleasant meadows, but at the

London Metropolitan University (LMU) sites on the Holloway Road and Commercial Street in London. Research from 2006 shows that over 60% of LMU students are drawn from ethnic minorities and that the university has more black Caribbean students than the 20 leading universities of the Russell Group combined (Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College, Kings College, the LSE, and Warwick etc). 97% of LMU students come from state schools and colleges and 43% are from lower socio-economic groups. With 34,000 students, LMU is London's biggest university. Now the higher education funding body HEFCE is cutting £15 million from LMU's budget and intends to claw back £36.5 million of past funding, alleging that the university misreported student completion rates. The university management intend to cut 700-800 jobs, a quarter of the institution's workforce. Courses and student places will be drastically reduced. Lecturers held a one-day strike on 7 May and students have occupied buildings. The University and College Union (UCU) have demanded that LMU's books be opened, no redundancies and no victimisation.

Higher Education Minister David Lammy has refused an independent inquiry into LMU's finances. The Vice Chancellor, Brian Roper, resigned in April but will be paid until the end of the year. LMU management previously attempted to derecognise the union. It is the management that should be held to account and sacked, not protected by the minister. A march on Saturday 23 May saw the small representation and many banners of large unions, the GMB, NUT, UCU, UNITE and the PCS. As Mark Serwotka of PCS said at the end 'the struggle should have started sooner, but it will have to start now'.

Chris Woodhead has a laugh

A true opportunist looking for fame and fortune could do worse than study the life and times of Chris Woodhead. From posing as an ultra progressive teacher, teacher trainer and LEA administrator, he rapidly escalated into an educational traditionalist under Thatcher. Writing for a conservative newspaper and becoming a consultant to a Conservative PR firm, he stamped his authoritarian views on the Ofsted inspectorate regime under the heading of accountability and 'raising standards'. Invited by the 1997 Labour government to continue as head of Ofsted with a massive pay rise, he

imposed an increasingly rigid and centralised inspectorate on schools. His dictatorial management style was evident in his refusal to publish the report behind a contentious ruling that put Islington Green School in London into 'special measures'. Woodhead was a particular target of that incisive commentator, the late Ted Wragg, to whom he was 'Sid Turniptop'.

After leaving the state sector Woodhead was appointed Professor of Education at Britain's only private university, the University of Buckinghamshire. In 2004 he became Chair of Cognita, a business that owns and runs private schools for profit. An opinionated shock-jock to the end, he announced in May that he has motor-neurone disease, but will not be speaking to 'any bearded social workers' about his future. Not so amusing, however, are his conclusions that the key to success in education is in the inheritance of intelligence - 'that the genes are likely to be better if your parents are teachers, academics, lawyers, whatever'. Woodhead's recourse to genetic determination to rationalise the failure of the state education system in which he played a central role, is disgusting. He practically suggests that there is no point in educating the working class. What is scary is that all the other Turniptops are still out there making money and careers out of the test-and-fail regime that is justified under the heading of accountability.

Accountability and the real world

But what is accountability exactly? The head of one south London school is worried that an Ofsted judgment on attendance figures may be distorted because only a third of pupils attended on one snowy February day. Had the school remained closed like many others there would be no problem and attendance targets would be met. Other headteachers are not so fragile. Sir Alan Davis, head of Copland Community School in Wembley, north London, on a wage of £150,000, has received £130,000 in bonuses over the last two years. Allegations are now being investigated that over £1 million has been liberally distributed to the head's favoured staff and a number of his relatives employed at the school. Three teacher union reps were suspended by the school management following a staff vote of no confidence in the headteacher. Parents and pupils have been demonstrating in support of the teachers' reinstatement, whose suspension is particularly vindictive because their classes have public exams in a few weeks.

'Accountability' has been the weapon of bullies under Labour, Woodhead and Ofsted. At last we are beginning to see it turned against those who have enriched themselves at the expense of the working class.

Susan Davidson and Trevor Rayne

Workers take on Visteon and win settlement

SUSAN DAVIDSON

When Visteon called in the administrators KPMG to close down their car part manufacturing plants in Belfast, Basildon and Enfield, they were declared bankrupt with £669 million debt. Visteon UK (VUK) turned on its employees with contempt, giving nearly 600 workers less than an hour's notice and instructing them to leave the sites immediately. The response was spontaneous and solid. The workforces occupied the sites and set up pickets to prevent the smooth evacuation of Visteon's remaining plant and to demand a proper severance deal that would include pension rights.

The giant motor company Ford set

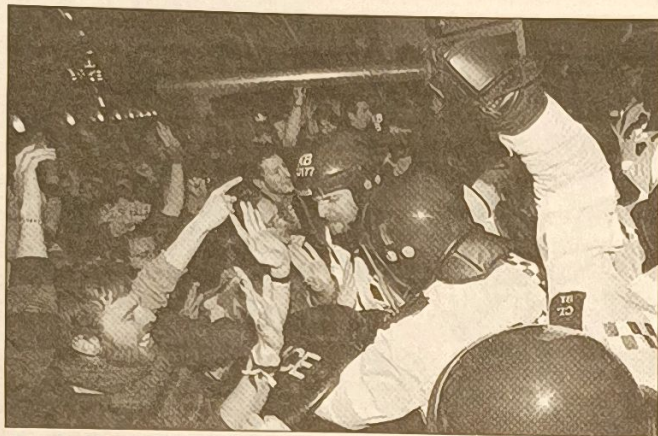
up the Visteon car part manufacturer in 1997 and sold it off in 2000. This is the usual pattern of 'outsourcing', by which big multinationals create structures and companies that are flexible, cheap and dispensable. Workers in the new units are usually less well-paid and have poorer conditions than those in the mother company. The outsourced manufacturer Visteon sends in a stream of income to Ford from a vast global spread with plants in Brazil, the Czech Republic and elsewhere. Visteon workers at the Rougegoutte plant in eastern France are currently blockading their factory in protest against threatened wage cuts. However, unusually when the operation was sold to VUK, workers were guaranteed Ford terms and conditions.

Unite's General Secretary Derek Simpson insisted that Visteon had a contractual obligation to make a settlement. Nothing insists quite like workers' fightback, however, and the pickets continued until pension rights and severance money were formally agreed. The victory is significant. Workers who were sacked without a second thought have won their negotiated rights. Those who had not been previously employed by Ford won a lesser settlement. The struggle won support from a wide range of fellow workers and communities. For nearly two months the Visteon workers were politically active, petitioning, meeting, marching, fighting the injustice of the workplace and pushing their union to defend employment rights.



FRFI supporters joined Enfield Visteon/Ford workers at their protest camp in April 2009

Police step up attacks on democratic rights



Police attack demonstrators in Bishopsgate on 1 April

LUKE LUCAS

In FRFI 208 we reported that the police were, in their own words, 'up for it and up to it', gearing up to make their prophecy of a 'summer of rage' self-fulfilling, with dire warnings of 'violent minorities' poised to take over the streets of London. Their strategy has backfired.

On 31 March, just before the 1 April G20 protests, police raids in Plymouth, after a man was arrested for spraying anti-fascist graffiti, led to five young people being arrested under the Terrorism Act and lurid headlines about

'imitation firearms', 'makeshift explosive devices' and 'political literature' being found. Police and media warned that the five had been intending to join the G20 protests. All five were later released without charge, but the scene had been set for the violent police tactics on 1 April.

'Purposeful foreshadowing' by the police – the careful dissemination of propaganda via the media – had begun months before G20, as they warned that the demonstrations would be 'very violent', using this as justification for state expenditure of an estimated £8 million – £1,600 per protester – on

'one of the largest, most challenging and complicated public order operations it has ever devised'. The Met called in support from 30 forces across the country to create a 5,000-strong team of officers.

In the face of a largely peaceful demonstration, riot police and SPG used dogs and batons to attack the protesters, 'kettling' 4,000 people by corralling them into a police pen in front of the Bank of England for hours. FRFI comrades outside the Bank of England reported that the place was 'swamped with police' who were 'hyped up and looking for trouble'. The 'kettling' began around midday, with police linking arms and aggressively forcing protesters backwards in short, sustained bursts, with yells of 'Forward!' By-standers behind police lines were 'pushed and shoved and told to clear off'.

One RCG comrade was assaulted after protesting at an unjustified, racist arrest:

'Two police officers ordered a young man off some street furniture and, when he complied, forced him up against a wall and demanded ID. When, reasonably, he said he didn't have to prove anything, they arrested him on the racist basis of having a foreign accent – he was accused of "entering the country illegally". He'd originally been stopped, it transpired, for using a mobile phone! Two of us,

who verbally protested at his arrest and offered ourselves as witnesses, were shoved out of the way. After he'd been put in the police van, another young man who was Asian was grabbed from behind by police and roughly dragged backwards. When I called for a legal steward, I was punched in the face by a police officer, hard enough to send me flying across the road. There was a real sense of barely suppressed rage – you felt they really wanted to hurt people.'

Another comrade who was attempting to join the Climate Camp protest at Bishopsgate saw a protester mauled by a police dog. In this climate of unrestrained police violence, which resulted in many injuries to protesters and 111 arrests, the police, far from defending the right to demonstrate, were risking the lives of protesters and public alike. Ian Tomlinson, a newspaper seller, was not involved in the protests but was simply trying to walk home. In an unprovoked assault, he was kicked, batoned and threatened with dogs and eventually collapsed and died from internal bleeding. Quick as ever to cover up its crimes, the police initially claimed he had died from a heart attack and that protesters had showered police with missiles as they attempted to give him medical assistance. But they can no longer get away with their lies as every demonstrator with a digital camera or even a mobile phone has now become a potential witness to the truth. Within hours, film footage had been submitted to *The Guardian* newspaper exposing the police violence and subsequent cover-up. The police can no longer get away with their brutal tactics and attacks on democratic rights.

Less than two weeks later, on 13 April, scores of police from Notting-

hamshire, Derbyshire and Leicester swooped in a 2am police raid on a community centre where environmental activists were meeting to plan a protest at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station. 114 protesters were arrested for 'conspiracy', handcuffed and lined up against a wall. Many of their homes were raided, ostensibly to protect the power station from what the police described as 'a serious threat'.

What is clear is that, as capitalism sinks deeper into crisis, the state is becoming more and more frightened of popular revolt. Every environmental protester, every 'foreigner', anyone who organises for justice and against the interests of the ruling class is automatically designated a violent criminal, a threat to the state or 'a terrorist'.

The police operations we have witnessed over the last two months are nothing new, but they are becoming more frequent. It is becoming increasingly clear for all to see that the police are not here to protect the people. They are here to follow the orders of an imperialist state; to attack anyone who speaks out politically and to repress the working class. Police are stepping up their efforts to repress and even to prevent political actions from taking place. However, while they 'kettle' protesters, conspire to stop demonstrations and arrest people for expressing anti-capitalist views, they are blatantly less and less averse to allowing fascist groups to organise on our streets and in our communities. Their actions must be challenged. We must recognise that Labour's army of police are our enemies who are here to defend the interests of the rich. We must defend our democratic right to protest and continue to build the fight-back against this imperialist state.

**Whose streets? Our streets!
Defend democratic rights!**

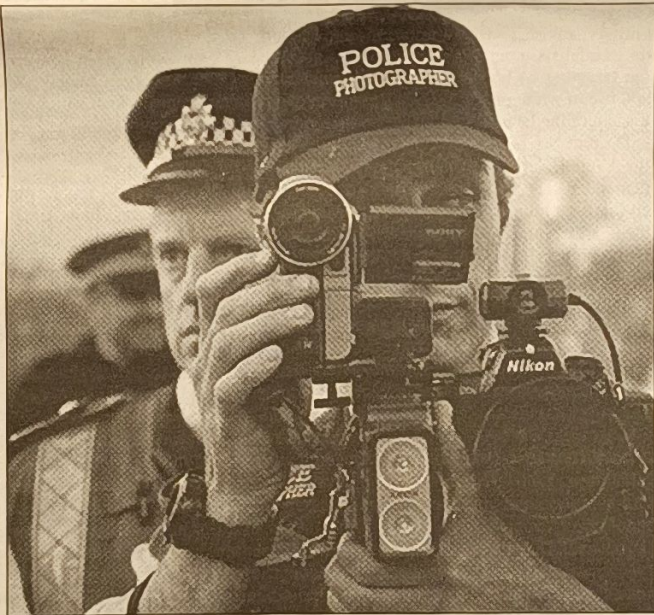
Police threaten press freedom

JON GREEN

Members of the broadcasting union BECTU and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) are increasingly reporting a serious threat to press freedom. Over the past year, there has been an emergence of police using their powers of stop-and-search to harass members of the press covering demonstrations and, equally worryingly, incidents of police filming reporters and TV crews carrying out their lawful occupation.

Aggressive police behaviour was observed at the Kingsnorth climate camp in summer 2008 where activists had gathered to protest against the expansion of the power station. There was a great deal of media interest. Alarmingly, media workers were subjected to stop-and-search going into and leaving the protest. Ian Axton, presenter for the ITV regional news programme *Meridian Tonight*, and his film crew were targeted by police. 'It was intimidating and totally unnecessary', Axton said. 'I had my press card which they examined, but it made no difference'. The search lasted 20 minutes and the police then turned on his film crew. 'This was the first time in 38 years that I have been searched', Axton said. The news-gatherers were handed pink slips stating that they were searched on 'suspicion of being equipped to cause criminal damage'. The search took place under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, which requires police to give a reason for the search. They were all also photographed.

Mark Vallee, a freelance photographer at the climate camp, was also searched for the first time in his career. He wonders if police tactics were aimed at delaying journalists so they would miss their deadlines. Jason Parkinson, an experienced video journal-



Watching the media: a police FIT team

ist with 15 years in the industry, added: 'We drove a few miles to McDonald's and were filming our material on their WiFi and noticed five police officers outside the window with notebooks and video cameras filming us'!

All the media workers involved were carrying official press cards approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers. If these cards are routinely ignored by the police, what is the point of issuing them?

Aggressive police tactics and officers without shoulder numbers are nothing new to veteran activists from the miners' strike, Wapping and the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy of the 1980s, but it now seems the media are on the receiving

end. The police are simply using the powers given to them by the Labour government: Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 allows a search to take place without any requirement for reasonable suspicion. Activists report that these powers are regularly abused. Under Section 44, the rise in the number of black and Asian Londoners stopped and searched since July 2005 is 354 per cent.

Unfortunately for the police, in the age of digital cameras and mobile phones, everyone is a potential news-gatherer, so the chances of them getting away with it are diminished, as the exposure of police involvement in the death of Ian Tomlinson at this year's G20 protests showed.

MI5: licensed to torture

CAT WIENER

On 27 May, *The Guardian* newspaper revealed that British citizen Jamil Rahman, a former British civil servant, is to begin legal action against Home Secretary Jacqui Smith after being tortured by Bangladeshi intelligence officers with the blatant collusion of MI5.

Rahman was stripped and beaten and told his wife would be raped and murdered and her body burned. Under torture, he confessed to masterminding the bombings in London in July 2005. He was visited by two 'well-spoken Englishmen', 'Liam' and 'Andrew', who said they were from MI5, and told them he had been tortured and made a false confession, at which point Andrew said 'They haven't done a very good job on you'. The two men left the room saying they needed a break, and the beatings and threats resumed. The two Englishmen returned, with Andrew saying 'That's good, you've learned your lesson'. During his interrogation, Rahman alleges, the MI5 officers would say 'We're not torturing you, are we?' When he agreed, he was told to say it again, louder and believes this exchange was being recorded. After his release, Rahman's passport was held for two years and he was told he was not to speak to the media or contact the UK High Commission in Bangladesh. When he finally managed to return to Britain, he was not questioned by police or charged with any crime.

This is but the latest in a stream of allegations of the active collusion of British security forces in torture and ill-treatment, which the government is still trying to cover up (see FRFI 208). Foreign Secretary David Miliband has fought tooth and nail to prevent the publication of what British Law Lords

have described as 'powerful evidence' of MI5 collaboration with the CIA in the torture of British resident Binyam Mohamed. On 20 May, Clive Stafford Smith of Reprieve was prevented from giving detailed evidence to the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee about Binyam Mohamed and the US use of British territory Diego Garcia to secretly render terror suspects, by Labour chair Mike Gapes, who claimed the case was *sub judice*. But the allegations and evidence continue to grow with at least seven other former detainees, mainly held in Pakistan, who have revealed how they were questioned by MI5, shortly before or after being tortured by local intelligence officers. In an unprecedented move, the Attorney General has asked the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to investigate MI5.

But that is not enough. In March 2009, a United Nations report condemned Britain for 'implicitly condoning torture and ill-treatment'. The British Criminal Justice Act of 1988 makes it a specific offence, punishable by life imprisonment, for a British official to instigate or consent to the inflicting of 'severe pain or suffering' on any person, anywhere in the world, or even acquiesce to such conduct. It is clear that since 2001 MI5 has been following an official interrogation policy, sanctioned at the highest level by the security and intelligence services and figures in government, to encourage information to be extracted on behalf of British intelligence by torture. The Labour government of Tony Blair that formulated the policy and the current Labour administration that is trying to cover it up are as guilty of torture as if they had administered the threats, beatings and mutilations with their own bare hands. These war criminals must be brought to justice.

BARBAROUS ASSAULT ON THE TAMILS

The last stronghold of the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was overrun by Sri Lankan government forces on 18 May. The Sri Lankan state fought a war of extermination. The scale of the slaughter inflicted is intended to confirm the completeness of victory for Sinhalese chauvinism and total defeat of Tamil national liberation. *The Times* (29 May 2009), citing UN sources, reported over 20,000 Tamil civilians killed, 45% of them children, in the last three weeks of fighting. Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa said no civilians were killed. Three doctors who worked in the war zone are under arrest, charged with fabricating casualty figures. 300,000 refugees are held in 42 camps surrounded by razor-wire and armed guards. This murderous operation copied the attacks in Jenin, 2002, Fallujah, 2004 and Gaza, 2008-09. The same methods were deployed.

The Sri Lankan army used heavy artillery, cluster bombs and multi-barrel rocket launchers and there is evidence of the UN-prohibited, flesh burning, white phosphorus. The Sri Lankan government said the LTTE used the phosphorus on its own people. It also made claims about human shields, despite evidence that civilians were used to shield the Sri Lankan army advancing on the 'no fire zone'. Hospitals and clinics were bombed and shelled by Sri Lankan forces. A Red Cross representative said they witnessed 'an unimaginable human catastrophe'. Rajapaksa called it 'a humanitarian operation' and 'the world's largest hostage rescue mission'. British Labour government foreign secretary David Miliband said Sri Lankan military advances had been 'striking', but the 'scale of civilian casualties is very large indeed, extremely distressing to the international community'. He was 'gravely concerned' by the conflict. The word 'concerned' is a monument to British ruling class collusion.

The Sri Lankan government rejected ceasefire calls and ignored the 17 May LTTE decision to 'silence our guns' to stop the killing of Tamils. At the end, two civilian LTTE leaders arranged through the Red Cross to surrender to the Sri Lankan forces. Following instructions given by the government both were shot dead by Sri Lankan soldiers. Rajapaksa declared 20 May a public holiday. He admitted that since July 2006 6,261 members of the Sri Lankan security forces were killed and 29,551 were injured. 80,000 to 100,000 people have been killed in the war since 1983.

Divide and rule

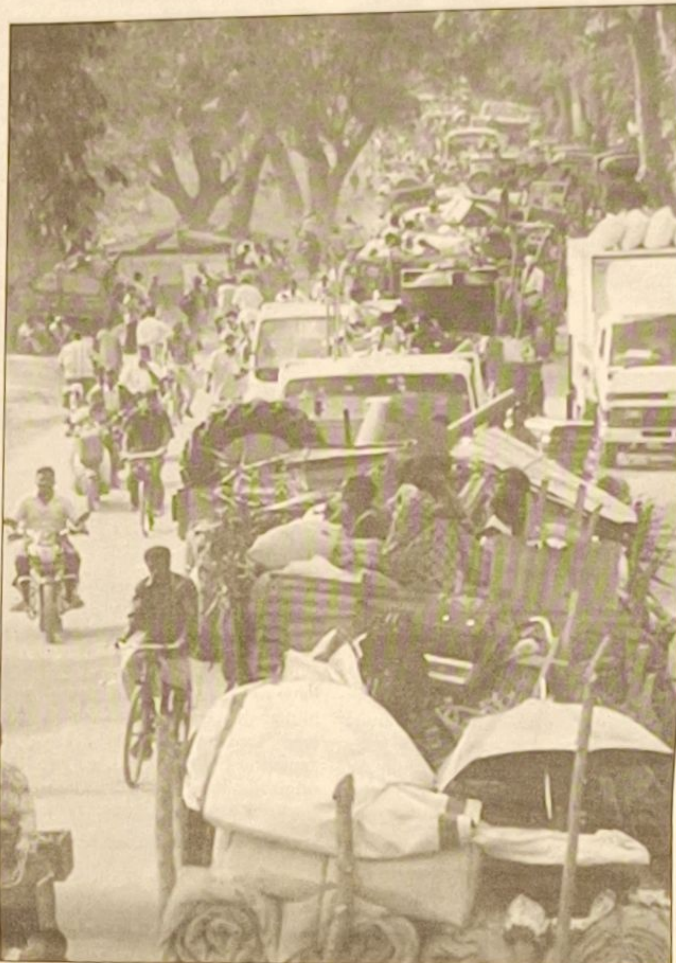
Tamils constitute 25% of the island's 21 million people. Historically, Ceylon was made up of two dominant communities: the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil, living in different regions and governed separately. In 1796 Britain wrested control over the island from the Dutch and joined the regions for administrative purposes, allowing the whole of Ceylon to be exploited for tea, coffee and rubber. Tamils were imported from southern India to work in slave-like conditions on plantations. Tamils indigenous to the island were educated by missionaries and served in the colonial administration, fuelling Sinhalese resentment. Britain granted independence in 1948 but kept strategic military bases and crippling trade agreements in place. Tamil delegations to the London Colonial Office requesting protective measures were brushed

aside by the Labour government, fearing harming relations with Sinhalese leaders. Political power was handed to the Sinhalese government who declared one million plantation Tamils non-citizens, removing their right to vote. Tamil language and culture were attacked, a new constitution was imposed without Tamil participation and Tamils were forced out of jobs in the civil service, education, police, army, railways and so on. They resisted, demanding self-determination, through peaceful means including school marches, pickets of parliament and workplace strikes. Non-violent protest was met with state organised violence and pogroms killing thousands of Tamils.

In 1976 elected Tamil leaders declared an independent Tamil state in the north east of Sri Lanka. To create and protect this state the LTTE took up arms, backed by the Tamil population, and have fought for national liberation since. The LTTE were not simply a military organisation. They implemented a judicial system, an alternative to racist Sri Lankan courts; they established an education and health sector, built colleges and hospitals; created the Northeast Secretariat on Human Rights functioning as a human rights commission for Tamils; ran the Bank of Tamil Eelam and, in 2004, set up the Planning and Development Secretariat to plan rehabilitation of areas hit by the tsunami. By 2001 70% of the Tamil homeland in the north east was part of Tamil Eelam and a ceasefire was agreed in 2002, mediated by Norway. Within three years the Sri Lankan government broke these agreements and in 2005 President Rajapaksa was elected on promises of 'No recognition' of the Tamil homeland or right to self-rule and 'No to international mediation'. Government paramilitaries and soldiers killed 47 aid workers, assassinated five Tamil MPs, murdered journalists, abducted hundreds of Tamils and broke the ceasefire, bombing a children's home, killing 67 pupils and seven teachers. A government minister justified the bombing saying 'there is nothing wrong in killing future child soldiers'. British arms exports to Sri Lanka rose 60% in 2005.

Strategic significance

Sri Lanka is located at the junction of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal and is consequently the object of major power struggles. Since 2007 the British Labour government has licensed sales of machine guns, small arms, communications equipment and armoured vehicles to Sri Lanka. Israel has provided Blue Horizon drones and



Thousands of Tamil refugees fleeing the Sri Lankan army attacks

military advisers. The complete ban on journalists entering the war zone, the targeting of hospitals and clinics and use of white phosphorus are reminiscent of the Israeli attack on Gaza.

Despite Sri Lankan state terrorism the United Nations Security Council demanded that the LTTE stop using civilians as human shields, lay down their arms, renounce terrorism and join political talks. Within the Security Council, Russia and China considered the war to be an 'internal matter'. The Security Council did not call on the government to stop fighting, only to stop using heavy weapons – a call that was ignored.

China was the biggest aid provider to Sri Lanka in 2008 and since the 1990s has been the biggest arms supplier. In terms of trade routes, Sri Lanka is potentially a key ally. 'We can no longer accept the Indian Ocean as an ocean of only the Indians,' remarked the head of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1993. Oil is transported from the Persian Gulf and raw materials from Africa across the Indian Ocean south of Sri Lanka and through the Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea. In 2006 the Malacca trade route recorded 35% of all seaborne oil flow. The route supplies 85% of China's imported oil. China deployed a naval fleet to the Strait in December 2008. It is building ports along the Indian Ocean coastline: at Gwadar in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh and Hambantota in the south of Sri Lanka. The US and India have designs on Trincomalee, a deep-water port in the Tamil region.

These power struggles are dictating the fate of Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government is using its strategic significance to play rival powers off against each other, preventing sanctions and using it as a permit to buy all manner of arms, UN-prohibited

or not. Governments go through the motions of expressing 'deep concern' but the UN Security Council still agrees to a \$1.9 billion loan which will further aid the genocide.

The fight will continue

In Sri Lanka the Tamils, vastly outnumbered, truly fought like tigers. Across western Europe they defied police repression and the European Union's proscription of the LTTE as 'terrorist' to take to the streets in protest at the extermination. These protests have been constant in London since 7 April and have visited Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leicester and other cities. Undaunted by proscriptions of the Terrorism Act or the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act there is a permanent Tamil presence outside the Houses of Parliament. The Metropolitan Police Territorial Support Group has cordoned and baton-charged the protest, attacked photographers and journalists and separated children from their families in attempts to shut down the protest.

300,000 Tamils are held in concentration camps in Sri Lanka. There are reports of murders, abductions, hunger and disease. The media are completely barred. Sinhalese chauvinists will be tempted to wreak vengeance on their captives. Sri Lanka exports textiles, clothes, tea, diamonds, jewellery and petrol worth over £500 million a year to Britain. Britain is Europe's largest investor in Sri Lanka. Socialists in Britain must stand in solidarity with the Tamils, demand an end to all arms sales to the Sri Lankan state and demand sanctions on trade until the right of the Tamils to self-determination is secured. All repression of Tamils in Britain and Europe must be opposed.

Sam McGill and Trevor Rayne

Ireland news

Sectarian murder in Coleraine

On 25 May, Kevin McDaid, a 49-year-old father of four, was murdered yards from his home in Coleraine by a loyalist mob simply for being a Catholic. Around 70 loyalists were involved. The attack, following Glasgow Rangers taking the Scottish league title, took place in full view of a Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) car. Kevin's wife was also badly beaten and two other young women attacked; one who is pregnant was kicked in the stomach whilst the other suffered a broken jaw. A 46-year-old man, Damien Fleming, is fighting for survival in hospital as FRFI goes to press, having been assaulted by the same loyalist murder gang. Ryan McDaid, one of the dead man's sons, stated: 'The police sat and watched as Dad died, they never moved, there were four police officers in a car and they sat and watched from Pates Lane. They never moved, never came, never helped... We were totally outnumbered. There was nothing we could do, they were local UDA members.' The police have denied this. Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, the Assembly's deputy First Minister, called on nationalists to have faith in the PSNI and to cooperate with their investigation. Nationalist anger on the ground threatens to boil over; they do not share Sinn Féin's illusions in the PSNI. As the loyalist marching season approaches nationalists are bracing themselves for further sectarian attacks.

Free Colin Duffy!

Since the March Republican attacks on British Army targets at Massereene and Craigavon, scores of nationalists have been held for questioning under Labour's anti-terror legislation. Most have been released without charge. One, Colin Duffy, was detained on 15 March in connection with the Massereene attack where two British soldiers were killed. Ten days later, the Belfast High Court ruled that his arrest and continued detention were unlawful. He was subsequently released but then immediately rearrested and later charged with murder. His family and friends have organised a campaign calling for his release. Speaking at a public meeting in Lurgan on 5 May, Colin's mother Cera Duffy reminded everyone that her son's arrest was not unique and that others were being unjustly imprisoned by the British state:

'One has only to look at the recent high-profile cases involving members of the Islamic community in Britain in the last month. Like Colin, 12 students were arrested in a blaze of publicity. Like Colin, they were tried and convicted in the media. All 12 were later released. Yet those cases were proven to have no evidential basis whatsoever, but were purely politically motivated arrests. That has proven to be the case on previous occasions when Colin was arrested and imprisoned in 1993 and 1997. We firmly believe that the same will again be proven to be the case in relation to his present imprisonment.'

Defend Suzanne Breen!

Respected journalist Suzanne Breen, the *Sunday Tribune's* northern editor, has been threatened with sanctions under the Terrorism Act 2000 if she does not hand over to the PSNI notes, papers, photos and other material relating to an interview with a Real IRA army council representative. In a private hearing on 12 May, a Belfast judge issued an order for Breen to hand over her source material relating to Republican militants. She is refusing to do so and faces a heavy fine or imprisonment for her resilience under such pressure. She is being supported by the National Union of Journalists, who have set up an online petition (<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/protectsources/>).

Paul Mallon

War in Afghanistan and Pakistan escalates

When Britain sent its first major contingent of 4,000 troops to Helmand, Afghanistan, in 2006 the then Labour Defence Secretary John Reid said he hoped 'not a shot would be fired in anger'. There are now more than 8,000 British troops in the province. They have fired over six million bullets. US, British and other NATO forces are escalating the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Top British military commanders want to send up to 4,000 more British troops. Defence Secretary John Hutton and Prime Minister Gordon Brown are believed to agree, but the Treasury is resisting the demand.



An Iraqi student protests against the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in October 2008

The US has begun to send 17,000 additional troops, together with 4,000 training personnel, to what President Obama calls 'the good war'. In the first week of May alone 150 civilians were killed in Farah province by US special forces. Previous top US commander in Afghanistan, Lt-General David McKiernan, requested an extra 10,000 troops by early 2010. The additional troops would bring the combined US/NATO force in Afghanistan to around 110,000. The imperialists plan to double the size of the Afghan army to 134,000 and, by 2011, to increase it to 230,000. Such numbers emphasise the importance of the region for US imperialism's strategy of global domination.

The Taliban have extended their control of Afghanistan from 54% to 72% of the country since the imperialists' decision in 2006 to increase occupying forces. Only one of four main roads out of Kabul is safe. The key imperialist supply route to the south is under constant threat. The Afghan and Pakistan Taliban have reportedly signed a pact to fight occupation forces inside Afghanistan and to stop attacks on 'fellow Muslims in the tribal areas and elsewhere in Pakistan' which are 'harming the war against US and NATO forces'. However, on 27 May the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for bombings in Lahore that killed at least 24 people, saying they were in retaliation for army operations in the Swat Valley.

The US is expanding major operations beyond Afghanistan into Pakistan. US Under Secretary of Defence Michelle Flannery said, 'Afghanistan and Pakistan are two countries that comprise a single theatre for our diplomacy. The future of the two countries is inextricably linked.'

War in Pakistan

In March, President Obama said the US aimed to destroy Taliban and Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He promised that if the Pakistan government forces played their part the US would provide \$1.5 billion aid a year for the next five years. If not, Obama threatened unilateral action in Pakistan. A few days later US Lt-Colonel Mark Wright offered joint military operations with Pakistan Frontier Corps in the northwest tribal areas. In fact, the US has been attacking this area for some time. Special forces have made secret incursions and, since August 2008, the US has launched over 60 unmanned drone attacks, some from inside Pakistan. They claim these missile attacks were aimed at Taliban and Al Qaeda bases, but no more than ten have hit their intended target and over 700 Pakistani civilians have been

killed as a consequence. Obama plans to extend these attacks into Baluchistan. The Pakistani army has been fighting in the region for several months with over 1,500 soldiers killed. The war has cost Pakistan over \$35 billion.

Mass depopulation

US air strikes on the border areas and the failure of the Pakistani ruling class to tackle its appalling poverty mean there is little support for the military actions. 89% of the Pakistani population oppose the war. A Pakistan government attempt to broker a truce by agreeing to introduce Sharia law in the Swat Valley and adjoining districts came to nothing when the Taliban advanced to within 60 miles of Islamabad, seizing the town of Buner in April. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accused Pakistan's President Zardari of 'basically abdicating to the Taliban and extremists'. The US has long known that elements in the Pakistan army and intelligence service support the Taliban and undermine efforts to defeat them. After Pakistani paramilitaries had been routed by the Taliban, the Pakistan army mounted a counter-attack from 8 May in the Swat Valley, Lower Dir and Buner. 18,000 Pakistan army troops backed by aerial support and heavy artillery attacked. The situation in Mingora, population 250,000, was likened to Fallujah in November 2004: 10,000 people were reported left in the city. The UN has registered 1.45 million people as refugees as they flee the onslaught. This is the biggest civilian displacement on the sub-continent since the 1947 partition.



Chota Lahore relief camp housing thousands of people, 29 May 2009

In Britain, opposition to the escalating war in Afghanistan and Pakistan is feeble. Barbarism is becoming systemic; having been made acceptable, the atrocities increase.

Iraq: British retreat, US bunkers down

As British troops prepared to withdraw from Iraq at the end of April amid the usual flag-waving jingoism, Hassan Juma'a of the Oil Workers' Federation delivered the verdict of the Iraqi people: 'My final message to the British warmonger is "good riddance". The curse of your Iraqi victims will always be with you, for you killed innocent people and tortured captives. Go to the dustbin of history, and never forget heroic Basra and the great struggle of the Iraqi people.' 400 British troops will remain to train Iraqi army and naval officers but the occupation of Basra has been taken over by US forces. Hassan Juma'a pointed out, 'The US will treat its junior partner with contempt - the master will no doubt seek to establish sole control of Iraq and its resources.'

Rising violence

Under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the Iraqi government, US combat forces are supposed to withdraw from Iraqi cities by 30 June this year and leave the country by August 2010. However, rising violence and sectarian tensions, deliberately fuelled by the occupiers, have demonstrated that President Obama's plans to withdraw US troops do not amount to the end of the war on Iraq.

The US claimed that the reduction in violence last year resulted from its military 'surge'. The main factors, however, were the decision of Sunni resistance fighters to take pay and protection from the imperialists as part of the Awakening Councils, Al Sahwa,

pressed by house to house searches and arbitrary arrests, by brutal attacks on the poor Shia districts of Baghdad and by continuing repression of the trade unions. Sectarianism, generated by the occupation, resulted in the division of the country largely along religious and ethnic lines, reinforced in Baghdad by a maze of concrete walls and military checkpoints. The Iraqi bourgeoisie, Shia, Sunni and Kurdish, looked forward to reaping the profits of this improved security, each within its own region. It gave the Iraqi government, dominated by the parties of the elite and merchant classes, strength to push its interests in the SOFA negotiations.

Iraqi government threatens Sunnis and Kurds

This state of affairs is breaking up because the Shia parties, forming the majority of the government, want to retain control of resources against demands of the Sunnis and Kurds.

The Iraqi government has been arresting leaders of Al Sahwa since spring 2008. Many of them are former members of the Baathist Party and regarded by the Shia as a threat to their dominance. They want to finish Al Sahwa before the US troops draw down. When local Al Sahwa leader Adil Al Mashadani was arrested in Fadhil on 29 March, an uprising by local Sunnis was put down with help from US forces. The understanding when Al Sahwa was created was that members would receive work in the Iraqi security and state services as part of a wider integration of Sunnis into the government, but by the end of March only 5,000 had been given jobs. There are an estimated 100,000 members throughout Iraq. Most have not been paid for several months.

In the oil-rich north, the Kurdish regional government has threatened autonomous action. Clashes followed gains made by Sunni parties in recent provincial elections. Iraqi government troops were sent to the region and the Kurds threatened civil war. A promised referendum on the status of Kirkuk has been cancelled by the Iraqi government. At present there is an uneasy stand-off and the situation is exacerbated by the threat of a Turkish invasion should the Kurds declare an autonomous state.

SOFA loopholes allow US to stay

In the SOFA negotiations the US hoped for a stronger and more permanent military occupation but they were in no position, politically, to ignore the demands of an increasingly confident Iraqi government backed by the

Iranians. They knew that while stability remained fragile, the Iraqi ruling class would require their protection. The result was an agreement with so many loopholes that the US could be confident of retaining strategic military bases in Iraq and consequently privileged access to its oil.

Operations against Al Sahwa have been defined as counter-terrorism, as have those against Turkish/ Kurdish PKK guerrillas operating in the north, thus triggering one of the conditions that permit US combat operations to continue beyond the date set by SOFA. Some combat forces have simply been renamed as 'advisory and assistance brigades'. The US commander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, made it clear that US troops are prepared to 'maintain a presence' in Iraqi cities after the deadline if asked to do so. Sure enough, according to the *New York Times*, negotiations are already under way to create exceptions to the 30 June deadline. They include redefining the term 'city'.

The US cannot afford to have many troops tied down in Iraq; it needs to reinforce those in Afghanistan. But it is in the interests of the US to be seen as the only force capable of preventing chaos, especially at a time when the Iraqi people are due to vote in a referendum on SOFA, defeat in which would mean all US troops leaving by next year. By keeping Iraqi security forces sufficiently weak the US hopes to maintain its military domination of the country. The US Government Accountability Office reported that, although the number of Iraqi army and police forces had almost doubled between January 2007 and October 2008, the proportion capable of undertaking independent operations remained about 10%.

Iraqi people continue to suffer

The suffering of the Iraqi people continues. The UN reports that only 40% of children have access to safe water and that water treatment plants are operating at just 17% capacity. There were 10,000 cases of cholera last year. The number of health professionals has halved since 2003. Families receive on average just three hours' electricity per day. Two million Iraqi refugees live abroad. Despite their dreadful circumstances they are too fearful to return. The Iraqi government has withdrawn the meagre offer of free transport and \$600 for those wishing to return. According to the International Organisation for Migration at least a further 1.6 million Iraqis have been internally displaced. They suffer overcrowded housing, food shortages, unsafe water, no electricity and lack of health and education services. Among them unemployment averages 66%, but rises to almost 100% in some areas.

So far the US government has offered \$9.5 billion for Iraqi reconstruction. It provided over \$700 billion to bail out Wall Street. The Iraqi government has reduced its modest social and infrastructure budget due to falling oil revenues. Bidding by the oil multinationals, including BP and Shell, for Iraqi oil is expected to commence at the end of June despite the government still not passing a law allowing this plunder. Iraq has known reserves of 115 billion barrels of oil, exceeded only by those of Saudi Arabia and Iran. The *Financial Times* (7 May 2009) explains that the Iraqi government has become desperate to get the contracts signed as oil prices have fallen and the budget has consequently suffered: 'For the companies, the drop in the oil price may have drastically reduced available cash but not enough to force them to forgo the biggest investment opportunity since the fall of communism.'

Jim Craven, Trevor Rayne and Andrew Alexander

Brigada de la 50 aniversario de la Revolucion Cubana!

On 23 April, 18 Rock around the Blockade activists left London on a solidarity brigade to Cuba – 'Brigada del 50 aniversario de la Revolucion', organised with the Cuban Union of Young Communists (UJC). The first week was spent in Pinar del Rio, a province devastated by three hurricanes last year; the second week was in Havana. We found an island braced and ready to confront the current global crisis. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the Cuban Revolution has realised the hopes James Connolly once held for an Irish republic, its name 'a rallying point for the disaffected, a haven for the oppressed, a point of departure for the socialist, enthusiastic in the cause of human freedom.'

We left Britain on the day that British chancellor Alastair Darling announced a Budget that, in the words of *The Guardian* newspaper, promised 'a brutal freeze on public spending' more severe than that of the Thatcher years. By the time we returned, two weeks later, the expenses scandal had exploded, exposing once again the stinking heap of corruption which is British politics. Throughout the world, the ruling classes are scrambling to resolve the deep economic crisis at the expense of the working class. What a contrast we saw in Cuba, which is solving problems in the interest of all its people, through socialist planning and socialist democracy.

Confronting the crisis

Ten years to the day before the collapse of Lehman Brothers investment bank in September 2008, Fidel Castro warned of the 'avoidable and deep economic crisis' threatening a world 'which has become an enormous casino'. Cuba will not remain immune: the collapse in the price of its main export, nickel, the reduction in tourism from imperialist countries now in recession and restrictions on access to international credit will have a very real effect. On 26 May, Cuban economic commentator Ariel Terrero predicted that Cuba's foreign income could be reduced by \$1bn, while growth figures for 2009 have been revised downwards from 6% to slightly over 2%, and even this may prove over-optimistic. On top of this, last year three hurricanes caused \$10bn worth of damage and the impact of the US blockade continues. In Havana our bus passed huge billboards reading: '8 hours of the US blockade = repairs to 140 schools'; '3 days of the US blockade = 100 tonnes of medicine'.

Nonetheless, unlike in Britain, no-one in Cuba is being thrown out onto the streets while a bank repossesses their home and unemployment remains under 2%. It became clear to us that it is Cuba's planned economy, with its ability to deploy resources rationally, based on the interests of a creative, conscious people, that will enable it to weather the economic storm.

The challenge in agriculture

Bolstering agricultural production in Cuba is seen as essential to overcoming the crisis, in order to replace imports and raise exports. In 2008, the country spent almost \$2.5bn on food purchases from abroad, \$907m more than in 2007.

One of the principal challenges is the shortage of labour power. The Cuban masses, through good quality health care and education, have high life expectancy and low birth rates; these great revolutionary achievements, however, exacerbate labour shortages. The rise in living standards for the Cuban masses across the board has raised other problems too. Orlando Borrego, who participated in the Revolution and was deputy to Che Guevara from 1959, explained: 'The workers in the fields became doctors, artists, lawyers. So in certain agricultural sectors we do not have qualified workers – we thought it would never happen in a socialist country, but it has. And the Revolution has recognised this and can plan: for the past four or five years there has been a reorientation in the universities towards solving this problem.'

Brigadistas witnessed first-hand these attempts. Founded in 1962 by Commandante Fidel, the Centro Politecnico Villena Revolucion is one of the biggest schools of its type in the world, specialising in agronomy and

veterinary science and is a 'national reference' school for the country. The basis of the entire school is the linking of theory and practice, with school units organised around farms where students work and implement practically what they learn in the classroom.

Rafael Mendez, Villena Revolucion's vice-principal, spoke of the school as 'a workshop to form the youth – the people of the future.' Stopping in front of a large field planted with beetroot, 16-year-old student representative Anaïs described it as her 'practical classroom'. She explained that the school was entirely self-sufficient in food, apart from rice, while also producing 300,000 litres of milk and 40 tonnes of meat for the city every year. 'There are not enough workers to toil the land, so students voluntarily fill the breach. This is not exploitation – it is part of our formation as citizens.' In their fourth year, students begin work in an enterprise where they are guaranteed a job after graduation. Students emerge imbued with both an academic education and a conscious grasp of the processes of social production and commitment to socialism.

All levels of Cuban society are involved in this process. In the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), Comrade Marsan explained that 'Members of the Central Committee do voluntary labour on the farms, once a month; they are very tough conditions to work in. With the heat in the fields at 10am it is hard work. By 2pm I cannot wait to get on the bus and end my shift!' In Pinar del Rio, brigadistas visited a massive state farm. Heavily damaged by hurricanes the previous year, labour brigades had been drafted in from around Cuba to help repair crop damage, and the farm had also received EU relief aid. Many of these large-scale socialist state



Brigadistas volunteering at an organic farm in Pinar Del Rio

farms were broken up after the Soviet Union collapsed. However, for the brigadistas it felt like the paradigm of socialist agriculture. The workers, trade unionists and Communist Party members were the most committed and politically conscious we met. They totally identified social production with ownership of the Revolution. They proudly displayed certificates received from the leadership, motivated by moral as much as material incentives.

The real success story of Cuban agriculture in recent years, however, has been in much smaller scale production – the urban organic farming movement. In the past 12 years, urban farming has created 350,000 productive new jobs. Production of vegetables and fresh herbs jumped a thousandfold from 1994 to 2005: from 4,000 tons to 4.2 million tons.

Brigadistas worked alongside Cubans on several *organoponicos*. The units are linked with science centres and universities and the workers helped to implement new technology such as semi-protected cultivation and wormeries. In contrast to the state farm, the profits of these co-operatives directly determine incentive payments, and most are profitable, selling some product at fixed state prices to schools and hospitals while some is sold in private markets at higher prices. Since last summer the government has parcelled out idle land in usufruct, a rent-free short term loan, to 60,000 families, which will significantly increase agricultural production.

Che Guevara recognised that this form of production can introduce contradictions into socialism, as workers identify more with their unit's interests than with national production. However, comrade Marsan made the key point:

'Our objective is to increase food. There is not a change in policy. It is just that in this economic situation it is necessary to have different farms. We sometimes have to take one step back before we can take two steps forward. The biggest areas of wealth are in the state farms. There is no process of privatisation.'

The Special Period, state planning and socialism

Through our meetings and discussions, we came to realise that national independence, the Revolution

and the planned socialist economy provide the framework within which all policies and processes are debated. When the entire Soviet camp disappeared in 1991, US imperialism appeared triumphant, the 'end of history' was declared and living standards plummeted, the Cuban people fought to defend their achievements. Yani Cruz, a long-standing Cuban friend of RATB, declared passionately: 'You cannot imagine the hardships. It truly was a terrible time for our people. But we fought to defend socialism; it is socialism through which we achieved all the gains of our revolution. The choice was between defending socialism and returning to capitalism. We chose socialism. There is no third way.'

Ephraim Ecchevaria, an economist at a Marxist research institute in Pinar del Rio, recalled speaking at an international meeting where an Italian communist stood up and accused the Cubans of betraying the principles of socialism by introducing the economic measures they had. 'He didn't understand what was necessary: above all else, we had to save the Revolution.'

Throughout the Special Period, not a single school, not a single maternity ward, hospital or sports facility was closed down; quite the opposite. 'At all times,' according to Ephraim, 'the economy was to be subordinated to social objectives'. Cuban research economist at Havana University, Elda Molina, wrote about the strategy of the revolutionary leadership in this period. 'A significant element of the Cuban economic reform was that state property prevailed in most key sectors. The main goals of the strategy were: to preserve the country's independence; to keep and improve socialism; and to create the economic and social basis to relaunch a development programme once the crisis was over.'

Proletarian democracy

On 29 April, we met with a constitutional law teacher at a school in Pinar del Rio. 'Bourgeois liberal parties in the west are in crisis, people don't trust them,' he explained – nine days before the *Daily Telegraph* began publishing details of British MPs' expense accounts. What he understood clearly was the difference between bourgeois and proletarian



RATB Brigade taking part in the May day celebrations in Havana



Cuban university students oppose the US Interests Section in Havana. The UJC put the US government 'on trial' for acts of terrorism

democracy. 'In Britain, there is the supremacy of the political class. In Cuba the people do not surrender their power.' When brigadistas returned to Britain, popular fury at the 'political class' was spilling over. But the blatant corruption and greed of these politicians is an expression, not the cause, of the bankruptcy and lack of accountability of bourgeois democracy itself.

As brigadistas saw in practice, the Cuban Revolution has developed a real socialist democracy throughout all levels of society, where politics is not confined to the voting booth. The law teacher explained: 'Where does accountability come from? The answer is in the direct mass participation of people, mass organisations and the electoral process, not the party or state.' All representatives of the state in Cuba are nominated by the people, firstly in the *barrios*, and voted on through universal, secret ballot. The institutions through which this process is conducted are the Assemblies of People Power, existing at local, provincial and national level. Delegates of these people's assemblies must be in constant communication with people, there must be a constant rendering of accounts and the assemblies must hold referendums and consultations with the people. If people are not happy with the work of their elected delegates, they can be recalled by constitutional law. 'So the Cuban constitution guarantees the sovereignty of the people, of popular power. The people don't delegate responsibility to an elected member; they don't give away their power.'

We witnessed the power of the Cuban people on International Workers' Day, 1 May, in Havana, where over half a million people streamed by under the banner 'United, productive and efficient!', carrying Cuban flags and homemade placards declaring 'Socialism or death!' A special moment of international solidarity was when a Palestinian delegation marched by, taking up the brigadistas' chants of 'Viva Palestina!', raising the V sign for victory.

Communities at the base

At the base of these massive mobilisations is the local community. In Havana City, comrades spent a day working with the 'Principe Neighbourhood Development Workshop' (money had been raised for this project by RATB in Britain). Dating back to community projects established in 1992 to enhance social integration and extended across the city, the mission of the Principe Workshop is to engage the community in 'transforming the physical, social and spiritual reality of the neighbourhood'. Studies of problems in the community are carried out by neighbours, work centre representatives and political organisations such as the PCC, UJC, Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) and the Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDR). Plans are formulated through popular consultation. 100 community leaders run 20 craft workshops which offer training in dance, theatre, painting, tailoring and doll-making; an acclaimed popular Cuban music project with professional musicians works with local people of all ages, organising shows which have



Above: Participants in the 'Transformation Workshop' in Havana discussing their understanding of socialism and capitalism with the brigadistas
Top right: Brigadistas visiting the Federation of Cuban Women in Pinar Del Rio

been taken to the streets, theatres and workplaces of Havana; there are also classes in local cultural history. RATB brigadistas saw all of this in action and helped in clearing out an old garage which will be the new base for the workshop. We asked some of the local members what they thought the differences were between Cuba and Britain. One man answered:

'Socialism gives opportunity to everyone independently of the economic resources you have, whereas in Britain only people with more money have the opportunities... Imagine what Cuba could achieve if it had the resources of Britain! And if Britain had the politics of Cuba, imagine what problems it could solve!'

Among the brigade's most inspiring activities was our visit to a CDR in Pinar del Rio. We arrived in the evening to join the local people who were already dancing in the streets at a street party organised by the CDR. A foundation stone of the Revolution, the CDRs are grassroots institutions through which people organise their own communities, collectively dealing with domestic problems, local issues and neighbourhood security; Cuba's is a participative socialism, built for and by its people and the CDRs are at the heart of this. That evening, one CDR member spoke movingly of an occasion, 30 years ago, when his CDR had responded, after a terrible earthquake devastated Peru, by mobilising volunteers who donated 70,000 pints of blood to sup-

port medical care in stricken areas.

Conclusion

RATB brigadistas did not go to Cuba as neutral observers but as committed activists in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. Our two weeks of work immeasurably deepened our understanding of the richness of the process of socialist construction and the creative ability of the workers and cadre on which it is based. It has given us the sense of urgency necessary to build a communist movement in this country, confident that a better world is possible. One that is right now demonstrating its superiority to capitalism in hugely difficult circumstances. As one brigadista told a reportback meeting after her return, 'The Cubans are clear about one thing; a new world order of communism is necessary for the survival of the human species'.

Jesus Garcia, who works in the Institute of Philosophy in the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, told us:

'A revolutionary situation doesn't arise just because of contradictions in the ruling class. The working class needs to understand that it is not just a mismanagement of capitalism. It needs to understand what power has to be defeated at any moment, overcoming division. If we don't steer through this crisis then it will mean a hundred year regression or the end of humanity. We need to end capitalism.'

Rock around the Blockade sends heartfelt thanks and solidarity: to the International Relations Department of the UJC; to our guide and translator, Lien Rodriguez; to the UJC in Pinar del Rio, including Juan Carlos, Alejandro, Ariel and Liosbel for their translations and engaging political discussions; to Orlando the bus driver and Angola veteran; to the International Relations Department of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, especially to European Coordinator, Marsan, for his excellent overview of recent developments; to Kenia Serrano, who toured Britain with RATB in 2002 and is now President of ICAP (Cuban friendship organisation), and Yari Cruz for very political meetings; to Orlando Borrego, Che Guevara's deputy from 1959, who assured us that 'capitalism is condemned to disappear' and urged us to study Marx; to Angel Arcos Bergnes, another comrade of Che, who spoke about leading by example; to Jesus Garcia who explained how Cuban democracy functions; and to Aleida Guevara, a revolutionary communist and daughter of Che Guevara, who welcomed us to the Che Guevara Study Centre in Havana. *Venceremos!*

Free the Cuban Five

On 15 June the US Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision on whether they will hear the appeal of five Cuban men imprisoned in the US since 1998 for 'conspiracy' to spy after a highly politicised trial in Miami. The Cuban Five, as they have become known, had infiltrated US-based terrorist groups to uncover plans and prevent terrorist attacks against Cuba, attacks which have claimed the lives of over 3,400 people since 1959. The Obama administration is attempting to influence the Court and has filed a brief urging it to deny the Five a hearing.

None of the charges against the Cubans involved violence, weapons or damage to property. The Five were arrested after the Cuban government passed information over to Washington that one extremist group, Brothers to the Rescue, was preparing to attack Cuban territory using pipe bombs dropped from aeroplanes. The US government's response was to arrest the Cuban agents for spying.

In 2005, a US court conceded that the Cuban Five did not receive a fair trial in Miami – a stronghold for the rightwing Cuban exile community – and ordered a retrial in a new location. However, the Attorney General intervened to get the decision overturned, and in August 2006 the convictions were upheld. In 2008, a federal appeal court again upheld the convictions. In early 2009, the Cuban Five's legal team filed a petition requesting the US Supreme Court to examine the case, in particular the change of trial venue and jury selection. An unprecedented number of *amicus curiae* – friend of the court – briefs have been filed with the Supreme Court by Nobel Prize winners, national and international personalities, jurists and human rights organisations requesting a review of lower court rulings.

International Conference to Free the Five

Two RATB brigadistas stayed in Cuba to participate in the International Conference to Free the Five on 11-12 May. The second such conference organised by the UJC, it was attended by 145 delegates from 82 organisations in 42 countries, providing a forum for updating and co-ordinating the international campaign. Many young Cubans also attended, as representatives from primary schools to universities, along with the families of

the Cuban Five, and President of Cuba's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon. In a speech to the conference, RATB said:

'Our five heroes are incarcerated today because they are in the vanguard of the defence of Cuban socialism, and Cuba's right to resist imperialism. Our five heroes are not alone in the fight, as Rock around the Blockade has seen on our solidarity brigades to Cuba – in the CDRs and when meeting the Young Pioneers, FEEM, FEU, the Women's Federation and UJC cadres. Within each of these organisations, whose role it is to unite, invigorate and involve society, there are people who have given themselves to the revolution, which is the advancement of humanity. THIS is what our five heroes are defending...

'This international campaign is an important battle in defence of the Cuban Revolution. As the leadership of the Cuban Revolution has stated, the fight to free the Five is not just a legal fight, it cannot be restricted to simple legal means. The fight has to be a political fight and it means building political movements. For Rock around the Blockade, this has meant holding regular street stalls, protests outside the US embassy and meetings to raise awareness of the Five. In February 2008 we invited Orlando Borrego, Jesus Garcia and a UJC militant on a speaking tour across Britain. Over two weeks, nearly 3,000 people in Britain heard them speak about, among other things, the heroic fight of our five.'

The Conference declaration called for days of international action on 6-8 June. In the US, the National Committee to Free the Five stated: 'It is important that we do not passively await the decision. Instead, it is urgent that supporters once again raise a worldwide cry for the immediate freedom of the Five.' Additional protests have been called for the day of the expected decision, 15 June, and for the day following the Supreme Court decision.

Contact your local RATB group to join events in your area or contact the RATB national office for support with your own event: tel: 020 7837 1688, email: office@ratb.org.uk or write to BM RATB, London WC1N 3XX.

For more details about the Cuban Five see: www.ratb.org.uk/ Free_the_Five.HTML.



RATB demonstration outside the US Embassy, London, in 2008, calling for the release of the Cuban Five

COLOMBIA

FARC – 45 years of fighting for peace

ALVARO MICHAELS

On 20 May the Colombian Senate began the process of allowing a referendum on whether President Uribe can stand for a third term. This is part of a ruling class strategy to complete the creation of a centralised state with an iron grip throughout the country. Central to this strategy is a continual, brutal war against the mass of the people, and their expulsion from the land to establish huge single crop estates in the hands of a few billionaires. The war and land expropriations created 400,000 internal refugees alone in 2008, four million since the 1980s. Half of those displaced are unemployed, living in miserable shanty towns in shocking poverty.

Since 1948, state violence against the poor has forced them continuously to use arms to defend their lives. The revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC-EP) was formed 45 years ago in the highlands of Marquetalia by guerrillas who had survived an extermination campaign directed by the Pentagon. Ever since then this revolutionary communist movement has waged an armed defence of the rural poor against the state. From its 1964 Agrarian Programme, to its present Bolivarian Programme for a New Colombia – a democratic, Bolivarian path to socialism – FARC has been determined to seek justice for the poor. It demands a National Agreement for Peace to 'overcome the national shame of an illegitimate government... creator of death and poverty...[which] supported by Washington...guarantees, by blood and fire, security for investments by transnationals that steal our resources.'



FARC guerrillas

The obstacle to peace

President Uribe's state executive today is determined to destroy FARC. Uribe's policy is one of permanent violence, a 'final solution' of complete and utter submission by the working class to a well armed and unified state.

In reorganising the state with US money, Uribe has had to rein in and redirect the fascist narco-gangs which were created by local landowners to terrorise the poor when the state was itself insufficiently armed. Many have now been incorporated into the army, police and local militias. Big fish who resist are being arrested. In revenge, some, such as 'Don Berna', have made damaging revelations about Uribe's past links with the AUC death squads and those of his allies. In July 2008, Carlos Garcia Orjuela, the architect of the campaign to permit Uribe a third period of office, and president of the ruling political party, was arrested for using AUC death squads to intimidate voters in Tolima in 2001 when he was President of Congress. Another Uribe loyalist, Congress ex-President Luis Humberto Gomez Gallo, was arrested in October 2007. By then some 70 congressmen had been investigated by the Supreme Court for connections to the AUC and 32 detained, the majority Uribe allies.

Despite the mountain of revelations concerning business corporations' direct role in the war against the working class, no penal action has been taken against companies such as Chiquita Brands, Drummond, Postobon, Brasilia, or Carbones del Caribe, all exposed by AUC chief Salvatore Mancuso in 2007 as directly arming or funding anti-working class paramilitary groups. Mancuso was extradited to the US in May 2008 to be charged with trafficking drugs and terrorism. Thirteen other AUC leaders were handed over with him. Another paramilitary chief, Francisco Enrique Villalba Hernandez, who denounced Uribe as directly responsible for the horrific massacre of El Aro, Antioquia, was murdered in April 2009. These are warnings to other heads of the AUC not to speak of Uribe's past or present.

Uribe aims to raise his armed forces to over 450,000 with the largest US military funding in Latin America. Yet despite some tragic leadership losses in the past year, FARC remains a powerful and unbeaten force: in March alone, 297 soldiers were killed and 340 wounded in combat with FARC forces. The Colombian ruling class faces unceasing resistance. ■

ECUADOR

Correa wins second presidential term

ALVARO MICHAELS

Re-elected as President for a further four years on 26 April, Rafael Correa obtained 51% of the vote and a first-round victory, the first in 30 years. Following his first triumph in November 2006, Correa introduced an unprecedented economic and social programme – the Citizens' Revolution – to start to extract the mass of the population from the miserable conditions imposed by previous pro-imperialist governments. A month after his 2006 landslide victory he said he wouldn't 'hesitate' to default on the country's debt in order to maintain government spending on the poor.

In less than two and a half years, Correa has achieved five election victories including one which approved the new constitution with 64% of the vote in September 2008. This gave the government much greater power to control key resources. Correa's priorities are free health and public education services, and investments in social services greater than the service costs of foreign debt which amounted to 40% of the national budget in 2004-2005 under the previous government. 25% of the population consumes only 4% of GDP while the wealthiest 20% take 60% of GDP; 70% live in poverty. Unemployment and

underemployment affect 50% of the people. In 2007, as Correa took power, 60% of homes had no drains, and 45% no drinking water.

The challenge is to throw off the country's dependence on the US and build a country for the mass of its people. Ecuador has been economically trapped since 2000 by the use of the US dollar as its national currency. In just two years Correa has expropriated goods wrongly seized by banks, forced transnational oil companies to change their contracts to benefit the people, suspended payment of foreign debts that were deemed illegitimate, and stripped the Central Bank of its independence. In May, Ecuador agreed to pay just 35 cents on the dollar to holders of \$3.2 billion of defaulted bonds, giving creditors a second chance to sell back their securities. Correa is also forcing the US to leave its military base at Manta when its 10 year lease ends in November this year, and has set up an enquiry into allegations of US abuse of human rights in its operations in the country.

In October 2007 Ecuador increased a 50% windfall tax on oil to 99% to obtain a greater share of crude oil revenue. The government said that the French oil company Perenco, which produces 25,000 barrels per day, owed \$338m in back taxes, plus interest. In May 2009, in defi-

ance of the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, Petroecuador auctioned 1.4 million barrels of oil seized from Perenco. The windfall tax has now been reduced to 70%.

The financial crisis of 1998-99, when GDP collapsed by 5%, sparked a mass emigration. Between then and 2007, over one million Ecuadorians sailed for Guatemala, from where they were smuggled across the Mexican border and into the US. Some headed for Europe; there are 90,000 in Britain. This from a country of 13.4 million. Such movement reflected an economic disaster; it has been compounded in recent years by the arrival of 250,000 destitute refugees fleeing Colombian state terror.

The current global economic crisis now makes Correa's task more urgent as migrant remittances from the US and Europe fell by 27% from \$759m in the first quarter of 2008 to \$555m in the first quarter of 2009. Correa is now pressing ahead with his alliances within the Union of South American Nations. This May Venezuela and Ecuador signed new agreements to search for oil, and to create a system of compensation between their countries in the form of a system of trade integration. They also agreed to deepen agricultural cooperation in order to guarantee food sovereignty and security to their peoples. The two presidents discussed the creation of a Latin American Human Rights and Freedom of Expression Commission in the South American Union of Nations (UNASUR) to overcome what Chavez called the 'manipulation by United States imperialism' of existing institutions. Both leaders know who is obstructing progress. ■

BOLIVIA

'I am a Marxist': Morales challenges imperialism

ROBERT CLOUGH

When Bolivian President Evo Morales told the 7th Summit of the ALBA countries on 16 April that 'I want to declare myself Marxist, Leninist, communist, socialist' and dared the Organisation of American States (OAS) to expel him for this statement, he was not just expressing solidarity with Cuba, expelled by the OAS for 'Marxism-Leninism' in 1962, but showing how far he and the Bolivian revolution have travelled since his election in December 2005. The reactionary separatists in Santa Cruz and the wealthy east of the country have been unable to overcome the isolation that followed their failed civic coup of September 2008 (see FRFI 206). In developments during April and May:

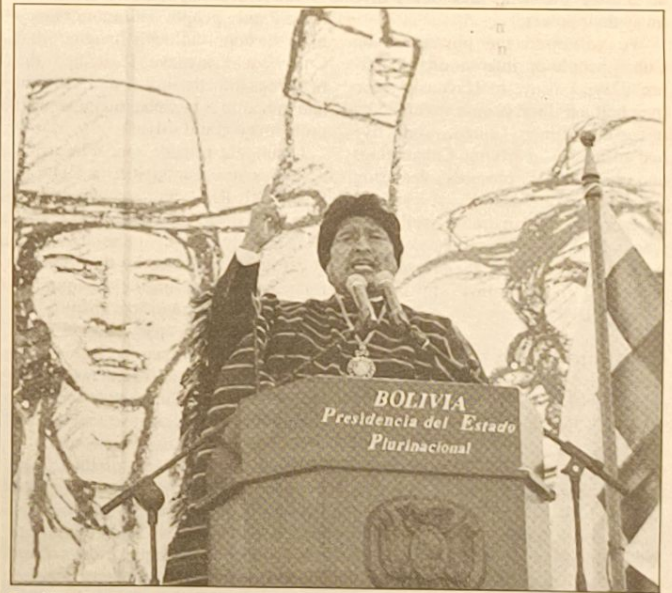
- An attempt by the bourgeois opposition in Congress to frustrate the implementation of Bolivia's new democratic constitution failed after Morales went on hunger strike to mobilise popular support;
- A plot to assassinate the president was broken up after police killed three mercenaries and arrested two others in a Santa Cruz hotel;
- Papers released in the US have exposed the extent to which the imperialists supported attempts to break up the country through the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

At stake in Congress was a Transitional Electoral Law to implement the country's new constitution and enable elections to take place in December 2009. The opposition tried to block the law using its majority in the Senate, despite a 61.5% majority in

electoral register this year, the law was passed on 14 April.

The conspiracy to assassinate Morales was exposed after police tracked down a gang which had bombed the Santa Cruz home of Cardinal Julio Terrazas on 15 April whilst he was away. The ringleader was Eduardo Rozsa Flores, a Bolivian with a Croatian background like many Santa Cruz separatist leaders. In an interview taped in September 2008 for a Hungarian TV station and broadcast after his death in the shoot-out, Rozsa Flores said he had been invited by the opposition in Bolivia to set up an armed force in the Santa Cruz 'nation', saying that 'We are ready... to proclaim independence... Santa Cruz is ready to separate from Bolivia.' Rozsa Flores had been the leader of a mercenary brigade in the reactionary war of Croatian independence from Yugoslavia. The police investigation has already resulted in arrests of Santa Cruz business leaders, and members of the neo-fascist Union of Santa Cruz Youth. A similar mercenary gang was responsible for the murder of 20 Morales supporters in Pando on 11 September 2008 on the instructions of the department's secessionist prefect, Leopoldo Fernandez.

That US imperialism has been involved in recent secessionist plots was confirmed following the release in early May of papers relating to USAID's Bolivian operations. In 2004, before Morales' electoral victory, it set up an Office for Transition Initiatives in Bolivia to fund separatist projects and has spent more than \$97m in 'decentralisation' and 'regional autonomy' projects since 2002. Other funding has gone to opposition political parties, and to create a network of 3,000 'observers' as an allegedly 'independent' body to



President Evo Morales

favour of the constitution in the January 2009 referendum. On 9 April, as a 60-day deadline to pass the legislation approached, Morales went on hunger strike to mobilise the masses. As people gathered outside Congress, the opposition started to back down, and their attempts to disenfranchise Bolivians living abroad – mostly Morales supporters – were defeated. With the government making concessions on the number of congress seats reserved for indigenous people (reducing them from 14 to 7, but not to the three demanded by the reactionaries) and agreeing to establish an electronic

monitor Bolivian elections. No wonder Morales has declared that: 'The US has no right or authority to speak of democracy, because they are the ones that foster coups, military coups, just as they are now arming a civic coup in Bolivia.' On 1 May, in front of a huge and enthusiastic demonstration in La Paz, Morales announced the nationalisation of AirBP, a subsidiary of British Petroleum which supplies aviation fuel to Bolivia's airports, further undermining the grip of the multinationals. The Bolivian people have pushed imperialism onto the back foot in their country. ■

PALESTINE

Obama: no difference for the Palestinian people

The six months that Obama has been US President have not made the slightest difference to the suffering of the Palestinian people. In Gaza they remain under siege, held at the edge of starvation. **BOB SHEPHERD** reports.



PA President Abbas meeting President Obama 28 May 2009

In some areas of the West Bank, Palestinians are surviving on as little as 10 to 15 litres of water per person each day, which is at or below humanitarian disaster response levels recommended to avoid epidemics. In Gaza, where Palestinians rely on an aquifer that has become increasingly saline and polluted, the situation is worse. Only 5-10% of the available water is clean enough to drink. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas continues to serve as a pliant tool of imperialism while road blocks and checkpoints remain in place, new settlements are planned and work continues on the separation wall. Obama's rhetoric about a comprehensive peace settlement remains just that, as new Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to make any commitment to a Palestinian state.

that it's so important for us to take a diplomatic approach is that the approach we've been taking, which is no diplomacy, obviously has not worked. Nobody disagrees with that. Hamas and Hezbollah have got stronger. Iran has been pursuing its nuclear capabilities undiminished. Not talking clearly hasn't worked.

As part of this new approach Obama wants to rein in the extreme right of the Zionist movement to encourage Abbas and his pro-imperialist allies to continue confronting the Palestinian resistance. Obama wants the Zionists to throw some crumbs to Abbas, hence his declaration that 'Israel is going to have to take difficult steps... Settlements have to be stopped in order for us to move forward. That's a difficult issue, I recognise that. But it's an important one and it has to be addressed.'

On the same day of the Obama-Netanyahu meeting the Zionists announced that the construction of a new Israeli settlement would start in the Jordan Valley in the east of the West Bank. This colonial project was apparently on hold from 2006 as the Bush administration had deemed it a violation of the so-called Road Map. It is reported that Netanyahu's current government has already approved the construction of some 73,000 settlement units in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. On his return to Israel, Netanyahu reiterated his hard line Zionist stance that East Jerusalem would never become a capital of any Palestinian state. 'United Jerusalem is Israel's capital. Jerusalem was always ours and will always be ours. It will never again be partitioned and divided'.

No end to siege of Gaza

Gazan border crossings are still opened and closed on Zionist whim with only a trickle of goods allowed to enter. The Rafah crossing into Egypt also remains closed for the majority of Palestinians. During mid-May only one border crossing, Kerem Shalom, was open, with Israel allowing between 80-110 trucks to pass through each day. Before Hamas took control in Gaza, nearly 500 trucks a day were entering Gaza. Israel continues to prevent the import of construction material of any sort, spare parts, agricultural imports including livestock, IT equipment and incredibly some food items, including tea and coffee, into Gaza. A Palestinian customs worker said that 'the deliveries are disorganised and irregular, and sometimes certain products are prohibited... Shoes and wood have not entered Gaza in six months, and no livestock have entered since September 2008.'

The fact that no construction material is being allowed to enter Gaza means that the thousands of people made homeless by the Israeli onslaught are still without homes. John Ging, Director of UNRWA in Gaza, states: 'There's nothing going on in terms of reconstruction because the crossings are still closed. That's the key to all the misery here... it's hard to fathom that after all the outpouring of concern and empathy with the plight of the people here during the January conflict that months later they are still living in the rubble of their former lives... so the rockets have stopped but the siege continues. Where is the dividend for the Palestinians?' The situation is so desperate that the Hamas government in Gaza is now seriously considering building houses out of mud and straw bricks. The need for consistent solidarity work here in defence of the Palestinian people remains critical.



PA security forces leave bullet-ridden building where they murdered two Hamas leaders, West Bank, 31 May 2009

On 18 May Obama met with Netanyahu in Washington. Their main concern was with Iran and its alleged nuclear weapons programme, which they labelled as the biggest threat to stability in the Middle East. Obama spoke of the possibility of the imposition of 'severe sanctions' on Iran and pledged to finance the development of a new Israeli missile system known as Hetis-3. The words may have changed; the aims remain the same: US domination of the Middle East. Obama has had to acknowledge that the approach of the Bush administration, far from destroying opposition to US imperialist interests, had in fact strengthened it: 'Understand that part of the reason

Abbas establishes new government

After months of inconclusive negotiations between Hamas and Fatah on the formation of a united Palestinian government, Abbas jumped the gun and appointed a new pro-imperialist caretaker government in Ramallah on 19 May. This action was condemned not only by Hamas but also by a large section of Fatah including its deputies in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Both the PFLP and the Palestinian People's Party refused to join the new government and condemned it as undermining attempts to forge a new Palestinian unity. However, Egypt has been setting the agenda for national reconciliation talks taking place in Cairo with the purpose of getting Abbas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) back into Gaza. One of the proposals is to create a new security force in Gaza that would be comprised of 50% PA security personnel. When they operated in Gaza before June 2007, PA security forces in Gaza were used to attack the resistance and defend widespread PA corruption.

NEPAL

Counter-revolution mobilises

LOUIS BREHONY

On 4 May, Nepal's communist Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, resigned from office, barely a year after his Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPN(M)) won the elections to the country's first constituent assembly. His resignation follows a threatened coup by the UCPN(M)'s opponents, led by President Ram Baran Yadav of the Nepali Congress Party (NC) and supported by the military and the reactionary United Marxist-Leninist (UML) 'communists'. These events reflect the continuing struggle between the impoverished mass of the Nepali people struggling for socialism, and the corrupt elite colluding with imperialism to try to hold back the revolutionary movement.

Following the elections in May 2008, which made the UCPN(M) Nepal's largest party, there was an agreement to integrate People's Liberation Army fighters into the military, with the Maoists bringing their 19,000 class-conscious guerillas into contact with the army rank and file. Knowing that the guerillas are supportive of land reform and democracy, the army establishment has resisted their integration at every step. The chief of staff of the Nepali Army, Rookmangud Katawal, has played a particularly reactionary role in trying to undermine the UCPN(M). He was found to be the main organiser of the planned coup, aborted when details were leaked to the *Kathmandu Post*.

When the UCPN(M)-led government told Katawal to step down on 3 May, President Yadav stood in the way and prevented the elected leadership from carrying out its duties. The other parties in the coalition, including the NC and the UML, quit the government in defence of the army chief. Prachanda saw no other option than to step down as Prime Minister in the face of 'unconstitutional and illegal' actions by the President, pointing out that 'the interim constitution does not give any right to the President to act as a parallel power'.

In government the revolutionary UCPN(M) has been restricted by its opponents' constant attempts to hold

back the many reforms demanded by the mass movement. According to political analyst Kanak Mani Dixit: 'After coming to power, the Maoists have been systematically attacking the institutions of state, like the judiciary and the media. The army was the only institution they couldn't touch. The fear was that they would bring down the army also.' Even under the constraints of the coalition government the UCPN(M) have been clear about their objectives of establishing a socialist People's Republic and bringing in greater industrialisation. As Finance Minister Bhattarai recently said: 'We are Marxists, but we are not dogmatic Marxists... We want to develop the science of Marxism... We are very practical and realistic Marxists who want to bring about real change in society.'

Narayan Kaji Shrestha, deputy leader of the UCPN(M), said that his party would not allow parliament to function unless Katawal was sacked. Prachanda exposed the opposition as puppets of imperialism: 'As per the dictates of their foreign masters, the dejected and rejected UML and NC leaders are forming the next government... Their heads will be always down as they have surrendered to their foreign masters, we have resigned but yet our heads will always be up.' Amid continuing unrest and a UCPN(M) boycott, the UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal was sworn in as Prime Minister on 25 May, promising to draft a new constitution, as protesters burned effigies of him and the Maoists warned that his fragile government 'will not last long'.

Millions of people in Nepal face dire poverty. One quarter of Nepalis live on a daily income of less than a dollar, with more than 80 per cent of the population depending on agriculture for an income. On one side stands a revolutionary force with the overwhelming support of the mass of the people, fighting to radically change the institutions of power and push for better living standards for the poor majority. On the other side stands an elite ruling class, tied historically to the corrupt and brutal military, and supported by international capital. The political situation in Nepal is on a knife edge.

North Korea's second nuclear test

TREVOR RAYNE

On 25 May the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) conducted a nuclear weapons test, followed by three short range missile tests later the same day.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared the tests 'erroneous, misguided and a danger to the world'. President Obama said the tests 'pose a grave threat to the peace and security of the world'. Who is a threat to the security of the world? The US has 10,000 nuclear weapons and Britain has 200. The US has 737 overseas military bases. Britain has conducted 129 separate military interventions abroad since the end of the Second World War. Who threatened the peace and security of Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Serbia, where hundreds of thousands of people have been blown

to smithereens by imperialism? Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu returned from visiting Obama in May to declare Israel's responsibility to 'eliminate' the 'nuclear threat' from Iran. Which other countries has Iran bombed? None! Who has North Korea bombed? Nobody! Nobody asks how many nuclear bombs Israel has. The real threat to the peace and security of the world resides in Washington, London and Tel Aviv. These states are willing to use war repeatedly to sustain their power.

During the 1950-1953 Korean War, the US threatened North Korea with nuclear attack. That war, conducted under the flag of the United Nations, claimed up to three million Korean lives. North Korea knows well the readiness of the US and Britain to kill Koreans and to do so with impunity. That is why North Korea conducted nuclear tests.

A master class in socialist economics

CHE GUEVARA:
the economics of revolution,
Helen Yaffe, London, Palgrave
Macmillan 2009, £17.99

by Diana Raby

Helen Yaffe has produced a very important book which can only be described as essential reading for all socialists. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara has been justly admired, indeed romanticised and even idolised, for his heroic role as revolutionary guerrilla fighter, his personal integrity and self-sacrifice culminating in martyrdom. But a vital period of his short life has been inexplicably neglected in previous accounts: the six years in which he served the Cuban revolutionary government, playing a crucial role in the transition to socialism.

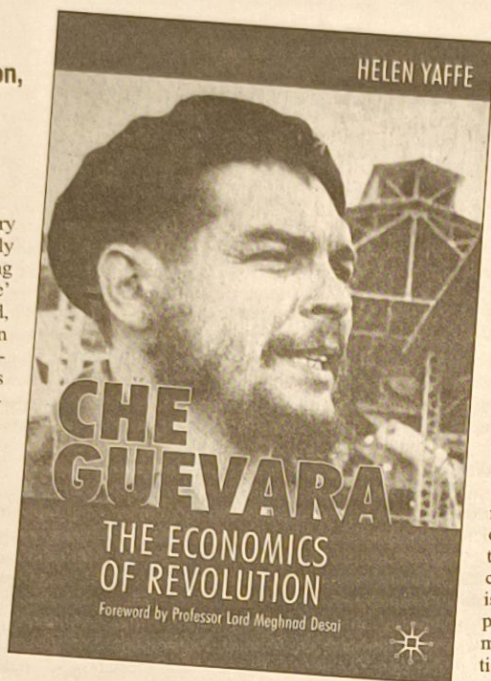
As President of the National Bank, Head of the Department of Industrialisation and then Minister of Industries, Guevara was responsible for many of the fundamental decisions in creating a distinctive Cuban model. Despite the importance of Soviet support in providing a lifeline to the young revolution, Che quickly made clear his reservations with regard to economic policies in the USSR. Che's criticisms gave rise to a public polemic which came to be known as the 'Great Debate', and several of the key contributions to this discussion were published in a useful volume edited by Bertram Silverman (*Man and socialism in Cuba: the great debate*, New York, Atheneum 1971). But we have had to wait until Yaffe's book for a detailed analysis of Guevara's arguments and actual policies.

On the basis of 60 interviews with Che's former colleagues and extensive archival research, including consultation of Guevara's crucial notes for a critique of the Soviet *Manual of political economy*, Yaffe gives us unprecedented insight into his vital contribution to the Cuban Revolution and to Marxist theory.

The law of value under socialism

The central issue at stake was the role of the law of value under socialism. Ever since Lenin, communists had recognised that this key component of capitalist economics would not simply disappear overnight and could not be legislated out of existence; in the USSR in the early 1920s, Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) was an explicit tactical retreat which authorised extensive use of capitalist practices and hence the law of value. Although Stalinist collectivisation appeared to eliminate or greatly restrict its operation, in fact it continued and after Khrushchev's reforms in the late 1950s, the law of value was once again explicitly enshrined in Soviet economic manuals.

To Guevara, Soviet technological backwardness was a symptom of the stifling of socialist creative potential by trying to combine socialist planning at national level with capitalist management systems at enterprise level. In technical terms, the key issue was the use of the Auto-Financing System (AFS), promoted in Soviet manuals



from the 1950s onwards, as against the Budgetary Finance System (BFS) favoured by Guevara. The AFS encouraged enterprise managers to maximise profits by using market mechanisms to determine prices, financing their own investments through credit and developing autonomous commercial relationships with other public enterprises with little regard for the national plan.

In contrast to this, under the BFS, goods exchanged between public enterprises were transferred without payment; a cost price was administratively determined and the relevant adjustments were made in the respective enterprise accounts in the Treasury. Incentives were based on micro-management of costs and production contracts (determined by management consultations at all levels, with direct worker input) regulating quantity, quality and punctuality.

Che's argument for the BFS was that under socialism, the entire Cuban economy was essentially one big public enterprise, and therefore exchanges of products within it were not commodity transactions; there was no transfer of ownership and therefore no purchase or sale. Costs had to be recorded to prevent waste, but incentives for increased quantity or quality of production should be based on the collective interest and not market forces.

This principle of socialist exchange, in which the law of value does not operate, could not be applied to foreign trade with capitalist countries, where imports were necessarily priced according to the law of value. It followed that goods produced in Cuba with imported inputs (raw materials or machinery) would have to reflect the law of value in their pricing. Indeed, one of Che's major criticisms of the Soviet Bloc was the extent to which they applied capitalist market prices in their international trade.

The transformation of Cuba

It is fascinating to see how Guevara applied these abstract principles in practice to the management of the Cuban economy, at the same time that

he was wrestling with all kinds of mundane practical problems. The nationalisation of virtually all large-scale enterprises in only two or three years, together with the sudden loss of Cuba's traditional commercial ties to the US and the need to replace American with Soviet technology, threatened to bring about complete economic paralysis.

What Helen Yaffe's book shows in this respect is how Che's extraordinary revolutionary dedication enabled him to deal with this daunting situation. While her discussion of the BFS refutes the widely-held myth of Guevara as a pure voluntarist and idealist, her account of his practical administrative work shows how his personal will and commitment drove him to find solutions to apparently insoluble problems.

Yaffe gives amusing examples of the improvisation and spontaneity which characterised the revolution in its early years, such as Che's appointment as President of the National Bank despite having no economic training or experience and his decision to appoint his maths lecturer, Salvador Vilaseca (who was equally inexperienced) as his deputy; and the appointment of 200 teacher trainees, aged 15-20, as managers of nationalised enterprises.

These examples confirm the tendency to improvisation and spontaneity which characterised the revolution in its early years, and while such rash decisions sometimes had disastrous consequences, it is remarkable how often these young and inexperienced revolutionaries succeeded in their new tasks. The reason for this almost certainly lies in the dedication which Guevara (and Fidel and many of their associates) brought to everything they did, and the practice of giving real decision-making power to shop-floor workers.

Study and scientific rigour

The myth of Che as impractical idealist is further undermined by his respect for science and his quest to apply the most advanced scientific knowledge in all spheres. Whenever he assumed a new responsibility, he immediately began to study the relevant scientific disciplines, systematically and intensively – and he insisted on his subordinates doing the same.

This combination of dedication, theoretical rigour and attention to practical detail also characterised Che's approach to issues of workers' participation and socialist consciousness. His insistence on the crucial importance of developing consciousness – the 'New Man' – was not just a matter of propaganda and exhortation. All kinds of mechanisms were introduced to promote workers' initiative and participation: Committees for Spare Parts, the Movement of Inventors and Innovators, Advisory Technical Committees, Production Assemblies and Committees for Local Industry. Most important, the human side of workers' involvement was a central concern.

Thus the encouragement of voluntary labour and moral (as opposed to material) incentives was accompanied by measures which showed a growing understanding of workers' practical problems. Health and safety were recognised as important issues, and 'burnt-out' workers were given entitlement to rest and recuperation in holiday resorts. Guevara's medical training made him sensitive to workers' problems of stress and self-esteem, and of psychological issues in general; and he was forced (with some difficulty) to recognise the problematic impact of his own explosive character.

The critique of the Soviet manual

Guevara's contribution to socialist theory is summed up in an incomplete study which he was working on in 1965-66, before leaving for Bolivia. These notes, which amount to a comprehensive critique of the Soviet *Manual of political economy*, and which were so contentious that for 40 years they were kept under lock and key by Che's deputy Orlando Borrego Diaz, are analysed in Yaffe's chapter 9.

Che's legacy

Yaffe recognises that Che's ideas have not been fully applied in Cuba since his departure and death, but neither have they been simply abandoned. Rather, she argues, the country's subsequent history 'can be portrayed as a pendulum swinging between what is desirable and what is necessary – with Guevara's ideas being associated with the vitality of the Revolution'. She also correctly draws attention to the importance of the new relationship with Venezuela and the ALBA, in which international exchanges take place on a non-commodity basis. She quotes favourable comments by Hugo Chavez on Che's ideas and the adoption by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela of 'the strategic objective of neutralising the operation of the law of value'.

What this book has achieved, then, is to demonstrate that Guevara's greatness lies at least as much in his contribution to socialist thought as in his heroic example as a guerrilla leader. This does not mean, of course, that his ideas should be accepted uncritically; indeed that would itself



Aleida March, daughter of Che Guevara, with Helen Yaffe's book

Guevara's ideas are certainly controversial, and a breath of fresh air for anyone familiar with the fossilised formulae of 'orthodox' communist (and in many cases also, Trotskyist) exegesis. He argued that in the USSR the NEP (which Lenin would surely have abandoned had he lived longer) had entrenched the structures of pre-monopoly capitalism, but centralised planning had prevented competition (and the law of value) from operating freely. The result was the worst of both worlds: technological stagnation and a situation in which 'man neither develops his fabulous productive capacities, nor does he develop himself as the conscious builder of a new society'. Stalinist dogmatism had frozen the system but had since been replaced by inconsistent pragmatism, which in turn would lead more and more towards capitalist restoration, pure and simple.

But Guevara's criticisms went far beyond this. He also rejected the Soviet *Manual's* acceptance of the idea of a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism in some countries; condemned the working class in imperialist countries as accomplices of the system; identified landless peasants as the truly revolutionary force in most countries; and condemned the USSR for replacing internationalism with chauvinism, forcing other socialist countries into submission.

be totally un-Guevarist. In the humble opinion of this reviewer, two questions immediately arise. First, if the BFS is a desirable mechanism for avoiding the operation of the law of value at enterprise level, does it not create an enormous danger of bureaucratic centralism stifling workers' democracy and initiative? And secondly, while it may be desirable to view the entire economy of a socialist country as one single enterprise owned collectively by the working people as a whole, does this not pose a serious problem of the potential disparity between ideal and real possession of the means of production: ie workers may well feel that they are the owners of their particular workplace, but do they really feel – and do the objective conditions exist for them to function as – owners of the entire economy?

One thing is certain: for anyone engaged in the struggle for a better world, the thought of Che Guevara is a fundamental point of departure, and this book is an essential work of reference.

Diana Raby is a research fellow at the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool, a National Council member of the Respect Party and author of *Democracy and revolution: Latin America and socialism today*, Pluto Press 2006

The Association of Prisoners

In 2002, following legal action by then prisoner John Hirst, the Prison Service was forced to accept that Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of association) meant serving prisoners had the right to set up and join 'representative associations'. The Association of Prisoners (AOP) had been set up shortly before this but did not become active. However, in April 2009, life sentence prisoner **BEN GUNN** announced via prisoners' paper *Inside Time* that he was the AOP's new General Secretary. Ben invited all prisoners to be involved in the Association. He has written the article below for FRFI. We invite other prisoners to send us their views on the AOP and how best it can further the struggles of prisoners.

The essence of prison is power – who has it, who is denied it, and how it is used and abused. And at the heart of the agenda expressed by the AOP are a rebalancing of that power, and a calling to account of those who use it to misuse prisoners.

We are at a unique point in prison history. On the downside, the system has spent the period since the 1990 riots developing a mesh of controls that weaves around each individual

prisoner. The changes in the system's intelligence gathering, the training of riot-control staff, changes in prison architecture and security procedures, all suggest that any attempt at 'reform through riot' as in 1990 is likely to fail.

The daily controls created since then comprise a managerialist bog of paperwork and procedures. Led by the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme, this web includes risk assess-

ments, sentence planning, parole dossiers, offending behaviour courses – an endless list of seemingly professional tools which are, in reality, responsible for oppressing a whole generation of prisoners. Whilst casual physical brutality and squalor have far from disappeared, most cons find greater frustration arising from dealing with 'professionals' in shiny suits who hide behind a mantra of risk and public protection than from dealing with thick-necked landing screws.

This is a new landscape for us to struggle upon. Using violence to fight attitudes and paperwork is attempting to punch fog. But amongst these changes there remain old truths, the most important being that prisons only work because of our co-operation. The landscape may have changed, the means used to oppress us may have become more sophisticated and subtle, but new avenues for struggle have also opened up.

Today, we are allowed to organise. For the first time in British prison history a group has organised in public and the system has had to grin and bear it. We need to capitalise on this and that means encouraging prisoners

to reassert their inherent dignity as human beings. The main aim of all that I do is to try to persuade prisoners that we are not helpless, that we don't have to lower our eyes in the face of being treated as irrelevant.

This calls for action on several levels. On the part of the prisoner on the landing this means looking in the mirror and deciding whether the person staring back is a prisoner or a willing slave. It means refusing to accept as unchallengeable the dozens of decisions made about us every day. It means questioning and challenging each assessment that determines everything from privileges to release, using all legitimate means at our disposal. While many of these arguments will inevitably run into the sand, each time any prisoner refuses to accept being misused fosters the attitude we need – that of being a sovereign individual, unbowed. Persuading people of that alone is worth a struggle.

As individuals grow in self-belief in their inherent worth and power, we need to form networks on the landings, between the wings, across the whole estate. There is a strength in numbers alone, a value in knowing

that there are others helping to fight the same battles. Smaller Associations can be formed, challenging local conditions or processes, taking advantage of each others' knowledge or specialist expertise.

Networks and campaigns are also being developed outside and across the walls. Our broad aims are not necessarily in conflict with reform groups and single-issue campaigners who press for change on our behalf. One of the main aims of the campaign for prisoners to vote in elections is to force those outside to hear our voices.

Change is possible, if we have the courage and fortitude to reach for it. We enjoy the benefits of generations of prisoners who went before us, and it is past battles which have brought us to the point where we are able to organise and support each other. But let us be clear: change doesn't come from the formation of the AOP; it doesn't come from the vote or media coverage. These things have their place but change originates within each individual prisoner who decides to refuse to be treated with contempt. And now is the time for each of us to stand up and be counted. ■

The war against us all – Free Mumia!

'This war in Iraq isn't the end; it's the beginning of wars to come... This isn't just a war on Iraqis or Afghans or even Arabs or Muslims. It is ultimately a war on us all. That's because the billions and billions of dollars that are being spent on this war – the cost of tanks, rocketry, bullets, and yes, even salaries for the 125,000-plus troops – is money that will never be spent on education, on health care, on the reconstruction of crumbling public housing.'

Mumia Abu-Jamal

On 6 April, 2009, the US Supreme Court denied former Black Panther, political prisoner and revolutionary journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeal against his 1981 conviction for murder. Despite having physically destroyed the Panthers in the 1970s by all-out surveillance and repression, the US state's ideological war against the Black Panther Party continues to this day – from the characterisation of the Party as 'black nationalist' to the recent prosecutions of eight former Panthers in San Francisco on the basis of evidence obtained from their torture in 1973, to the continued incarceration of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Mumia Abu-Jamal was born in Philadelphia in 1954. Aged 14 he became a founding member and Lieutenant Minister of Information of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence. During the summer of 1970, he worked for the Panthers' newspaper in Oakland, California.

In the 1970s Mumia worked as a radio journalist. His hard-hitting criticism of the Philadelphia Police Department and the administration of Mayor Rizzo marked him as a journalist 'to watch' and eventually cost him his broadcast job. By the time of his arrest, he had come to be known as Philadelphia's 'voice of the voiceless'.

On 9 December 1981, Mumia was critically shot and beaten by police and charged with the murder of white police officer Daniel Faulkner. Put on trial before Philadelphia's notorious 'hanging judge,' Albert Sabo, he was convicted and sentenced to death. The case was marred with racial bias, including the deliberate exclusion of



African Americans from the jury, resulting in a jury of 10 white and only two black people in Philadelphia where 43% of the population is black.

After years of challenges and international protests, the US District Court overturned the death sentence but upheld the conviction. This decision was then appealed by both sides, with the prosecution objecting to the overturning of the death sentence and Mumia's attorney rejecting the upheld conviction.

Even from Death Row, Mumia has been a prolific journalist and social commentator. His 'radio essays' cover a wide range of topics including Cuban socialism and its 'remarkable achievements', the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the barbarism of the US death penalty, and how capital punishment is used to suppress the poor – and especially black people – in an attempt to prevent them from fighting back against the exploitation and violence of the capitalist imperialist system.

Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Danny Masuka

Ronnie Easterbrook dies after 21 years of struggle

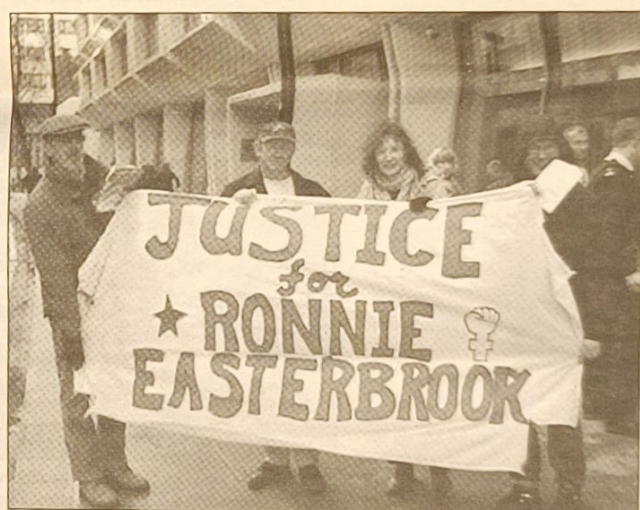
Ronnie Easterbrook died on 10 May 2009 in Gartree prison, the day before his 78th birthday. He had been on a prolonged hunger strike, the last in a series of protests over the 21 years he spent in prison.

FRFI first came into contact with Ronnie in 1995 when he was in the segregation unit of high security HMP Whitemoor. In the 1990s the government made a concerted and generally successful attempt to transform and 'modernise' the prison system and in the process to destroy solidarity between prisoners. Following massive prison protests in 1990 these changes mainly took a seemingly progressive form, but after two high profile escapes from Whitemoor and Parkhurst in 1994-5, the new measures became overtly repressive, with security and control prioritised over all else.

During the same period, the IRA called a ceasefire and negotiations began around the repatriation of Irish Prisoners of War from English gaols. There were waves of protest throughout the system, with POWs demanding immediate transfers and prisoners in general angered by new systems restricting possessions and increasing intrusive searching of cells and visitors.

In July 1995 prisoner Dennis Prescott wrote to us: 'there are currently eight on a "dirty protest". English as well as Irish prisoners... because of very oppressive conditions, being assaulted by screws... plus being hundreds of miles away from their families... There's a 64-year-old man next door to me on a "dirty": Ronald Easterbrook, who has only one lung. His door is being kicked in the middle of the night by screws saying "We haven't woken you up have we?"'

In Ronnie's first letter to us in September 1995, he wrote: 'Prisoners in this country are subject to outrageous sentences if they are from the working class, and then dumped



into the dispersals, which are symptomatic of the class structure outside. They are the council estates of the prison system.'

Ronnie was arrested for participating in a failed armed robbery that was deliberately set up by a police informer. A detachment of armed police and a TV film crew were lying in wait. Tony Ash, who was with Ronnie, was shot dead. At Ronnie's trial he wanted to argue that the 'shoot-to-kill' policy being used by British forces in Ireland was now being used in England. His barrister did not agree to argue this and Ronnie ended up defending himself, reading out the whole of the Amnesty International report on shoot-to-kill to the jury.

Ronnie received discretionary life sentences for armed robbery and attempted murder and was given a 'whole life tariff' meaning he could never be released. He was the only person in Britain not convicted of murder to be sentenced to life with no possibility of parole. Following an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights the tariff was eventually reduced to 12½ years; however,

whatever their tariff, lifers can only be released once the Parole Board determines they are no longer dangerous. Ronnie was not interested in parole – only in a retrial at which the actions of the police could be re-examined. In pursuit of this and more humane treatment he undertook several prolonged hunger strikes which took him close to death.

Ronnie was supported by many prisoners who respected his uncompromising attitude and refusal to dance to the tune of the Parole Board by ceasing to protest, going on 'offending behaviour courses' and looking to 'progress' through the system. Outside prison he was supported by comrades from FRFI, Anarchist Black Cross and MOJO. Together with a few friends and relatives who stuck resolutely by Ronnie through thick and thin, we corresponded with him, wrote letters of complaint to the Prison Service and organised demonstrations outside the Home Office.

We send our condolences to Jackie and John, Jon, Charley and Bluejay, and everyone in prison who knew Ronnie. Nicki Jameson

FRFI SUMMER 2009 CAMPAIGN

Build resistance, organise to fight repression

With the deepening economic crisis, and the political disarray within the ruling class, it is vital that socialists in Britain build on the opportunities that now exist to create a new anti-imperialist working class movement. There is now a real urgency: chances such as this do not come often, and we must seize it with both hands. Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! urges its readers to join with us in a summer of campaigning activity to help extend and deepen the influence of our trend, taking a stand on the streets against war in Iraq and Afghanistan, in support of socialist Cuba, in defence of the Palestinian intifada, alongside those fighting racism and deportation or factory closures or public sector cuts.

Hundreds of thousands in Britain will be forced out of work in the coming months, out of their homes and into poverty. They will face a punitive Welfare Reform Bill, which, when it becomes law, will intensify the oppression of those who cannot work. Eligibility for income support, incapacity allowance and other benefits will be reduced to force people – including single mothers and those unfit for work – into whatever miserable jobs are available, on whatever conditions the ruling class sees fit to impose. Those unable to get work will be forced to perform 'community service' for their benefits, for the equivalent of £1.83 an hour. Backed by the racist media, the Labour government continues its virulent attack on immigrants and asylum seekers, with a barrage of immigration laws used to harass, detain and deport thousands of people. Those who demonstrate – in support of the peoples of Palestine or Tamil Eelam, or against the G20 summit – are violently attacked by the racist British police.

Throughout the world prospects for fighting imperialism are improving. From Baghdad to Caracas, forces of resistance and revolution are on the march. Today, after 50 years of imperialist blockade and attacks, Cuba still carries the banner of socialism and continues to show what is possible when the working class and oppressed take power and use it to transform society. Across Latin America new democratic governments are starting to challenge imperialist hegemony and setting out on the road to construct new societies: in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador in particular. Cuba's influence, through its relationships of mutual solidarity, is crucial in this process.

We in Britain need to play our part. FRFI argues that human society can only make progress, or indeed survive, if capitalism is destroyed. We stand for the creation of a society organised both to meet the needs of the entire population, and to ensure the fullest possible development of every individual. That will require a revolution led by the working class since the British ruling class will never allow the system which maintains its domination to be voted away.

The first step, and one we can all take, is to commit to fighting attacks by the Labour government, to intervening in working class struggles as they emerge, to presenting arguments for the unity of the whole working class and oppressed, and to working



FRFI supporters lead a contingent on the march for Palestine, 16 May, London

together with other working class people to develop effective means of resistance. We need to extend our street work, taking our clear anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-Labour message into new parts of the country. For that we need your active support and involvement in our summer campaign. You can:

- Build a street event in your local area – a meeting in support of Cuba, a picket of Marks & Spencer in defence of the Palestinian people, or anything else that promotes a socialist, anti-imperialist standpoint. We can provide materials and help in the organisation
- Contact us about campaigns or events

new areas of the country

- Host an FRFI public meeting – we can provide speakers and help with publicity
- Subscribe to FRFI, ensuring that you receive news and analysis of anti-imperialist struggles around the world with every issue
- Take out a standing order to support FRFI, helping us to expand the range of our publications and open regional offices across Britain, or make a donation to our Fighting Fund – see page 15

The campaign will culminate in a speaking tour in early autumn with national speakers addressing the key questions facing us in the context of



FRFI supporters take part in a march through Newcastle city centre on 25 April as part of a series of demonstrations called by Tamils in Britain

in your area in which you are involved and for which you need support; send reports about them for publication in FRFI

- Take copies of FRFI to sell to your friends, in your workplace, university, college, school or on the streets, helping us to extend information, analysis and organisation to new people and

the crisis. We will be preparing publicity for this with the next issue of FRFI.

Now is the time to get active. The socialist movement is at its weakest in Britain for over a century and this is not tolerable. All of us have a role to play and a responsibility to act. Let us seize the time!



FRFI supporters in Glasgow join a global day of action in solidarity with the Palestinian people and for boycott, divestment and sanctions on 29 March

EVENTS

LONDON

Saturday 13 June 12-3pm
Speak out against racism and deportations!
Street event with open mic, speeches and music, leafleting and petitioning
Outside Angel tube, N1

Tuesdays 7 July and 4 August 1-2pm
Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!
Demonstration at Communications House Reporting Centre
Old Street, EC1
Nearest tube Old Street

Sunday 12 July 4-6pm
Readers and supporters group
Discussion of FRFI article
Contact us for reading material
Upstairs at The Perseverance
Corner of Lambs Conduit Street and Great Ormond Street, WC1
Nearest tube Russell Square

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Demonstration for Palestine – Victory to the Intifada
Outside M&S, Oxford Street, WC1
Nearest tube March Arch

For more details contact 020 7837 1688 or email londonfrfi@gmail.com

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 20 June 11am-2pm
TCAR's Northern march against immigration prisons
Meet at Centre for Life next to Central Station at 11am for march
Rally at Monument from 12 noon

Sunday 26 July
Doors 7pm – first act 8pm
Stand-Up for Justice!
Comedy fundraising night
The Dog and Parrot, Clayton Street
Acts include Anvil Springsteen!
Tickets £5

Every Thursday 5-7pm
Picket of Marks & Spencer
Northumberland Street

Every Saturday 11am-2pm
Anti-racist stall and street meeting
Monument

For details of other stalls around the region call 07858 346 276 or email frfinortheast@googlemail.com

MANCHESTER

Every Saturday
Street stalls
Manchester City Centre
For details call 07519 427 093 or email mcrcgrfi@fmail.net

GLASGOW

Tuesday 9 June 7.30pm
Public forum: Marxist theory of crisis and breakdown

Tuesday 23 June 7.30pm
Public forum: Marx and Capital

Tuesday 7 July 7.30pm
Public forum: Lenin and imperialism

Tuesday 21 July 7.30pm
Public forum: Socialism for the 21st century

All at Partick Burgh Halls on Burgh Hall Street, near Partick Rail station/underground

On 13 September FRFI is entering a team in the annual Glasgow to Edinburgh 50-mile cycle ride to raise money towards our fighting fund. To take part or sponsor us please call 07779 785 529.

DUNDEE

Every Saturday 1-3pm
Street stalls
Murraygate, Dundee City Centre

Tuesday 16 June and 14 July 7.30pm
Readers and supporters group
Room G7, Dundee University Tower, Perth Road.

For further information on events and activities in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee call 07779 785 529 or email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

RATB EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesday 16 June 7-9.30pm
Second in a series of discussions on Che Guevara: the economics of revolution
Upstairs at The Perseverance
Corner of Lambs Conduit Street and Great Ormond Street, WC1

Sunday 26 July 3-11pm
Music and politics to celebrate Cuba's 26 July Movement
The Jamm, 261 Brixton Road, SW9 6LH

Tuesday 28 July 7-9.30pm
Third in a series of discussions on Che Guevara: the economics of revolution
Upstairs at the Perseverance as above

For further details, call 020 7837 1688 or email office@ratb.org.uk

LIVERPOOL

Tuesday 23 June 7.30pm
Solidarity with socialist Cuba! Report back from RATB brigade to Cuba

Tuesday 7 July 7.30pm
Che and the construction of Cuban socialism
Discussion on Che Guevara: the economics of revolution

Tuesday 28 July 7.30pm
Che: imperialism and socialism
Discussion on Che Guevara: the economics of revolution

All at Methodist Centre, next door to News from Nowhere, Bold Street

MANCHESTER

Sunday 7 June 2pm
Film: Bolivia – this land is ours
Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street

Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 July
Weekend of action – Celebrate 50 years of the Cuban Revolution
For details contact 07535 616 325 or email manc@ratb.org.uk

GLASGOW

Thursday 11 June 7.30pm
Book launch: Che Guevara: the economics of revolution
A talk with the author Helen Yaffe
Waterstone's bookshop, Sauchiehall Street

Thursday 25 June 7.30pm
Revolutionary Cuba: eyewitness accounts, film and discussion
Jury's Inn Hotel, 80 Jamaica Street

Sunday 26 July 1-4pm
Street meeting: power and democracy – defend the Cuban Revolution!
Buchanan Street (Outside Borders)

DUNDEE

Tuesday 30 June 7.30pm
The Cuban people do not surrender their political power!
Report back from Cuba – video, photos and discussion.
Room G7, Dundee University Tower, Perth Road.

Saturdays 27 June and 25 July 1-4pm
Street stall
Murraygate, Dundee City Centre

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name

Address

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SUBSCRIBE to the best anti-imperialist newspaper in Britain FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Thank you for solidarity with Cuba

It was a great pleasure to learn about you from your friends who came to Cuba and told me about the RCG. I admire your work and devotion to the Cuban Revolution, and I thank you on behalf of my people for your solidarity.

We are living in troubled times and our societies need young people's efforts more than ever. Our struggle has to be carried out daily and needs to reach every corner of the world. Our responsibility is huge, because our existence depends on our victory.

I just wanted to send my militant greetings and my admiration for being communists and friends of the Cuban Revolution from within imperialism itself. That takes a great deal of courage. We are the beacon of the new global and socialist society and that beacon has to become a great storm of fire,

which erases once and for all the oppressive capitalist system.

Cuban revolutionaries know that we are not alone, that we can count on you, that we have your solidarity and your friendship. We support you and admire every one of the RCG's members. We feel you are our brothers and sisters. For revolutionaries like us there aren't any borders, because the necessity for socialism is worldwide. Revolutionaries are a brotherhood and so, my dearest friends, you may always count on our loyalty to revolution, socialism and communist principles.

Keep up the good work! Rock around the blockade! Free the Cuban Five! Socialism or death! Towards victory, always. Spread the beacon.

ALEJANDRO
Union of Young Communists,
Havana, Cuba

Revolutionary greetings

Warm red greetings. I'm a long-time political prisoner in the US. I've been receiving your paper and finding it useful and informative for over a year. I'd like to keep getting it. My state sentence ended and I began an on-and-after sentence (53 years) so I was transferred from a state prison in

Massachusetts to a federal penitentiary in Arizona. So please send the paper here.

For more information on US political prisoners, check out a major voice of ours – www.4struggle.org. Issue 12 should be up online soon.

Revolutionary greetings and a salute to you and your work. Amanda!

JAAN LAAMAN (10372-016)
USP Tucson, PO Box 24550,
AZ 85734, USA

G20 police set dog on protester

On 1 April, as a friend and I attempted to join the G20 Climate Camp protest at Bishopsgate, we came up against a row of six policemen with dogs blocking one of the roads. The dogs were extremely agitated even though there were no protesters in the area. One man, obviously a little worse for wear and not at all coherent, did a little dance in front of one of the police officers. The policeman responded by loosening the dog's leash and letting the dog jump at the man. We all ran; when we went back to see what had happened, the man who had been maimed by the police dog was walking around in a daze with his upper right arm ripped through to the bone. Some people vomited. A couple of us tried to guide the man to get him some medical help. We took him to a police block and asked them to call an ambulance, to which the

police officer replied 'You've got a mobile phone, haven't you?' To our horror and disbelief, the man was arrested shortly after this.

The next day we joined the vigil at the Bank of England for Ian Tomlinson, who died during the G20 protests as a result of police brutality. We sat down for a minute of silence; I then wrote a message of remembrance. When I looked up, the whole area had been sealed and we were surrounded by two rows of police officers, silently intimidating us. I suffered a panic attack for the first time ever and was allowed to leave, but while the actions of the police during these events may deter a few people from attending future demonstrations, it will only make the majority more determined.

SARAH TAYLOR
London

I just want to tell you my feelings about today's activity [by the Rock around the Blockade brigade] at the 'El Principe' community workshop in Havana.

I really feel impressed by all your opinions and points of view, but in essence the thing that impressed me most was your spirit of solidarity with us and the love that you feel for my country and its great cause. I feel proud to know people like you, so realistic, brave, sensitive, simple, noble and responsible. Thank you once again for all the affection and love that you transmit and because you keep your eyes open to the world around you.

MAYTE PACHECO VAZQUEZ
Havana, Cuba
rafapacheco@infomed.sld.cu

Basque workers protest against crisis

The General Strike held on 21 May in the south of the Basque country was a success. In spite of the boycott by the unions CCOO and UGT and various employers' organisations and misinformation spread by the mainstream media; in spite of everything, the facts speak for themselves: over 53% of the companies stopped completely, with major disruption in others. By midday, there were large demonstrations in the major cities of the south of the Basque country: 15,000 people in Bilbao, 10,000 in San Sebastian (Donostia, in Basque) and Pamplona (Iruñea) and more than 8,000 in Vitoria (Gasteiz).

The Basque working class, women and men, took to the streets to denounce the capitalist crisis, and make it clear that the workers are not willing to pay for a crisis (generated by big capitalists and bankers, and the politicians of right-wing governments).

For more information see www.gara.net or the website of the LAB-Basque trade union: www.labsindikatu.org

We want to also reiterate our thanks to the trade union organisations that sent us solidarity. Unity is strength.

IGOR URRUTIKOETXEA
Secretary of International
Relations, on behalf of
the militant section of the
FOB union

Hillsborough: 20 years on, still waiting for justice

It is now 20 years since the Hillsborough stadium tragedy which resulted in the deaths of 96 people on 15 April 1989. The tragedy was caused by a crush at the Sheffield Wednesday football stadium when a large number of Liverpool fans were let into the ground during an FA cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest.

The police took the decision to open the gates to all the fans rather than follow the normal overcrowding procedure of delaying the start of the game. It was a disastrous mistake and one which they began to cover up as soon as the extent of the disaster became apparent. The police were also responsible for stewarding inside the ground, such as directing fans away from pens that were already full. This did not happen and contributed towards the crush.

Rather than have their negligence exposed, the police immediately tried to blame the fans by releasing statements that said they were out of control, aggressive and drunk. They fed disgusting lies to the media that fans had been stealing from and urinating on the dead and on the police, and had blocked police and ambulances from attending to the injured. The *Sun* newspaper

enthusiastically printed these lies. A boycott of the *Sun* was established by the people of Liverpool that survives in much of the city 20 years later.

The inquests into the Hillsborough deaths proved controversial. Coroner Dr Stefan Popper limited the main inquest to events up until 3.15pm on the day of the disaster – just nine minutes after the match was halted and the crowd began to spill onto the pitch. Popper said this was because all of the victims were either dead, or brain dead, by 3.15pm. This decision angered the families of the victims, many of whom felt this meant the inquest was not able to consider the inadequate response of the police and the other emergency services after that time. The inquest returned a verdict of accidental death, which let the police off the hook. Relatives have continued to campaign unsuccessfully to have the inquest reopened.

Hillsborough is synonymous with police cover-up, press collusion and media lies that seek to demonise the working class. With the recent death of Ian Tomlinson we have witnessed such lies and collusion again. The campaign of the Hillsborough families is as important and relevant today as ever. Twenty years on we still call for justice and a boycott of the *Sun*.

ANDREW ALEXANDER
North London

Michael Martin – an MP fit for imperialism

The media has had plenty to say about former Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin. Ignore the phoney bleatings of his ilk in parliament, suggesting that

he was a victim of class prejudice from the *Daily Telegraph* and the opposition: this pickpocket was helping himself to whatever was going, big time! Arrogant rogues like him, a particular product of the British labour aristocracy, and his sort of colourful thievery, are guaranteed to sell as many newspapers as the breathtaking fiddles of Tory toffs. On his way from the family pile in posh Bishopriggs to Celtic Park, this Labour Party chancer charged us hundreds of pounds for chauffeur-driven Jaguars and Mercs. On a salary of £138,724, he had the nerve to charge £173.90 for a trip to Springburn Jobcentre in 2004. Springburn, cited as the source of Martin's working class

credentials, should shame this corrupt politician: since 1979 he has presided over the absolute decline of this once heavily-industrialised area. Martin himself, beginning as an engineering shop steward at Rolls-Royce, climbed to the top of the dung heap via Glasgow City Council's Labour Party monopoly.

In 30 years, Springburn has fallen to the bottom of statistical tables for employment, health and housing – life expectancy for males in Springburn is 12 years lower than more prosperous parts of Scotland and unemployment is 2.5 times the national average. While Michael Martin rose higher and higher, heroin moved in to soil the future of working class youth. His story is the story of the corrupt Labour Party and its constituencies everywhere in Britain. Michael Martin reached the top; he may have fallen a little way, but he will be more than compensated by his £1.4 million pension deal and a seat in the House of Lords.

MICHAEL MACGREGOR
Dundee, Scotland

Concert Five ready to fight charges of 'racism'

Prosecutors have raised charges of racism against five campaigners from the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC). During a concert at the Edinburgh Festival on 29 August 2008 by the Jerusalem Quartet, 'cultural ambassadors' for the Israeli state and 'distinguished IDF musicians', the five stood up and heckled the quartet. Despite the peaceful nature of the interruption, concert security employed heavy-handed tactics and there were a number of arrests.

The campaigners were

originally charged with 'breach of the peace', but in March this year, a week before their trial, the Procurator Fiscal deserted the case and brought forward new charges stating that the protest was 'racially motivated' and that the five were motivated by 'malice and ill will' towards 'members of an ethnic group'. The five welcome the new charges which will provide them with an opportunity to refute the allegations of 'racism' made against pro-Palestinian campaigners by the Zionist lobby once and for all.

The British state is clearly taken aback by the widespread support for the Palestinian struggle and the boycott of commercial, cultural and academic institutions which support the Israeli state.

Elsewhere in Scotland, FRFI has

been active in several pickets of supermarkets stocking Israeli goods, alongside the SPSC. According to the Association of Israeli Manufacturers, the commercial boycott has forced two thirds of Israeli exporters to slash their prices in a desperate attempt to win back business. Mick Napier, one of the five, commented that: 'It should come as no surprise that the same government that co-operates with Israel to criminalise and punish Palestinian people as a whole, should work at home to criminalise those in active solidarity with a people resisting military control and refugees demanding their rights to be repatriated.'

PADDY FORBES
Dundee, Scotland

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! 2009 Fighting Fund

Help us raise £10,000!

New political opportunities are opening up to create an anti-imperialist movement in Britain. FRFI needs to take advantage of them for all the reasons set out on page 14. Even before our Summer Campaign started we have had to increase our print run. But we need to extend our facilities in the regions and move to set up more local offices from which to organise and extend our campaigning work. For that we need your financial support. Please give generously.

Name

Address

Donation £

Please make cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications and send to FRFI Fighting Fund, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

British state terrorises Pakistani students

On 8 April, 12 young men were arrested in a high profile 'anti-terror raid'. Their only 'crime' was to be students from Pakistan – the latest target of Britain's imperialist war in the Middle East and Asia. NICKI JAMESON reports.

The government claimed to have smashed a terrorist cell and prevented an 'Easter bombing campaign'. The press was awash with headlines along the lines of 'Al Qaeda terror plot to bomb Easter shoppers' (*Daily Telegraph*). It quickly transpired that 11 out of the 12 were Pakistani nationals who had come to Britain on student visas. This in turn created its own furore: 'Student Passport to Terror – Scandal of how Britain hands out thousands of visas to bogus students, including Al Qaeda fanatics' (*Daily Mail*).

There was no bombing campaign and the students were not bogus. No amount of police interrogation, house raids and internet trawls could come

up with any evidence to charge any of those arrested with anything. The Labour government and Association of Chief Police Officers have repeatedly argued to extend the length of time that people arrested on suspicion of terrorism can be detained, demanding anything from 42 to 90 days. However, neither the current 28-day period nor the previous limit of 14 days were necessary for the police to ascertain that there was not a shred of evidence against any of these young men. By 12 April one 18-year-old had been 'released' and by 22 April all 12 were 'free'. 'Released' and 'free' are relative here, as in fact ten were not released but simply, as has happened

to so many others in similar situations, handed over to the UK Border Agency to be detained under immigration law pending deportation on grounds of 'national security'.

Bombs that never were

The big story of a bombing campaign that never was is nothing new. In 2000 the police warned that 'dissident Irish Republicans' were about to mount a 'Christmas bombing campaign'. By 2005, Al Qaeda was supposedly planning to disrupt Christmas. Neither of these scare stories came to anything. However the scares assisted all those in Parliament and the police campaigning for yet more draconian legislation and powers.

In 2004, eight men, one woman and a 16-year-old boy were arrested in raids across the northwest of England involving 400 police officers. *The Sun* rushed to print the claim that a plot to bomb Manchester United football ground had been foiled – 'Al Qaeda fanatics planned to blow themselves up amid 67,000 unsuspecting supporters...The Islamic fanatics planned to sit all around the ground to cause maximum carnage.' There was no such plot against the football ground or anywhere else. The innocent people arrested were Iraqi Kurds with no interest in religion and little in politics, but quite a lot in football. They had been targeted out of sheer racism and the link made to Manchester United after a ticket stub was found in one of the flats raided.

In 2006 Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Paul Stephenson declared that a plan to 'cause untold death and destruction' and 'mass murder on an unimaginable scale' had been foiled with the arrest of 24 people. 'We believe that the terrorists' aim was to smuggle explosives onto

planes in hand luggage to detonate them in flight', Stephenson alleged. However, within days it was clear that there was no such plan. No reservations had been made nor airline tickets purchased by any of those arrested.

The same year, in an operation costing £2 million, 250 police officers, armed and with many dressed in chemical protection suits, sealed off an area in Forest Gate, east London and raided the home of brothers Mohammed Abdul Kahar and Abul Koyair, who were supposedly manufacturing cyanide for a 'dirty bomb'. They shot Mohammed Abdul Kahar at point-blank range, while Abul Koyair was wounded in the head. Both were arrested and detained for seven days before being released without charge. Nine other people, including a baby, were taken to Plaistow police station, held in the police canteen and 'persuaded' to give DNA samples and fingerprints, with no access to solicitors. Again, there was no bomb and no plot.

Of the 1,471 arrests under anti-terrorism law which took place between 11 September 2001 and 31 March 2008, only 521 resulted in any kind of charge and only 340 in a charge related to terrorism (the majority of which charges were the specious 'possession of an article for terrorist purposes', 'membership of a proscribed organisation' and 'fundraising for terrorist purposes'). Of those arrested just 13% have gone on to be convicted of any kind of terrorist offence.

Attacking students

Even after it was clear that none of those arrested in April were guilty of anything, the attack on the colleges that some of them had come to study at continued. On 21 May *The Times* headlined 'Degrees of dishonesty'. A

supporting article was called 'Sham colleges open doors to Pakistani terror suspects'; the continued implication being that Pakistani students coming to Britain are generally terrorist sympathisers as well as 'immigration cheats'.

This all fits in very well with Immigration Minister Phil Woolas' current crusade against foreign students. On 1 April new measures came into force whereby all educational establishments accepting foreign students have to be vetted by the UK Borders Agency.

A climate of terror

It is no coincidence that, as Britain and the US shift the military focus from Iraq to Afghanistan and spread their operation across the border, those under attack are from Pakistan. British imperialist offensives are always accompanied by racism and criminalisation of anyone here who might be even slightly supportive to or identify with those under attack. The constant overlap between the use of anti-terrorism, criminal and immigration law and the accompanying endless media cacophony ensure that, even though repeated raids are revealed to have targeted the innocent, the community under attack will continue to be treated with suspicion.

Fighting back

Manchester RCG comrades have joined the Justice for the North Ten campaign, which was set up in solidarity with these criminalised young men, who continue to be held in the high security wing of Strangeways prison. The campaign has been publicising the case and demonstrating regularly outside the prison. See www.j4nw10.org for more information.



Supporters of the imprisoned students demonstrate outside Strangeways prison, Manchester

Support sacked cleaners!

Migrant workers, the majority of Latin American origin, employed to clean the high-powered offices of the City of London, have been organising successfully over the past year for union recognition and against poverty wages. But the cleaning companies have hit back, attempting to introduce longer and more unsociable shifts and sacking workers when they refuse to change their working hours. In particular, the activists leading these campaigns have been victimised. In 2008, five cleaners employed by Mitie Cleaning and Support Services at the Willis Building near Liverpool Street were sacked after leading a successful campaign for the London Living Wage of £7.20 an hour. They have been staging weekly protests outside the Willis Building with the support of Latin American groups, anarchist and communist activists and groups of cleaners from similar struggles.

The case of Alberto Durango, a Unite branch committee member, who was instrumental in a successful campaign to force his cleaning employers Lancaster to pay its workers a living wage and to prevent changes to their working hours, has many parallels with the Mitie workers. In his case, the company retaliated by summoning him to a meeting where he was confronted by police and immigration officials, arrested for 'using a false name' (which the company had known about for the ten years he worked for them) and held in a police cell while his home was searched. He was subsequently suspended from his job. And, like the Mitie workers, the cleaners at Lancaster found themselves abandoned by their union, Unite. Alberto spoke to FRFI after the regular Friday picket of the Willis building.

'I got involved in the Justice for Cleaners movement, organised by Unite. Unfortunately, although there were 30 cleaners at my workplace, Schroders, asking them to help us organise there for a living wage, Unite never visited us. So we mobilised cleaners to go to the union headquarters in Holborn to ask them

why they don't want us to fight. One of the main organisers took us aside and recommended that we wear masks for our demonstrations. We said 'Why? We are not criminals. We just want what is fair for us'. We tried to push more and they promised three demonstrations and then each time cancelled them on spurious grounds: the last time, they said the company had called for negotiations so we should call it off. And we said 'what have they negotiated?' and the organiser told us that we had the right to go to a consultation meeting! At the time I didn't understand why they did this, but I've been learning more as I've become involved in different struggles and I know now the union organisers just want to get the salaries and the commodities and don't want to fight; they are building up money like big business, like capitalism. They don't represent us. So we decided to organise our own protest.

The company responded by trying to change our working hours, so we decided to fight. We wrote to the union, to Schroders and to the cleaning company, fighting in three ways. They were trying to reduce the num-

ber of workers from 30 to nine in a clear attack on union organisation in our workplace. In October 2008 we all went out, 30 cleaners and our families, with support from many Latin American solidarity groups and anti-deportation campaigns. It was a successful demonstration. They called for negotiations and after some intimidation and threats from the company, we won the increase and they didn't change the time. But after that, as is inevitable when you fight for your rights, the company retaliated by attacking the organisers. It was the same story with Mitie.

We have been demonstrating outside Willis for three months. We wish the union would support us. All the organisations involved in this campaign wrote to the secretary of Unite and they responded by saying that they are a fighting union and we were in the wrong. We think we are paying the union to defend us and the union should believe the workers and not the companies. We are getting a lot of solidarity. Last week I was in a forum with the Visteon workers and they were shocked when they heard our story and they had the same situation



International workers' day demonstration, London, 1 May 2009

with the union – the same organiser. The Visteon workers are supporting us. That is very important, because all the workers, we need to support each other, because the bosses are powerful, they have got money and the media and the police in their favour, so we need to organise amongst ourselves to defend ourselves.

Support the sacked Mitie cleaners: demonstrate outside the Willis Building, Lime Street, London EC3, 1-2pm every Friday.

Sign the online petition demanding Unite support sacked cleaners at: www.petitiononline.com/jobs4all/petition.html