

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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US soldiers arrest a young Haitian in Port-au-Prince

INSIDE

HAITI

Haiti recolonised p1
Haiti: a history of oppression p4

CAPITALIST CRISIS

The great NHS cover-up p2
Banks on a roll as Britain
staggers out of recession p3

MIDDLE EAST

Palestine: Egypt tightens noose
on Gaza p5

ENVIRONMENT

Climate change conference:
ALBA leads call to save the
environment p6

LATIN AMERICA

Bolivia p7
Venezuela: Chavez takes over
the banks p10

AFGHANISTAN/IRAQ WAR

Obama surge means more
brutality for Afghan people p8
The Iraq Inquiry: imperialists
clean their stables p9

CUBA

Cuban socialism in 2010 p11

FIGHT RACISM

Labour government criminalises
protest p16

news, prisoners fightback,
round-up and letters

HAITI

RECOLONISED

The earthquake that struck Haiti on 12 January measured 7 on the Richter scale, releasing energy equivalent to a half-megaton nuclear bomb, 500,000 tons of TNT. By 28 January estimates of deaths reached up to 200,000 people. In Port-au-Prince there are 500,000 homeless people in 447 improvised camps. People around the world, seeing the devastation, have donated generously to help them. But on 23 January Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive said that 90% of the people in camps had received no aid. US imperialism has moved quickly to recolonise the country. **TREVOR RAYNE** reports.

US President Obama responded to the earthquake: 'This is one of those moments that calls out for American leadership.' The US ruling class's credibility and power is tested in Haiti; it must ensure that it and not Europe commands Haiti's fate and Cuba's selfless contribution of medical assistance must be censored. For domestic political reasons the US government has to be seen to be responding to the catastrophe following the complete racist failure in New Orleans in 2005. US priorities were quickly demonstrated. By 14 January the air-

craft carrier *USS Carl Vinson* was moored off Port-au-Prince and troops from the US 82nd Airborne Division had secured the airport. The 82nd Airborne Division is a combat force whose recent record includes suppression of the 1967 Detroit uprising, the invasions of Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989), service in former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan and in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. On 22 January the US secured 'formal approval' from the United Nations to take over all Haitian air and sea ports and to 'secure' roads. No Haitian

signed this agreement. (John Pilger *New Statesman*, 28 January 2010). This is the fourth US invasion of Haiti.

Fidel Castro said Cuba was sending doctors not soldiers. By 26 January the US had 15,400 soldiers in Haiti and Cuba had 766 doctors who had treated 26,000 people. There were 374 Cuban medical workers in Haiti when the earthquake struck, assisted by approximately 400 Haitians who were medically trained in Cuba. Two Cuban field hospitals were operational in Port-au-Prince within 24 hours of the earthquake (Hugh O'Shaughnessy, *The Guardian* 29 January 2010). On 17 January the French government complained to the US about its management of the airport when a French medical flight was turned away. The following day Medicines sans Frontières complained that several of its cargo planes had been 'blocked' from landing, 'Priority must be given immediately to aircraft carrying life-saving equipment and medical personnel' and not to military equipment and personnel.

While the corporate media ran stories of looting and gangs, UN tanks were dispatched into Port-au-Prince's

poorer communities such as Cite Soleil, a stronghold of support for the evicted former President Aristide. The *Wall Street Journal* reported, 'US officials have blamed security concerns for holding up relief. Yet a team of Cuban doctors were seen on Monday [18 January] treating hundreds of patients without a gun in sight.' All flights into Haiti were halted for three hours for US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit. Italian official Guido Bertolaso described the US intervention as 'pathetic...it's truly a show of force, but it's completely out of touch with reality' and referring probably to Bill Clinton's visit said, 'Some individuals were putting on a vanity show for the television cameras instead of rolling up their sleeves.'

French doctors accused the US military of causing unnecessary deaths by delaying relief groups from reaching the injured. It was six days before the US Air Force dropped bottled water on people suffering from thirst and dehydration. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that an estimated 20,000 people were dying each day due to lack of access to medical treat-

ment and on 26 January it carried a letter from three New York doctors who were among the first to reach Haiti after the earthquake: 'Our operation received virtually no support from any branch of US government, including the State Department.' They said that they had quickly run out of supplies and 'Later, as we were leaving Haiti, we were appalled to see warehouse-size quantities of unused medicines, food and other supplies at the airport surrounded by hundreds of US and international soldiers.'

UN troops fired rubber bullets at people milling around food trucks on 25 January. The following day they fired tear gas and pepper spray at crowds in a tent camp and tanks were brought up to threaten the crowd. Elections scheduled for 28 February have been postponed indefinitely and Aristide's Lavalas party has been prohibited from competing, whenever they take place. This is the recolonisation of Haiti. All socialists must demand the removal of US and UN troops from Haiti, the cancellation of Haiti's foreign debt and the right of Haiti's people to self-determination.

continued on page 4

Spending freeze, cuts and closures – the great NHS cover-up

HANNAH CALLER

The NHS faces a cash squeeze estimated to be between £8bn and £20bn by 2017. But while services suffer and patients lose out, consultancy companies are doing very well. One such company, McKinsey, a US-based firm which charges over £2,000 a day, is reaping massive profits. In September 2009 it produced a report for the Department of Health which proposed cutting 137,000 jobs in the NHS to save £2.4bn a year. It also proposes reducing medical school places. It doesn't mention, however, what Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) – local arms of the Department of Health (DoH) – spend on management consultants to support 'World Class Commissioning' and other such privatisation gimmicks – estimated to be an average of over £1.2 million in 2008/09 compared to £360,000 in 2006/07.

London

Within London, the McKinsey report assumes that PCTs will face a funding gap of £5.1bn by 2017 and that even if tariffs paid to providers were reduced by 3-4% per year, they would still be £2bn short. Hospitals will also face a funding gap of £2.9-3.4bn. However, a British Medical Association report from November 2009 published in mid-January, *London's NHS on the brink*, said McKinsey's report had not been made available to PCTs, and that there was little evidence that NHS and Foundation Trust board meetings had had access to the full report. The DoH has withheld publication of the document, and NHS London Strategic Health Authority has refused to release it despite Freedom of Information requests. Trusts have had

to rely on key points leaked via the Health Service Journal and a summary of the conclusions that NHS London has designed to put out.

NHS London's response to McKinsey is to press on with the 2007 Ara Darzi proposals, *Healthcare for London: a Framework for Action*. This includes reducing health care costs by £1.5bn per year, introducing polyclinics and differentiating hospitals in terms of the services they should provide. Darzi however failed to address key points that NHS London continue to overlook. These include the fact that when you remove services from Foundation Hospitals, which receive money through payment by results, their costs do not fall as fast as their income; and the fact that moving services to polyclinics at the level proposed requires huge numbers of additional doctors, nurses and other support staff, which are not accounted for in the document let alone in post.

NHS London has also decided to downgrade and close many district general hospitals, shut A&E departments, and close up to a third of the capital's beds. Services such as A&E and trauma will be concentrated in specialist hospitals, with the overall aim of delivering most care through the 100 planned polyclinics and GP practices. By 2017, it is hoped that polyclinic attendances will account for approximately 75% of hospital A&E visits and 50% of out-patient visits. NHS London assistant director of strategy Sam Higginson said 'no change is not an option', conceding that some hospitals will close altogether and others will become polyclinics. He hasn't worked out how many will be changed, but said that 'we [in London] have too many beds already'. But since 2005, London has

lost 25.5% of its elderly care beds and 21% of its NHS mental health beds. Private mental health facilities now cost the NHS over £860 million a year because of the inpatient bed shortage, and many acute hospital trusts report that bed occupancy rates are consistently over the target of 85%, and near to 100%. Meanwhile London's PCTs and Trust Boards are reporting increases in A&E attendances and emergency admissions. The figures do not add up!

more than £400 million in 2014. One example is Queen's Hospital in Romford, east London: £238 million to build, Barking, Havering and Redbridge Trust (BHRT) which runs the hospital will have to pay £2.28bn by 2042 when the contract ends – more than nine times the building cost. The index-linked unitary charge the Trust has to pay was £43.5 million in 2009; it will be over £90 million in the last few years of the contract. These escalating costs are contractually

the capital. Bromley's Princess Royal University Hospital Trust in southeast London will end up paying £788 million for a building which initially cost £118 million; the scheme at Barts and the London NHS Trust in east London, the largest PFI deal in the NHS, costs £1bn, a fraction of 35 years of index-linked repayments which will start at £96 million in 2013.

Selling off community services

Transforming Community Services is the government plan to privatise services provided by about 400,000 community health professionals (district nurses, speech therapists, health visitors, etc) and 200,000 support workers employed by PCTs. There are three options: become a Community Foundation Trust, or a direct provider organisation like a hospital trust, or set up as a 'social enterprise' with the loss of NHS terms and conditions, pensions, and so on. A 'social enterprise' will be given a three-year contract after which its services will be put out to tender in competition with health industry multinationals running the proposed polyclinics.

When the major political parties say that they will protect frontline services from cuts in state spending after the election, they are lying. The financial squeeze hasn't even started yet and already the NHS is facing crisis. The private sector is allowed to pick and choose the most profitable areas to buy, while the existing primary care infrastructure will not be able to cater for the proposed switch from hospital to community provision. Private companies will compete to run polyclinics for profit and patients will lose the continuity of care essential for good quality primary care. People's health will suffer. ■



The PFI scheme at Barts and the London NHS Trust in east London will be the largest PFI deal in the NHS

Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

London has 20 PFI hospital building schemes costing £2.6bn. Repayments however will cost the NHS in London £16.7bn, more than six times the basic cost. London's PFI payments will rise from almost £250 million in 2009 to

ally binding irrespective of the financial situation of the trust. BHRT currently has a cumulative deficit of £105 million. The new building has never been fully opened or fully staffed for financial reasons. This absurd situation is repeated in PFI schemes across

Education Notes Hot air, inequality and cutbacks

If I ruled the world

Vladimir Lenin is said to have described the British House of Commons as 'the biggest gas works in Europe'. If he meant that it is full of hot air and bluster, he was spot on, particularly in the run-up to a General Election. Politicians are spouting platform promises about their vision for the future and how they will improve education – if they get your vote. The Tories want teaching to be a 'noble profession', Labour wants 'world class' training and skills. Such election pledges are no different to any wish list saying: 'If I ruled the world, all schools, colleges and universities would be excellent all the time and all teachers and students would be great'. In reality education budgets will be cut or stagnate and the uneven distribution of resources will be reinforced by continued privatisation and privilege.

Who gets the money?

The schools budget alone has risen by 56% in the last decade, reaching £31 billion a year. The Department for Innovations, Universities and Skills today has a budget of £21.5 billion. The approximate increase in public funding for universities between 1997 and 2009 is £4 billion, doubling to £8 billion today. Yet these massive sums

are failing to generate what Labour calls 'class mobility'. Recent research shows that the education system has not reduced inequality between social classes in 12 years of Labour government. Data from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and a long-term study, the Millennium Cohort, show that family income still determines future educational achievement and earning power. Despite Labour's promise to eradicate child poverty by 2020, four million children (roughly 30%) live below the poverty line. Using Free School Meals (FSM) as an indicator of poverty (an inadequate measurement that excludes the majority of the low paid), surveys show that poverty creates an educational divide that emerges early and expands over time. By the age of 11, students receiving FSM are twice as likely to miss basic literacy and numeracy standards. Just over 6% of FSM pupils take A levels, compared to about 40% overall and in 2008 a mere 176 (about 0.5%) of these students received three A grades.

The failure

Why has this massive education budget, which has doubled under Labour, failed to produce a more socially mobile and equitable society? Why will

it fail to do so under the Tories who, in pre-election mode, are talking up support for the poor? Because the money is poured into the mouths of multinational corporations whose only interest is profit. The budget is feeding the appetite of an increasingly privatised state education system in which layer upon layer of parasitic education-business organisations make profits out of educational provision.

So, for example, education software, used in 22,000 schools, is a profit-maker for private companies. Two of these, Capita and Broncom, are currently at loggerheads over anti-competitive practices in which, it is claimed, Capita overcharged schools by £75 million for IT over the last ten years. Contracting out school and college supplies is mega business, and takeovers and buy-outs are now as much part of the education scene as playground fights. The 157 Group, representing Britain's richest further education colleges, is selling on college-branded higher diploma courses to China, shouldering out established awarding bodies like Edexcel and City and Guilds.

Import and export

The Higher and Further Education sectors are also being sustained by the

student import market, with an estimated 600,000 people coming to Britain each year, worth about £1.5 billion of trade. There is no legal requirement for colleges to be registered or licensed and they can be set up by anybody. As a result hundreds of overseas students have been cheated out of money paid upfront for non-existent courses by phony colleges. Additionally there were recent headline scares about overseas students who are granted visas to study here but, allegedly, intend to overstay. Prime Minister Brown has ordered a review of the student visa process, in particular for those from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This fits neatly into Labour's agenda on terror threats and immigration controls, but is against the spirit of enterprise 'connecting the UK to the global education market' that the government simultaneously encourages.

Nor is it just Bournemouth Business School International and similar colleges that claim they will lose some 80% of business if government proposals go ahead. The overseas students, whether funded by rich parents or home country scholarships, pay three times as much as home students. Private fee-paying residential schools have also been a lucrative business in recent years and fear a clampdown by the Home Office.

No country for young people

At present nearly one million young people aged 16-24 years old in Britain are unemployed. The jobless rate for young white people is 20%, while almost half of young black people are unemployed. The government has

decreed that by 2013 teenagers will no longer be allowed to leave school at 16 without continuing in some form of education, training or employment that includes training. This Raising the Participation Age programme was announced by the DCSF as a way to raise the skills level of the workforce to compete internationally. The calculation is that by 2020 there will be three million fewer low-skilled jobs in Britain and that it is a 'social imperative' to control the rise in the number of Neets (young people not in employment, education or training). On educational attainment, Britain ranked 17 out of the 21 most advanced nations in 2009.

There is certainly a need to put an end to this damaging unemployment and dumping of young people onto the labour market to be hired or fired. The question is, can a marketised education system solve the problems of youth unemployment, with short-term courses, part-time jobs, testing regimes, vocational work in disappearing trades and all the other second-rate options so far on offer? We think not. Capitalism cannot sustain quality mass education and has no interest in doing so. After all, most of the privatised provision that the state education system has put out to tender is financed, in the end, and much more expensively, by central government. No businesses are going to educate and employ young people without financial reward, and the days of a seeming unending flow of funds from the DCSF to its friends in the education businesses may be coming to an end.

Susan Davidson

Banks on a roll as Britain staggers out of recession

'You have brought this country to the greatest financial panic in history'.

US Senator Smith Brookhart

'We brought this country, sir, to its standing in the world through speculation'.

Richard Whitney, Banker and

President of the New York Stock Exchange

(Hearing of the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency in 1932 on the causes of the great crash, cited in *The Observer* 17 January 2010)

During the crisis the losses of financial institutions were socialised and transferred to government balance sheets. The result of this and the fiscal stimulus – tax cuts, higher government spending etc – necessary to lift the major capitalist economies out of recession has been some of the highest public sector deficits seen in peace time. These deficits will be severely cut back by all major capitalist governments over the next few years, driving down the living standards of millions of working people. How quickly these cuts can be implemented is a major dispute among the ruling class. Cut too quickly and risk driving the country back into recession. Cut too slowly and risk the countries' credit rating on the international markets, making it more expensive to finance public borrowing. Whatever is decided by the various capitalist governments, the vast majority of their populations face years and years of austerity ahead. This is the context in which governments have been forced to take some action to deal with the speculative activities of the large international banks. In Britain, because of the dominant role these banks play in the British economy and the very high public sector deficit, the proximity of a general election has ensured that these issues have become particularly contentious.

Curbing the banks?

Britain, precisely because of the role the financial sector plays in the economy, has been the last of the major capitalist countries to come out of recession, registering a growth rate of 0.1% in the fourth quarter of 2009.² Financial services dominate the economy of Britain.³ The City of London is the world's leading financial centre. Half of the world's top 100 banks, 46% of asset managers and 46% of top insurers have a presence in Britain. 80% of Europe's £440bn hedge fund assets and around 60% of its private equity firms are in Britain. The assets of UK banks are five times Britain's GDP. Britain's foreign assets are also around five times Britain's GDP and 60% of those assets in 2008, £4,261bn or nearly three times the GDP, are loans and deposits abroad by UK banks. Financial services are vital for Britain's balance of payments, accounting for 70% of the large surplus on services trade. One quarter of corporate taxation comes from the financial services sector. It is simply not credible that any of the main ruling class parties will take measures to curb the financial sector that would undermine the City of London as the engine of British imperialist interests throughout the world.

In early January the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, insisted that the government had 'no intention' of sacrific-

While the large corporate banks contemptuously flaunt their vast profits once again by distributing massive bonuses to their partners and bank employees, politicians have to attempt to assuage the anger of millions of people who are suffering from the deepest recession since the 1930s. The speculative activities of the multinational banks are seen as the root cause of this crisis and it has been only an historically unprecedented intervention by capitalist states to support the banks that has led to national income of the main capitalist countries starting after a year or more, very tentatively, to grow again. That is why the ruling class has to show it is willing to consider measures to curb the speculative activities of the banks in an attempt to prevent such a financial crisis of the capitalist system happening again.¹ DAVID YAFFE reports on how the ruling class is confronting these problems in Britain.

ing the UK's leading role in financial services. 'There is no question of choice being made between financial services and manufacturing' (*Financial Times* 9 January 2010). This was a clear rebuff to those who might believe the supertax on bankers' bonuses above £25,000 this financial year, announced in the pre-budget report in December 2009, and the 50% tax rate on high earners' incomes to be introduced in April 2010 represented some return to so-called 'core values' for the Labour Party. When the Chancellor Alistair Darling announced his bonus tax he explicitly linked it with public outrage about bankers' pay. 'I say to the bankers: if you want to get off the front pages, for goodness sake show some of the restraint the public want you to' (*Financial Times* 25 January 2010). His concern is the approaching general election and he must show he is in tune with a public that is increasingly infuriated by bankers openly parading their wealth during a recession. This is not an attack on the City of London and its global role. Lord Myners, the City Minister, made this clear when he supported large bonuses for the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). Speaking to the Scottish Affairs Committee in mid-January, he said it was important that RBS could compete globally and was able to recruit and motivate staff. 'We are going to see major banks paying very high bonuses, and if we want RBS to play in a global world it has to sell itself appropriately' (*Financial Times* 14 January 2010).

Kraft's debt-financed £11.9bn takeover bid for Cadbury demonstrates how the interests of the financial services sector are paramount in the British economy. Fees of some \$390m (£250m) were shared out between banks, advisors and lawyers as a result of the deal. Hedge funds, which bought shares as the bid got underway, made a quick profit. The chief executive of Cadbury, Todd Stitzer, will receive around £12m in cash and shares from the sale. Cadbury's group employs 6,000 people in the UK and job losses are inevitable as Kraft will cut annual running costs by \$675m (*The Guardian* 20 January 2010).

In the third week of January the very high profits of the major US banks and the large annual bonuses for their bank employees in 2009 were reported. Goldman Sachs actually claimed it was showing restraint by cutting the share of its revenue allocated to pay from 48% to 35.8% – the lowest proportion since the bank became a public company in 1999. The compensation pool was in fact \$16.2bn and the average pay packet was \$498,000 per employee. Some partners would get millions. Its top London-based partners, in a supposed act of restraint, had their bonuses capped at £1m. Other partners, as well as non-partners, could still expect



Demonstration against the Kraft takeover of Cadbury: the interests of the financial services sector are paramount in the British economy

multi-million pound payouts. Average payouts for other banks ranged from \$94,000 at crisis-ridden Citigroup to \$378,000 at JP Morgan Chase. The resulting public outrage forced the politicians to respond in a more concerted way.

President Obama led the charge. Trying to seize back the political initiative after the loss of a senate seat in Massachusetts, he said he wanted to cut down the size and scope of the banks. 'Never again will the American taxpayer be held hostage by a bank that is too big to fail'. He is already seeking to impose a 0.15% levy on banks' assets over \$50bn to raise \$90bn over ten years from the largest 50 financial institutions as compensation for potential losses made from bank bailout programmes. Now he is calling for a ban on banks' proprietary trading – betting/speculating with their own funds to make profits – and a ban on owning, investing in or sponsoring hedge funds and private equity groups. This is a move in the direction of a separation of retail banking and investment banking. He also proposes more generally to limit the size of banks. Bank shares and stockmarkets fell, and bankers expressed outrage after Obama's speech, but much of this is gesture politics and will have little impact in reality once the commotion dies down. The major banks will take measures to avoid the impact of the new rules should they get

through Congress. The concentration and centralisation of banking capital will not be reversed. Indeed, during the financial crisis it was the policy of both US and UK governments to force the mergers of stronger banks with failing ones.

Obama's proposals became part of a somewhat spurious debate in Britain. Lord Myners, while calling for a review of investment banking and the 'greed is good' culture said that he didn't see 'anything in Obama's proposals' that would change the British approach of higher capital requirements for banks and 'living wills'. The latter would allow banks to be broken up without the need for taxpayer support should they collapse. Alistair Darling told the *Sunday Times* (24 January 2010) that Obama's proposals would not have prevented the crisis. He rejected limiting the size of banks and separating their activities. This is not surprising. RBS, now 84%-owned by the state, is a very large diverse bank which has some 22,000 investment bankers. Darling made it clear he would do nothing to 'disadvantage London relative to the rest of the world'.

The Conservatives chose to use Obama's intervention to hit back at the government. But their proposals are empty of real content and even contradictory. Shadow chancellor George Osborne wants to separate retail banking and investment banking

but only at the 'riskiest end' of the market and then as part of an international agreement. David Cameron, the Tory leader, said the banks should not be stopped from offering the opportunity to speculate. The Tory shadow financial secretary, Mark Hoban, told a London Chamber of Commerce meeting in mid-January in relation to the banks: 'You don't encourage a more balanced economy by cutting down the tallest flowers – you allow others to grow.' In reality, if they get back into power, the Tories, like the Labour Party, would not fundamentally change anything.

Paying for the crisis

In the third week in January Alistair Darling told the *Financial Times* (19 January 2010) that he will order his ministers to start work on the most swingeing cuts in public spending in a generation. Some departments face cuts of more than 16% over three years. Halving the deficit in four years, he said, was 'non-negotiable'. The extent of cuts in each department would be revealed in the Budget before the general election. In the same interview he stressed 'the importance of London as a financial services sector' and made it clear that the 50% supertax on bankers' bonuses would not be repeated. He even suggested that the new 50p top rate of income tax would eventually be removed, saying it was not introduced 'as a matter of ideology' but to counter the 'extraordinary' conditions affecting public finances. It is clear where the Labour government stands.

Already, in the pre-Budget report, Darling has capped public sector pay at 1% for two years from April 2010 and frozen personal allowances and tax thresholds. VAT, a regressive tax, has been put back to 17.5%. The extent of the departmental cuts needed to halve the deficit will mean that it will be working people paying for the financial crisis, with the poorer and more vulnerable sections of the working class suffering most.

Darling attempted to use the fragility of economic recovery in the last quarter of 2009 to hit back at the Tories and support his claim that the opposition would drive the country back into recession by cutting the public sector deficit early in 2010. This is, as we argued in the last issue of FRFI, simply electioneering. It matters little who will be in power after the general election as both parties share the same intention to slash the public sector deficit. With either party in power, it is clear that the interests of the financial services sector and the City of London take priority, as always, over the needs of the mass of the population.

1 Regular readers know that FRFI argues that the fundamental cause of the crisis is rooted in the crisis of capital accumulation and imperialism and the speculative activities of the banks are its product. See the articles on our website:

www.revolutionarycommunist.org under FRFI newspaper, Imperialism and Crisis. 2 This figure is provisional and could be revised up or down in the coming months. However it demonstrates the fragility of the upturn in the British economy and was well below expectations.

3 See FRFI 194 and FRFI 210 on our website for articles on the parasitic character of British capitalism.

HAITI

a history of oppression

In Haiti we see in microcosm the forces that threaten the species with destruction. Not the natural forces that inflicted the earthquake but the social and political forces that magnified its impact and which brought Haiti to ruin long before the fault line ruptured: the forces of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism.

When Christopher Columbus and a band of Spanish gold seekers landed on Haiti's north coast in 1492 there were perhaps 500,000 Taino Arawak people on the island of Hispaniola. By 1548 there were fewer than 500. The Spanish colonialists enslaved them, forced them to work in gold mines and supply food. Those who refused were hunted down by dogs, mutilated, raped and killed. Others died from influenza, smallpox and typhus.

From the 1520s slaves were imported from Africa. French and English forces preyed upon the island. By the end of the seventeenth century France was in control of Saint-Domingue, now Haiti. Saint-Domingue was described as 'a mill for crushing Negroes as much as for crushing sugar cane'. By 1789 Saint-Domingue supplied two-thirds of Europe's tropical products; it was France's most valuable colonial possession.

The slave revolt started in August 1791. Toussaint l'Ouverture joined the revolt, initially as a doctor then as military leader. A British invasion force landed in 1793. Despite calling up over 40,000 reinforcements they were expelled in 1798 by Toussaint's forces. The revolt continued and Haiti declared independence on 1 January 1804. The name Haiti was chosen by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a leader of the revolt, and was a Taiwo name meaning mountainous land. At the declaration of independence Dessalines's secretary is said to have commented, 'We will write this act of independence using a white man's skull for an inkwell, his skin for parchment, blood for ink and a bayonet

as pen.' The US and France refused to recognise Haiti's independence. George Washington's government sent \$400,000 to the white plantation owners. The revolt delivered a terrific blow against the slave system in the Americas.

In 1825, under threat of invasion and restoration of slavery, Haiti's ruling elite agreed to pay France an indemnity equivalent to \$21 billion in today's money to compensate for loss of land, equipment and human 'property'. In exchange, France recognised Haiti. In 1914 US Marines seized the Haitian government's gold deposits at gun point and deposited them in New York's National City Bank (Citibank), following a dispute over debt repayments. After a series of coups the US occupied Haiti in July 1915. Haiti's army was disbanded and replaced by a police



force under US officers. Unpaid, compulsory labour was re-introduced to Haiti. US Marines repressed peasant resistance using aerial bombardment.

Enforced poverty

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. 40% of Haiti's foreign debt, reaching \$1.8 billion at its peak, was run up by the Duvaliers. In exchange for loans the International Monetary Fund and World Bank forced Haiti to accept food imports. 30 years ago Haiti did not import rice. Today it imports almost all its rice. Haiti was the world's main sugar producer. Today it imports sugar. The US dumped subsidised rice and sugar on Haiti destroying much of its farming. The population of Port-au-Prince was 50,000 in the 1950s and 2-3 million today, swollen with people driven from the land. Prior to the earthquake the US Congress granted Haiti preferential treatment for garment imports. Port-au-Prince's sweatshop workers earn less than China's clothing workers. Remittances from Haitians who have fled abroad constitute a fifth of the economy.

Life expectancy in 2007 was 61 years. 55% of the people live on \$1.25 a day or less and 72% on \$2 or less a day. The average income for women is 37% that of men. The richest 10% of Haiti's people have 48% of income and the poorest 10% have 0.9%. The infant mortality rate is 60 per 1,000 live births. About 40% of the people are illiterate and unemployment has varied between 50-70% for over a decade.

They departed in 1934 but the National Bank remained a subsidiary of the US Export-Import Bank until 1947, when the final indemnity payment was made to France.

Mulattoes were elevated by US racists who saw it as natural that lighter skinned people should rule. US fruit companies were given concessions and mass evictions of peasant smallholders resulted.

The Duvaliers

Backed by the black middle class and medium-sized landowners, Francois Duvalier was elected president in 1957, defeating a candidate from the mulatto elite. 'Papa Doc' ruled with the Tontons Macoute, a secret police force that kidnapped, tortured and killed opponents. Duvalier closed down trade unions and the University of Haiti. He invited US Marines to train the Haitian army and offered the US government military bases and missile stations, presumably to target Cuba. When 19-year-old Jean-Claude Duvalier 'Baby Doc' was installed as president in 1971, two US warships anchored offshore. A counter-insurgency Leopard force was established, armed and trained by the US. Sustained by US imperialism, the Duvalier regimes turned the country into hell on earth: by 1980, 80% of people were unemployed, 40% homeless and 85% illiterate. Half the children did not live beyond four years. For every school in Haiti there were 35 prisons and for every teacher 189 soldiers. Malaria, pneumonia and tetanus were rife. 1985 foreign debt repayments were almost seven-times expenditure on education.

US multinationals developed a lucrative trade: the blood of surviving Haitians was rich in antibodies, much sought after by wealthy North Americans. Each month five tons of Haitian blood was shipped by Dow Chemicals, Armour Pharmaceutical and Laboratories Cutter to US markets.

Haitians fleeing this inferno were denied refuge in the US. US authorities imprisoned them in concentration camps in Florida, US-held Puerto Rico and later Guantanamo Bay in US-occupied Cuba. US and Bahamian ships sank refugees' boats, drowning many. A camp was opened in upstate New York where temperatures drop below freezing. Black and progressive organisations in the US and Puerto Rico threatened to tear down the fences.

Some 50,000 people were killed by the Duvalier regimes before 'Baby Doc' fled to France in 1986 after mass protests and a general strike against his government. A military junta of six generals took over the government. Former head of the Duvaliers' Presidential Guard Prosper Avril seized power in 1988 but was deposed two years later. Avril tortured political opponents, trade unionists and even a doctor attempting to practice community medicine.

Reform thwarted

On 16 December 1990 Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide won 67% of the vote to become Haiti's president. The US saw Aristide as a 'liberation theologian'; less Christian than Communist. Aristide calculated that France owed Haiti \$21 billion that should be returned so that Haiti 'can build primary schools, primary healthcare, water systems and roads'. He called for a minimum wage of \$5 a day! The CIA funded paramilitaries which targeted Aristide supporters and were prominent in the 1991 coup that deposed him. For three years Haiti was ruled by a military junta until the US military intervened to restore Aristide, on the understanding that he would implement US-dictated privatisation and remove import tariffs. Avril planned an assassination campaign against Aristide supporters in the Fanmi Lavalas Party. When Haitian police went to arrest Avril at his home they were met by US soldiers attempting to stop the arrest. Avril fled to the Colombian ambassador's residence and then to Israel. Aristide was re-elected president in November 2000. Avril returned to Haiti and was arrested to popular acclaim after US troops withdrew from Haiti in 2001.

Aristide continued to call for reparations for Haiti. In 2003 the country sent 90% of its foreign currency reserves to the US in debt repayments. The US again undermined the government, aiding opposition groups. In January 2004 opposition forces surrounded Port-au-Prince and Aristide was forced into exile, taken by the US military to Africa. Avril was in prison when Aristide was overthrown but released a few days later. UN troops were dispatched to Haiti. Rene Preval was elected president in 2006, while Aristide stayed in exile, where he remains to this day. Trevor Rayne

Obama: one year on

Barack Obama has been President for a year. One year on, what are the results?

First, the US is still in Iraq, has expanded its war in Afghanistan and now looks set to occupy Haiti. His promise to close the Guantanamo Bay torture camp has been broken and the US intends to continue holding captives without trial and without giving them POW status. Healthcare 'reform' has turned out to be a gift to the insurance industry. Economically, bank profits have soared, the stock market has risen by over 50% since March 2009 - yet for tens of millions of working-class Americans the supposed recovery is proving elusive.

An important poll, released on 16 January, showed how Americans continue to suffer: 48% reported that they, or members of their family, had made significant reductions in spending; 32% had to draw on savings to make ends meet; 31% had lost a job or been unemployed for a sustained period.

Billions of dollars have been handed over to the banks, while ordinary Americans have been left to suffer unemployment and homelessness. Latest figures show 15.3 million are unemployed; a further 3.6 million have dropped out of the labour market: the

total rate including unemployed and underemployed is now 17.3%. 40% have been unemployed for more than six months.

The consequence of this has been the demoralisation of many of those who enthusiastically supported Obama and the drift of 'moderates' to the right. On 19 January a special election for the Massachusetts seat of the late Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy returned a right-wing Republican, Scott Brown. Republicans are ecstatic, even though the majority was slim; the Obama camp was stunned, even though the result had been predicted in opinion polls a week before. Of those who voted for Brown, 29% had voted for Obama for President.

It has now dawned on the Obama camp that they have to make some political gesture toward working-class Americans, even as they work tirelessly to prop up US finance capital. Faced with the prospect of bankers paying themselves huge bonuses, the Obama administration is seeking to impose a Financial Crisis Responsibility fee on the largest banks. It has been estimated that the fees will come to around \$2 billion for JP Morgan Chase, Citigroup and Bank of America. Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs will have to pay around \$1 billion and Wells Fargo

about \$700 million a year. The banks have been screaming blue murder, but in reality, the fee is little more than a cosmetic slap on the wrist. Behind the scenes the Federal Reserve has been propping the banks up with hundreds of billions of dollars of funds.

Obama made jobs the centrepiece of his State of the Union address on 27 January, announcing several measures supposed to increase jobs by cutting various taxes, promoting exports, expanding infrastructure expenditure, including on nuclear power, biofuels and 'clean coal' technology. Yet, at the same time, he promised to cut the budget deficit by halting all spending except on war, security, Medicare and social security. With these restrictions and the tax cuts, it's unclear how he plans to pay for the rabbit he's promising to pull out of his hat.

The Obama presidency, for all its talk of change, is doing nothing to change capitalism but only putting superficial measures in place to try to placate an angry electorate, drifting steadily to the right. It is time for the US left to build a serious mass movement which will provide a real alternative to replace Obama's saccharine measures.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent



US Supreme Court gives elections to corporations

In a breathtakingly reactionary decision, the US Supreme Court has decided (5-4) that corporations have the same free speech rights as individual citizens. The practical effect of this will be to give corporations the right to spend unlimited amounts of money to sway elections. This decision rips the veil off bourgeois democracy. Although elections superficially seem fair, with one-person-one-vote, this fairness is purely formal. In fact elections depend massively on who controls the messages put out by the media, who can afford most campaign workers, who can spend most on advertising for candidates. Whoever can spend most has highest chance of influencing the outcome: the formal equality of one-person-one-vote hides the real votes: dollar bills.

Although US corporations have donated money to campaigns in the past, their contribution has been relatively limited. Now the reactionary majority of the US Supreme Court have opened the floodgates for corporate America to buy elections outright.

This blatant change has brought protests, not only from outraged citizens, but also from liberal politicians who want to be able to throw dust in the eyes of voters and conceal what is really going on. Only a massive mobilisation to change the law and pull money completely out of politics can restore a modicum of fairness to bourgeois elections. It remains to be seen whether US activists will be willing and able to do this.

Steve Palmer

Palestine: Egypt tightens the noose on Gaza

BOB SHEPHERD

A year on after Israel launched its barbaric onslaught on Gaza on 27 December 2008, murdering over 1,400 people, conditions of life for Gazans remain desperate. Interviewed by *Al Jazeera*, Raafat Hijazi, a market trader in Gaza City, described their situation: 'Before the war we thought it couldn't get any worse, but despite the siege things weren't as bleak as they are now. You really can go downhill from rock bottom.'

Despite this, Hamas still retains its popular support. Tens of thousands of people rallied in Gaza on 14 December 2009 to mark the 22nd anniversary of the organisation's foundation. Addressing the rally, Ismail Haniya reiterated Hamas's basic position with regard to Israeli occupation:

'Negotiations have failed, and the negotiators said after 18 years that the result is zero... We say today in the name of the Palestinian people... Hamas will not go back on its line of resistance and struggle until it achieves for our people their freedom and independence.'

It is this refusal by Hamas to capitulate and follow the pro-imperialist path of Abbas and his allies in Fatah that imperialism cannot tolerate.

The determination of imperialism to crush the Palestinian resistance means that it will not lift the siege on Gaza, despite the mass destruction of life, homes, buildings and infrastructure. The border crossings between Israel and Gaza have remained closed except to allow a trickle of food supplies to keep the population from starving. Figures from the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) and other agencies show that:

- 80% of the Gazan population of

1.5m is dependent on food aid, with half of Gaza's population being under 18 years of age.

- The numbers of what are known as the 'abject poor', those who have no means whatsoever of supporting themselves, have tripled from 100,000 to 300,000 since the onslaught.

- The Israeli blitzkrieg damaged around 50,000 buildings in Gaza leaving tens of thousands of people living in tents and damaged buildings.

- 'The population lives under constant threat of a collapse of water, sanitation and electricity services' (Red Cross).

Because of the lack of medical care, Gaza is now home to the highest percentage of disabled people in the world: 4% or 70,000 residents have some form of disability.

Egypt – imperialism's willing accomplice

Given this context of continuing siege and of no reconstruction, the tunnels under the Egypt/Gaza border have become vitally important. It is estimated that between 15% and 20% of Gaza's food supplies now enter Gaza through these tunnels and that up to 30,000 people are employed in the smuggling business.

The imperialists now want to shut down this food supply line, and in Egypt they have a willing accomplice as the US is the paymaster for the Egyptian ruling class and its military forces. Thus Egypt is second only to Israel in the amount of aid it receives from the US: since 1975 it has received about \$50 billion, the majority designated as military aid.

As part of an agreement with the Egyptians to intensify military operations along the border with Gaza, in March 2008 Condoleezza Rice allowed \$100m military aid which had been withheld by the US Congress, to go to Egypt. The US Army Corps of Engi-



The Viva Palestina convoy was attacked by Egyptian military before crossing into Gaza

neers then began work with the Egyptian military to devise ways to stop the digging of tunnels under the border. The outcome of this cooperation is the planned construction of an underground wall and 'security' fence along the border with Gaza. Egypt's Foreign Minister said that the work along the border involves 'construction, engineering work and ultrasound equipment'. In the last few months of 2009 Egypt reportedly destroyed large numbers of tunnels using detection equipment provided by the US.

A Hamas spokesman, pointing out the hypocrisy of Egypt, declared 'There are Arab League resolutions that call for breaking the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip. Now, instead of taking practical steps to break the siege we get surprised by this steel wall.' He then pointed to the devastating effect the closing of the tunnels would have for the people of Gaza:

'Tunnels represent a real lifeline for Gaza's Palestinians under the closure of Gaza's crossings, and that is why this wall will truly smother the Gaza Strip.'

A further aspect to Egypt's role in isolating Gaza is its intention to prevent international solidarity activists from entering Gaza. On 27 December 2009, Egyptian forces stopped the Gaza Freedom March, which had participants from across the world, from crossing the border on the anniversary of Israel's attack. The third Viva Palestina aid convoy was also obstructed, harassed and attacked by the Egyptian government before the majority of its vehicles were allowed to travel into Gaza. The leader of the convoy, George Galloway, was deported from Egypt as soon as he returned from Gaza and the Egyptian government has announced that it will not allow any more aid convoys to cross the border

from Egyptian territory.

As imperialism, through its willing pawn Egypt, tightens the blockade and the isolation of Gaza we need to step up the campaign in Britain to boycott and isolate Israel.

Boycott Israeli goods!

Isolate the racist Zionist state!

Egypt's 'national security'

The justification the Egyptian government has used to defend the building of the underground wall along its border with Gaza is that it will defend Egypt 'against threats to national security'. What 'national security'? might well be asked, as Egypt hasn't had any real control over its national territory in the Sinai Peninsula since before 1967.

Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula along with the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights after the 1967 war. In 1979 Egypt betrayed the Palestinian struggle and signed a peace treaty with Israel in which Egypt recognised the state of Israel and accepted the demilitarisation of the Sinai Peninsula, in return for an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. This took place in 1982.

The conditions imposed on Egypt prevented them from stationing troops or military airplanes in Sinai. When Israel pulled out of Gaza in 2005, it wanted a military force on the Egyptian border that would do its bidding and confront the Palestinian resistance. It therefore signed an agreement with Egypt allowing Egypt to station a military force of 750 border guards in Sinai and permitting weaponry that included assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns.

So much for Egypt's 'national security'.

British and US imperialism take aim at Yemen

ANTHONY BAIRSTOW

The US and Britain have declared Yemen as the next hotbed of Al Qaida activity and have prepared their military targets. Britain has now imposed a 'no fly' ban on the entire Yemeni civilian population. From 1839 southern Yemen was an important geo-strategic colony of the British and later a gateway to the Suez Canal. Today, with the excuse of 'the war on terror', Britain and the US once again seek to gain influence on the Arabian peninsula, scrambling for the chance to intervene.

The recent failed attack of the 'Underwear Bomber' on 25 December 2009 has allowed the US to force the Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to accept further drone attacks and surveillance (which began in 2002), imperialist military funding and the influx of US and British military advisers. Their military intervention could lead to the occupation of the whole country.

Since August 2009 the Yemeni government has waged Operation Scorched Earth, a military offensive on northern Shia-Zaidi Muslim civil-

ians, known as Houthis. In December 2009 an air strike in northern Yemen by either US or Saudi jets killed 120 Houthi people. On 17 December, the Yemeni government attacked a site north of the capital Sana'a, killing an alleged 34 Al Qaida militants. However, local officials reported the deaths of 49 civilians, among them 23 children. The total casualties are unknown due to a media blackout, but deaths run into hundreds and wounded into thousands. US, British and Saudi influence over these manoeuvres has long been apparent and is increasing.

Saudi Arabia is by far the most important foreign power in Yemen, providing \$2 billion in budget support. The Saudis are reported to be using white phosphorous shells to bomb northern Yemen. The struggle of the Houthis in north Yemen is not unlike that of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza in that they have demanded an end to the collusion between the ruling authority and the US and Israel. The contempt and hostility of Saudi Arabia's Wahabi establishment for Shia Muslims is an important reason why they have provided material support to Saleh's attempt to put down the northern



Roadblocks in Yemen: following the attempted bombing, security around government buildings was tightened

uprisings. In 1990 Yemen refused to join the war against Iraq and consequently Saudi Arabia expelled 850,000 of its two million Yemeni workers.

The recent disclosure that Britain had a military training presence in the country even before the failed 25 December airline attack, comprising members of the SAS working as mentors to Yemeni forces in strike operations and interrogation techniques, follows the announcement last month that the US will be sending special forces to the country in the fight against 'terrorism'. The US has already conducted covert operations

in Yemen, using unmanned Predator drones from bases in nearby Djibouti to attack 'terrorist' safe houses and provided intelligence and missiles for three recent air strikes in Arhab, Abyan and Shabwa provinces.

Even though US intelligence estimates only about 200 Al Qaida members in Yemen, by 1 January 2010 the US had doubled its security assistance to Yemen's government to \$140 million from \$67 million in 2009. Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently announced that the US and Britain have agreed to fund and train a counterterrorism police unit in Yemen. Britain also

plans to support Yemeni coastguard operations – strategically vital for imperialism as Aden and Yemen face a major world shipping lane linking Europe and the Middle East to East Asia.

Yemen has depended on oil reserves which are now running out. Its population is officially the poorest on the Arabian peninsula and has an unemployment rate of 35%. The average person in Yemen survives on one-fifth of what the World Health Organisation considers to be an adequate amount of water in a country where about 45% of the people live on less than \$2 a day. UNICEF has indicated the number of internally displaced people now totals 175,000 since the conflict in the north began; half of them are children.

Now the US and Britain will face a difficulty in Yemen similar to that in Afghanistan, by supporting an unpopular and corrupt government. It is not that Al Qaida is strong but that it will be swimming in sympathetic waters because the government is in a weak position. A high proportion of the captives still held by the US at Guantanamo are Yemenis and the US does not want to return them to Yemen, fearing that they will join Al Qaida.

However, the Yemeni people have a history of anti-imperialist struggle and evicted the British occupation forces from Aden in 1967. With the oil reserves running dry, President Saleh's ability to buy off his opponents and former friends has begun to wane. The imperialists may find themselves wading into quicksand yet again.

ALBA leads anti-imperialist call to save environment

'If the climate was a bank, they would have saved it already.' Graffiti in Copenhagen

Days before the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009, leading climate scientist James Hansen, of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, stated that no deal would be better than the flawed deal that the talks were heading for. Calling President Obama's policies 'half-assed', he compared Obama on climate change with Abraham Lincoln on slavery: 'You can't say let's reduce slavery, let's find a compromise and reduce it 50% or reduce it 40%'. In particular, he denounced carbon trading as 'analogous to the indulgences that the Catholic Church sold in the middle ages. The bishops collected lots of money and the sinners got redemption. Both parties liked that arrangement despite its absurdity'. DAVID HETFIELD reports.

In a foretaste of what was to come, following a visit by Hillary Clinton, the Philippine government dropped its lead negotiator, Bernardita Muller. She is a veteran of the Kyoto talks who argues that climate change is the overwhelming responsibility of the imperialist countries. Sudan, which chairs the G77 nations, invited her to join the G77 negotiating team.

The first week of the conference saw the emergence of the 'Danish Text', a secret draft agreement worked on by a few countries including Denmark, Britain and the US. The text undermined UN democracy and was an abandonment of the Kyoto protocol. Delegates from the oppressed nations reacted furiously. British Climate Change Minister Ed Miliband denounced any criticisms as wasting time on procedure rather than substance.

Outside the conference centre, Danish police reacted brutally to any form of protest, using baton charges and water canon and making preventative arrests; over a thousand people were handcuffed and forced to sit on the freezing ground for hours before being bussed to a prepared detention facility, filled with cages. They were not told what they had been arrested for, nor how long they were to be detained, and were denied access to a telephone call or toilet facilities, and attacked with pepper spray if they complained. Most people were held for around 12 hours before being released without charge. Nine protesters were only released in the middle of January 2010, and two are still in jail at the time of going to press. Democratic rights were suspended both inside and outside the conference.

By the second week the poor nations hadn't bowed down before the imperialist agenda, so off to Copenhagen went Gordon Brown, two days earlier than planned, to shore up the imperialist offensive. He met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Zenawi had sent Ethiopian troops to invade Somalia on behalf of the US. Now he would help in the climate war against the poor. Zenawi proposed to the conference that the developing countries accept \$10bn a year to cope with climate change from 2010-2012. This led critics from Africa to say: 'We don't yet know what Zenawi got in exchange for so radically changing his tune or how, exactly, you go from a position calling for \$400bn a year in financing [the Africa group's position] to a mere \$10bn'. Labour has since admitted that Britain's contribution will be taken from the existing Overseas Development Aid

budget, and would not be new money as earlier promised.

When Obama arrived, the Danish hosts helped turn the event into a US summit; over 160 nations were ignored whilst Obama held meetings with a select 25. This group included the leading imperialist countries, plus China, India, Brazil and South Africa, with Ethiopia and Bangladesh as token poor nations. Rather than deal with the pitiful emission cuts offered by the imperialists, well below the 40% cuts by 2020 demanded by science and the poor nations, Obama instead made a stand on verification of emission cuts by the developing countries. China objected, as under Kyoto developing nations are not obliged to reduce emissions, yet it, India and Brazil had all volunteered to do so. China also objected to the proposed cuts for 2050. Scientists call for the developed world to cut emissions by 80% and global emissions to be cut by 50% on 1990 levels. Imperialist countries would still be allowed to emit at least twice the amount of greenhouse gases that developing countries could. Obama had to concede on these points.

After waiting five hours without explanation, the majority of delegates were informed that the deal had been done and were given one hour to read the document and respond to it. The



Bolivian President Evo Morales

subsequent debate was to be limited to points of order, but even then some countries had to bang their name plates to get noticed. Ed Miliband made sure everyone understood that the paragraphs on financing would only come into operation if countries signed up to the accord. The US reiterated this position. The small island state of Tuvalu likened the financing to '30 pieces of silver'. The Sudanese chairman of the G77 nations stated: 'What has happened today concerns what we have been suspicious of -



Demonstrators outside the Copenhagen conference

that a deal will be imposed by the US with the help of the Danish government on all nations of the world ... President Obama, in acting the way he did, definitely eliminated any difference between him and the Bush tradition'. Comparing the accord to the Holocaust, he said it 'asked Africa to sign a suicide pact, an incineration pact, in order to maintain the economic dominance of a few countries'.

The ALBA nations were united in their condemnation of the accord. Delegates from Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua all condemned it. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez criticised the lack of democracy: 'Mr Chairman ... the document [the leaked 'Danish Text'] that you repeatedly claimed did not exist is showing up now. We have all seen drafts surreptitiously circulated and discussed in secret meetings, outside the rooms where the international community has been transparently negotiating through its representatives'. Further, he pointed out, 'this document does not guarantee, in any way, the adoption of minimal measures conducive to the prevention of an extremely grave catastrophe for the planet and for human beings'.

Bolivian President Evo Morales and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had already denounced the hijacking of the conference and pointed out that capitalism is to blame for climate change. Evo Morales contrasted the two cultures offered, the culture of death 'which is capitalism ... exploiting others, plundering their natural resources, assaulting Mother Earth, privatising basic services' and the culture of life - 'living in solidarity, in equality'. He ridiculed the paltry sums of money offered for adaptation to climate change: 'The budget of the US is \$687bn for defence. And for climate change, to save life, to save humanity, they only put up \$10bn. This is shameful. The budget for the Iraq war is \$2.6trn, to go kill in Iraq. But directed towards paying the climate debt, \$10bn'. Morales pointed out how the imperialists had taken over the atmospheric space with their greenhouse gases, not leaving any space for others to use on their path to development. He condemned them for expelling immigrants who go to imperialist countries to improve their economic situation, and demanded that 'the rich countries should take in all of the migrants who will be generated by climate change or affected by climate

change'. Proposing an International Environmental Justice Court to provide sanctions against nations not meeting targets, he stated 'Our objective is to save humanity and not just half of humanity'. He suggested a worldwide referendum on climate change to include the questions:

- Do you agree to re-establish a harmonious relationship with Nature, recognising the rights of Mother Earth?
- Are you in agreement with changing this system of excessive consumerism and waste, that is, the capitalist system?
- Do you agree that the developed countries should reduce and reabsorb their greenhouse gas emissions?
- Do you agree on transferring everything that is spent on wars to create a budget higher than the defence budget to tackle the problem of climate change?

Hugo Chavez also spoke on the undemocratic nature of the conference: 'Can we hope for something democratic, inclusive from the current world system? What we are experiencing on this planet is an imperial dictatorship ... Down with the imperial dictatorship and long live people's democracy and equality on this planet! He went on to expose the reality of this imperial dictatorship, 'The 500 million richest people, 7% of the world population, are responsible for 50% of contaminating emissions... The total income of the 500 richest individuals on the planet is greater than the income of the 416 million poorest people. The 2.8 billion people who live in poverty, earning less than one dollar a day, and who represent 40% of the global population, receive just 5% of the global income ... there are 1.1 billion people who do not have access to clean potable water; 2.6 billion without health services; more than 800 million illiterate individuals and 1.02 billion starving people. This is the global scenario'. Chavez ended by showing the way forward: 'Stop the aggression and the wars. No more imperial military bases or coup d'états. Let us build a more just and equitable social and economic order. Let us eradicate poverty. Let us bring an immediate end to high levels of emissions; let us

halt environmental destruction and prevent climate change catastrophe. Let us join together in the noble objective of being more free and driven by solidarity! ... History is calling us to unite and fight. If capitalism resists, we are forced to fight a battle against capitalism and open the way for the salvation of the human species.'

The conference ended with the delegates noting, rather than accepting, the 'Copenhagen Accord'. Immediately the imperialists, led by Ed Miliband, started blaming China, Sudan and the nations of ALBA for a deal not being agreed, and called for 'major reform' of the UN Framework Convention on Climate change and the way negotiations are conducted. Then they carried on as if the accord was a deal, giving the deadline of 31 January for nations to sign up.

The accord itself states that increases in temperature should be kept below 2°C, but the pledges of emission cuts are estimated to set the world on track to warming between 3 and 3.5°C. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the rich world promises to make cuts of 15-19% in collective emissions by 2020 on 1990 levels, however, once the loopholes are taken into account this could result in an actual increase of 4-10%. Loopholes include carbon trading, carbon offsetting, that airlines and shipping fuel aren't included in any nation's emissions and flaws in the forestry management plan.

In January, a group of 450 investors controlling \$13trn of assets met at the UN in New York to urge governments to reset their domestic agendas to lay the foundation of a Carbon Market. The Carbon Market is forecast to be worth up to \$4.5trn, 45 times the \$100bn promised for adapting to climate change by 2020.

Leading the alternative, Evo Morales announced the First World Conference of the People on Climate Change will take place in April in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba, famous for the people's victorious struggle against multinational companies' attempts to privatise its water.

Copenhagen showed that on the issue of climate change, you are either on the side of Labour and the imperialists or on the side of the majority of the world's people, the culture of death versus the culture of life. Join the anti-imperialist fight led by ALBA!

The 1999-2000 Cochabamba Water War



Mass demonstration against Bechtel, Cochabamba main square

The background to the Water War was an agreement by the neo-liberal Bolivian government, under Hugo Banzer, to privatise the water supply in Cochabamba province, to meet a condition set by the World Bank for the extension of \$600 million debt relief. The new owner was a consortium run by US multinational Bechtel, *Aguas del Tunari*, which was the sole bidder for a contract that guaranteed an annual profit rate of 16% over its proposed 40-year life. At the same time the Bolivian congress passed Law 2029 which handed control of all irrigation, water collection systems and wells in Cochabamba to *Aguas del Tunari*. With only half the population of one million connected to a mains water supply, the wells were vital; many of them had been built by small cooperatives. Law 2029 also allowed the consortium to install water meters in every household at consumers' expense. The terms of the law were so broad that they essentially passed the ownership of rainwater to *Aguas del Tunari* as soon as it hit the ground in the province. Prominent among supporters of the privatisation was the very wealthy Mayor of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes, because it would finance the construction of a dam from which he and many of his political cronies would benefit. The privatisation of the Cochabamba water system was part of a wholesale privatisation of Bolivian industry and resources which had started in the mid-1980s with the New Economic Policy (NEP) under the direction of

planning minister Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, later to become president on two occasions. Under the NEP, gas and oil resources, electricity generation, tin mines, rail and air transport were sold off at rock-bottom prices. The results were devastating for the poor: massive unemployment – 20,000 miners alone lost their jobs – and a bonanza for the rich. State income collapsed: annual revenue from gas fell from \$3-400 million to less than \$100 million. By 1990, per capita GDP had fallen by nearly 20% below its 1980 level and was a mere \$836. From the late 1990s, however, popular resistance to imperialism's onslaught started as coca farmers began to organise against the US-funded and organised coca-eradication programme, particularly in the Chapare region to the south of Cochabamba.

The start of the Water War

The first signs of opposition to Bechtel appeared within a few weeks of the contract being signed in September 1999. In early November, farmers and irrigators organised a 24-hour blockade of Cochabamba city to protest against the handing over of their resources to the consortium. On 12 November, farmers' and workers' organisations came together with environmentalist groups to form the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life). The initial focus of the *Coordinadora* was on the consortium's announcement of a 35% increase in water charges which would make working class families pay an average of \$20 a month where the minimum wage was only

On 7 December 2009, President Evo Morales was re-elected president of Bolivia by a landslide. Less than 10 days later, alongside Venezuelan President Chavez, he upset the imperialists' hope for the Copenhagen negotiations when he stated in a plenary session that not only was capitalism responsible for climate change, but that the rich nations should make climate reparations to the poor. Ten years ago it was unthinkable that a Bolivian president should have such international influence. But that was before the 1999/2000 Cochabamba Water War, an event which together with Chavez's election in December 1998 turned the tide against imperialism in Latin America, and led eventually to Morales' first presidential victory in December 2005. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.



Police confront marchers in Cochabamba

\$60, and the average wage \$100 a month.

When new bills arrived in January 2000, many had doubled and tripled, hitting the middle class and local industry as well as the poor. A Bechtel official said that if people didn't pay their water bills, their water would be turned off. The *Coordinadora* organised its first major protest, a city-wide general strike which stopped the city for four days. Roads were blocked, the airport shut down and thousands of protesters filled the central square. After initially refusing to negotiate with the protestors, the Cochabamba governor agreed to press the government to rescind the increases; the *Coordinadora*

gave him a three-week deadline. When by the beginning of February nothing had happened, the *Coordinadora* organised a peaceful demonstration to the city centre. It was attacked by police drafted in from other Bolivian cities. 200 were arrested and dozens injured in clashes which lasted two days. The outcome was greater determination. The principal spokesperson for the *Coordinadora*, Oscar Olivera, later wrote: 'The greatest achievement of the February days was that we lost our sense of fear.'

The April days and victory

Protests and mass assemblies continued throughout March 2000, joined by

Chapare coca growers who had been fighting US-led eradication programmes; their president was Evo Morales. The *Coordinadora* organised a referendum. 96% of those voting called for the termination of the contract. Popular assemblies discussed tactics and strategies; their proposals were put to city-wide *cabildos*, mass open meetings which could involve over 50,000 people, for discussion and agreement. The whole of the population of Cochabamba, apart from the rich, had been mobilised against the contract. By the beginning of April, demonstrations had spread to other cities in the country.

On 4 April, a *cabildo* demanded the contract be cancelled within 24 hours; the next day, tens of thousands occupied the central plaza and refused to move until they achieved their demand. Province-wide road-blocks organised by *campesinos* cut off the city from the rest of the country. On 6 April, the government declared martial law and tried to hunt down the *Coordinadora* leaders who all went underground. Tens of thousands of people were involved in hand-to-hand battles with police and soldiers. 'The poorest young people were always on the frontline, throwing stones at the police', one participant recollected. 'They are people who have a tradition of fighting because they have been ignored, marginalised, pushed around... They inspired us to move forward.' On 8 April, Captain Robinson Iriarte, who had been trained in the infamous School of the Americas, shot dead a 19-year-old student, Victor Daza, who was not participating in the protest. The deliberate nature of the act was picked up on camera and broadcast nationally, fuelling the protests which were now raging night and day throughout the city and province. The position of the coalition government had become untenable: two days later, it capitulated. Bechtel had been kicked out of Cochabamba.

The Cochabamba Water War showed that popular forces organised in a democratic and revolutionary manner could defeat neo-liberalism and imperialism. From that point on in Bolivia, the anti-imperialist social movements were in the ascendancy, and the ruling class in retreat. In December 2002, Evo Morales was narrowly defeated by Sanchez de Lozada in presidential elections after a crude intervention by the US ambassador. The following October, despite ruthless repression costing the lives of 70 people, Lozada was forced to flee the country in the face of a mass mobilisation insisting on the re-nationalisation of the country's huge gas resources. In June 2005, his replacement Carlos Mesa was also forced out of office. Six months later Evo Morales was president. The Cochabamba Water War served as an inspiration for social movements across Latin America, in Argentina, Ecuador and Peru.

Bolivian elections – a defeat for imperialism

On 6 December 2009 the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) won a resounding victory in the Bolivian general election. Evo Morales took 64% of the presidential vote, with his closest rival, Manfred Reyes Villa, receiving just 26.4%. MAS won 88 out of 130 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and 26 out of 36 seats in the Senate. In winning more than two-thirds of the Senate seats, MAS now has the power to complete agrarian reform, nationalisation and investment in health, education and infrastructure which have until now been blocked by representatives of the ruling class.

In spite of the opposition, during MAS's first term the country's gas and oil were taken under full state control. Contracts with multinationals were renegotiated and state revenues from hydrocarbons rose from 5.6% of GDP in 2004 to 25.7% in late 2008. This paid for increased social spending on health and education as well as regular payments for the poorest pensioners, families and pregnant women. Careful economic planning has avoided the worst effects of the global recession; since Morales came to power in January 2006, Bolivia's currency reserves have risen from \$2 billion to \$8 billion and the economy has seen average growth of

5.2% – the highest in the last 30 years.

Since the December election, the government has proceeded with its plans for agrarian reform, in one instance seizing two ranches totalling 60 square miles. Under the new Bolivian constitution, approved by referendum in January 2009, the state can expropriate and redistribute land obtained by fraud, or which serves no economic or social purpose, or where there is evidence of forced labour. The government is now fighting in the courts to take over 143 square miles of land from five ranches in the Alto Parapeti region, where forms of serfdom still exist. MAS has already

pledged to distribute 77,000 square miles of unused or disputed land to landless *campesinos* by 2013. Three quarters of this target has already been met.

In January 2006, Bolivia joined Cuba and Venezuela in ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas. Cuba and Venezuela were instrumental in the Bolivian literacy campaign, launched in 2006. UNESCO declared Bolivia free of illiteracy in 2008, after 800,000 people had learnt to read and write through the campaign. Cuban medical brigades are working among the poorest communities in Bolivia, and Bolivians have received 444,000 sight-saving operations through Operation Miracle, the Cuban-Venezuelan initiative to provide free eye surgery throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Trade within ALBA has helped Bolivia to mitigate the effects of being expelled from the US-led

Andean Trade Preference agreement after Bolivia cut diplomatic relations with the US and expelled USAID (US Agency for International Development) because it was funding the Bolivian opposition.

At the international level President Morales is an important representative of anti-imperialism. He condemned Cuba's isolation within Latin America and has repeatedly denounced the US blockade in the Organisation of American States and other international forums. While leading the Bolivian delegation at the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change, Morales also spoke out against the US attempt to impose a climate deal that protected imperialist interests. Subsequently he has called for a worldwide referendum on climate change, and is hosting an alternative international climate summit in Bolivia this year.

Sam Vincent



US soldiers on patrol in Afghanistan

Obama's surge means more brutality for Afghan people

Imperialist propaganda claims that the massive build up of forces in Afghanistan will be underpinned by a new emphasis on nation building, reconstruction and winning local 'hearts and minds'. The US military has even employed a team of anthropologists to help them negotiate Afghan culture. In December, a raid by US forces on the village of Changowlak was intended to illustrate this sensitive new approach. Some of the supposed insurgents captured were later released, to their families' delight. The officer in charge, US Captain Terrell, then addressed the community. 'We went to a lot of trouble to get this area, and now it belongs to you' he said. 'But you must tell us if you see the Taliban. If you put something on the ground and cover it up, we are going to shoot you. If we see you carrying a weapon, we will shoot you. These are the rules you must learn from now on.' JIM CRAVEN reports.

On the night of 26 December, US forces raided a village in Kunar province. They shot and killed a student and a 12-year-old shepherd boy. They then took seven more children from their beds, handcuffed them and shot them. Two of the victims were still at primary school. A local farmer who went to investigate was also shot and killed. NATO admitted the forces responsible were 'non-military', meaning a secret paramilitary unit. US commanding officer in Afghanistan, General McChrystal, ran such death squad operations in Iraq.

On 13 January, at least eight people were killed and 13 wounded when US and Afghan forces opened fire on a demonstration in Gamsir in Afghanistan. US troops claimed they were firing at a Taliban sniper.

The paramilitaries involved in the Kunar massacre could well have been employed by the private contractors. Blackwater (now re-named Xe Services – see Iraq article on p9). The number of armed private contractors in Afghanistan doubled to more than 10,000 between June and September last year. On top of the 140,000 US/NATO troops soon to be operating in Afghanistan, there are likely to be well over 150,000 private personnel contracted to the US Department of Defense and other agencies. It is clear that any social or cultural operations carried out by the occupying forces are intended only to improve the effectiveness of their campaign of overwhelming force.

US rejects Taliban peace offer

President Obama claims that the US aim in Afghanistan is the military defeat of Al Qaida and the 'neutralisation' of the Taliban. But US national security adviser James Jones has admitted that there are fewer than 100 Al Qaida operatives in Afghanistan and that they have 'no bases (and) no ability to launch attacks on either us or our allies'. Nor are Al Qaida and the Afghan Taliban closely allied. The former Taliban government did not invite Osama bin Laden into Afghanistan, indeed they offered to co-operate

with the US to get rid of him. In a proposal for peace negotiations made in early December, Mullah Omar, leader of the Afghan Taliban, stated that his Mujahideen movement has 'no agenda for meddling in the affairs of other countries and is ready to give legal guarantees if foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan'. The peace offer was ignored by the US government despite a public plea from Afghan President Karzai for the US to engage in direct negotiations with the Taliban leadership.

Understanding that they cannot win the war, the imperialists want to make sure they don't lose it. Most accept that negotiations with the anti-occupation forces will be necessary and, indeed, communications through 'unofficial' channels have been taking place for many months. But the US hopes to negotiate from a position of strength. Islam Online (based in Qatar) claimed in November that the US had offered the Taliban control of six provinces in the south and north-east of Afghanistan if they would accept the presence of NATO forces and eight US army and air bases. US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said, however, only after the Taliban's 'momentum' has been stopped and they suddenly realise they are 'likely to lose' that they would be willing to negotiate on US terms.

The occupying forces face massive problems. Anti-occupation forces now hold 80% of the country. 2009 was by far the deadliest year of the war for occupying troops with 316 US, 108 British and 95 others being killed. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) casualty rates are expected to rise to 300-500 per month this spring. The British Ministry of Defence recently revealed that one in five of combat forces are unfit for active duty. France and Turkey have refused to send further troops. The imperialist forces have a limited window to gain the upper hand before casualties, public opinion and failing political will among some NATO countries take their toll.

President Obama has promised to begin troop withdrawals by the summer of 2011. The anti-occupation forces have no such deadlines. A mor-

bid joke circulating among the Afghan people says that 'The Americans have the watches, but we have the time'.

Afghan security forces penetrated

A second stated US aim is, therefore, to massively increase the size of the Afghan army and police to eventually take over responsibility for much of the security. After eight years of training, however, the Afghan army is ineffective, the police force riddled by corruption and incompetence and Afghan President Karzai recently said that it will be '15 to 20 years before Afghanistan is able to sustain its own security forces'. The ease with which Afghan security can be infiltrated has been illustrated by several incidents recently in which anti-occupation fighters posing as Afghan army, police or intelligence agents, have been able to attack from within. In November, an Afghan policeman shot dead five British soldiers after a joint patrol. On 14 December three Afghan policemen in Helmand killed seven of their 'colleagues' and on 30 December seven CIA agents, including the head of team, were killed in Khost province by a suicide bomber acting as a double agent. On 18 January, around 20 Taliban fighters walked through what is supposed to be the tightest security cordon in Kabul, around the Presidential Palace area, attacking government buildings and holding the Afghan army at bay for over three hours.

A wider problem in expanding the role of the Afghan army lies in the fact that it is presently controlled mainly by officers from the Tajik minority, whereas the base of the anti-occupation resistance is in the Pashtun heartlands.

In league with the warlords

The present Afghan government is too weak to unite the country and the armed forces. Following the fraudulent elections, President Karzai was told by the imperialist powers that he must tackle corruption. In reality, the US has always been willing to use the corrupt and brutal Afghan warlords when it suits their purpose. One of President Karzai's own brothers

Ahmed Wali Karzai, is on the CIA payroll and runs a private militia hired by the US. Another is a major drugs baron. In 2001, the CIA gave millions of dollars to Northern Alliance commanders, including war criminals. Many are still on the US payroll, including Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the man who invited Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan in the 1980s.

President Karzai dropped two ministers accused of corruption from his proposed cabinet but retained Ismail Khan, accused of war crimes by Human Rights Watch. He also retained ministers favoured by the US in defence, interior, finance and agriculture. Afghan MP Mirahmad Joyanda said 'Nothing has changed. Half of the cabinet remains. The other half is introduced by warlords'. In January, the Afghan parliament rejected 17 of Karzai's 24 nominees, describing them as unqualified and corrupt election cronies. Later the same month, almost half of a new cabinet was rejected for the same reasons.

Pakistan dragged into chaos

Obama's third professed goal is to partner Pakistan against the 'common enemy'. In the past year US drone missiles have attacked western Pakistan on at least 44 occasions. The US military claim five Al Qaida and Taliban leaders have been killed in these raids. Officials in Pakistan say 708 civilians were also killed in the process. The 16 strikes needed to kill Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud cost up to 321 lives. Most attacks are based on information from Pakistani and Afghan tribesmen, some with their own local scores to settle. The drones are guided by CIA functionaries on video screens in Langley, Virginia; killing, with the touch of a button, unseen numbers of men, women and children 7,000 miles away.

The Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies says that over 12,600 people have been killed in Pakistan as a result of the US-backed campaigns by the Pakistani army against supposed insurgents, a figure that does not include the large number of deaths amongst the million refugees fleeing the fighting. A further 13,000 people have been arrested. According to

President Obama has promised to begin troop withdrawals by the summer of 2011. The anti-occupation forces have no such deadlines. A morbid joke circulating among the Afghan people says that 'The Americans have the watches, but we have the time'.

AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

Amnesty International, many prisoners have been subject to torture and rape.

The US lumps together all the Taliban as part of this 'common enemy' but there are several distinct groups. The Pakistani Tehrik-e-Taliban, led by Hakimullah Mehsud, is the group that occupied the Swat Valley and is fighting the Pakistani army. It is held chiefly responsible for the bomb attacks in Pakistan against military and civilian targets. Other Pakistani groups have no argument with the Pakistani armed forces. The Afghan Taliban has refused to back the Mehsud Taliban. In October, Mullah Omar said 'We do not have any agenda to harm other countries, including Europe'. His spokesman, Qari Yousaf Ahmed, said 'We are fighting occupation forces in Afghanistan...US and other forces have attacked our land and our war is only against them. What is happening to Pakistan is none of our business.'

Many in the Pakistani army and ruling class see the Afghan Taliban as a strategic rearguard defence against Indian incursion. They are angry at US nuclear and other agreements with India and the presence of the Indian paramilitary patrols defending Indian road-building in southern Afghanistan. The majority of people in Pakistan are opposed to the US occupation of Afghanistan and see the US as an enemy. But the US is preparing for a long-term presence, building a

huge embassy and CIA headquarters in Islamabad. The CIA is said to run a secret drone base, which employs Xe Services personnel, in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. The US claims some Taliban are being protected by Pakistan and wants to extend drone raids to Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, which has a population of 800,000. Balochistan has big oil and gas reserves and occupies a long section of coast in the Gulf of Oman through which the bulk of the world's oil shipping has to pass. Any US oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea would have to pass through the region. Balochistan has its own independence movement, which the Pakistanis claim is being aided by India and which is asking for US assistance. The Baloch homeland extends into Iran.

The future of the already unpopular Pakistani government is thrown into further doubt by the annulment of an amnesty for President Zardari against corruption charges. US interference in the region is in danger of igniting a much wider conflict. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons.

Perpetual war

Although the US knows it cannot win the war, to appear defeated would be a major blow to its global strategy of limiting the rise of rival economic powers by maintaining military and hence political domination. Obama's promise to start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in 2011 was there-

fore soon wrapped round with conditions.

Obama has reiterated Bush's doctrine of taking unilateral, pre-emptive action. In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech he claimed this was not to 'impose our will' but 'out of enlightened self-interest - because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if other people's children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity'. To conflate the interests of the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited in this outrageous way, Obama has to invent a 'common enemy'.

That is not to deny the tragic reality of the slaughter of innocent people by some amongst this 'enemy' but Obama chooses to ignore that they are fired by the very imperialist domination that Obama seeks to continue. The US, therefore, has a self-perpetuating rationale for war; permanent and global. Obama said, 'The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan'.

On 3 January, the US Transportation Security Administration added, alongside its list of so-called 'rogue states' and the four 'state sponsors of terrorism', a further ten 'terrorist leaning countries'. Which of their children and grandchildren will be the next targets for the operators in Langley, Virginia?

THE IRAQ INQUIRY Imperialists clean their stables



Demonstration outside the Iraq Inquiry on the day of Blair's appearance

'The general leaning towards barbarity acquires a certain method, immorality becomes a system, lawlessness gets its law givers and club law its law books.' Karl Marx.

It was noted that the four politicians who took Britain to war against Iraq - Tony Blair, Jack Straw, Lord Falconer and Lord Goldsmith - were all lawyers (Henry Porter, *The Guardian* 28 January 2010). For them the law is their personal property or it is an obstruction to be shoved aside.

The terms of reference of the Chilcot Inquiry were decided by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and agreed by the House of Commons. Since the 2005 Inquiries Act government ministers and not judges control public inquiry proceedings, set the terms of reference, determine public access and access to evidence submitted to the inquiry. If ministers do not like the direction an inquiry is taking they can withdraw funding. If ministers do not like the content of the resulting report they can withhold part or all of the publication. The Inquiries Act was passed in response to a demand that there be a public inquiry into Royal Ulster Constabulary and British intelligence collusion in the loyalist murder of Irish solicitor Pat Finucane. During the parliamentary debate on the legislation it was hardly mentioned that the Finucane case was the motive for the bill.

In Sir John Chilcot the ruling class chose a safe pair of hands. He is chair of the Police Foundation and a Trustee of the Police Rehabilitation Trust. Chilcot conducted a review of Royal and VIP security, sat on an inquiry into an alleged IRA break-in to the Police Service of Northern Ireland Special Branch HQ and the Lord Butler 2004 Review of (Iraq's non-existent) Weapons of Mass Destruction. He is a former Staff Counsellor to the Security and Intelligence Agencies and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. Chilcot's four fellow Inquiry panelists are equally reliable representatives of their class and include a noted Zionist. This Inquiry will certainly not call any representative of the Iraqi people.

Whatever acuity the panel displayed when questioning senior civil servants, it escaped them when confronted by Tony Blair, who was allowed to stick to his well-rehearsed script and was not questioned on details such as misleading Parliament on weapons of mass destruction and whether he put pressure on the Attorney General Lord Goldsmith to give the legal advice Blair wanted. Instead, Blair was able to propose targeting Iran.

One of the more revealing episodes of the Inquiry came when Lord Goldsmith explained how he changed his mind from considering

an invasion of Iraq illegal without a second UN resolution to considering it legal. Three days before the attack Goldsmith responded to a question from British military chiefs and told the Cabinet and Parliament that an invasion would be legal. He explained that lunch with the French ambassador and a private meeting in the US with US security adviser Condoleezza Rice and US government lawyers had persuaded him that France had privately admitted that the invasion could go ahead without a further UN resolution. No new legal interpretations, no new evidence presented; France privately said it would be alright and the Attorney General changed his mind.

The division in the British ruling class over allying with the US or Europe lies behind many of the machinations of the British state over Iraq. If the ruling class were united they would not have had to circumvent established procedures which has so infuriated the senior civil servants.

On 25 January the *Daily Mail* reported that Lord Hutton, who headed the 2004 inquiry into the death of the government scientist Dr David Kelly, had placed a 70-year ban on the release of medical records of Dr Kelly's post-mortem. The Hutton inquiry concluded that Dr Kelly had committed suicide. Thirteen eminent doctors have now challenged the Hutton verdict and elicited a letter from Oxfordshire County Council revealing the ban. One of the doctors said, 'I am shocked but not surprised by this. It fits in with the subversion of due process we have seen for six years.' Dr Kelly had accused the Labour government of manipulating evidence to draw Britain into the invasion of Iraq. He had close ties to the British intelligence services, debriefing Soviet defectors and serving as a weapons inspector in Iraq. He was found dead in woods not far from his Oxfordshire home and did not leave a suicide note. Recognising that the 70-year classification suggests there is something to hide, Lord Hutton quickly recanted and has said he will lift the ban.

The World Health Organisation estimated that UN sanctions imposed on Iraq before the invasion killed half a million children, 5,000 babies died because of them every month. How many people have the invaders killed in Iraq: 600,000? a million? And Tony Blair says that he has 'no regrets'. 'A woman was seen sobbing as he left the room' (*Financial Times* 30/31 January 2010).

'The most important questions - war, peace, diplomatic questions - are decided by a handful of capitalists, who deceive not only the masses, but very often parliament itself.' VI Lenin.

Trevor Rayne

Multinationals grab Iraqi oil

Since the height of the violence in Iraq in 2007, both civilian and US casualties have fallen by over 90%.

There is, however, no peace for the Iraqi people. In the northern Kurdish areas around Kirkuk and Mosul tension remains high because Kurdish aspirations for an autonomous government controlling its own oil are being thwarted by central government and Sunni political advances in the region. Car and suicide bombs in the latter part of last year aimed at Iraqi government and US targets in the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad killed more than 500 people. Sadi Piri of the Kurdish PUK said 'This proves that the Iraqi forces are not able to control their own cities and borders'.

US General Petraeus admitted that what he called 'Iranian-backed militias' still posed a threat to Iraqi security. Some of these groups, such as the Badr brigade, had been used by the imperialist forces in the early years of the occupation and came to dominate the Iraqi police. It has been claimed that Peter Moore, the British computer expert released in January, had been kidnapped by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard because he was installing a system that could track how international aid for Iraq had been diverted to pro-Iranian militia groups. In October 2007, Judge Radhi Hamza Al Radhi told the US Congress that Iraqi government corruption amounted to \$18 billion. The only records of transactions were destroyed in a fire at the Iraqi Central Bank.

Moore was released in exchange for Qais Al Khazali, who had been captured by the SAS in 2007. Al Khazali had been a spokesman for Moqtada Al Sadr, a former forceful opponent of the imperialist occupation with strong support among the Shia poor. He is now prominent in the pro-Iranian Iraqi Righteous League, expected to take a large share of the vote in the forthcoming Iraqi elections.

In December, the Iraqi parliament passed a new election law, after pres-

'Car and suicide bombs in the latter part of last year aimed at Iraqi government and US targets in the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad killed more than 500 people.'

sure from the US, reducing representation for Sunnis. In January, the Iraqi government threatened to bar 14 Sunni parties from the election and banned over 500 Sunni candidates, including Saleh Al Multah of the National Dialogue Front, which seeks to reconcile Sunnis, Shias and Kurds. More violence could follow if Sunni and Kurdish aspirations are not met by the Shia dominated government.

Oil contracts signed

On 17 December, Iranian troops occupied the Iraqi Al Fakkah oil field in the disputed border region of Maysan Province. The Iranians also have claims to the Abu Gharb field in the same area. Anglo-Dutch Shell has interests in both fields. Despite the continuing uncertainty, however, multinational oil companies consider the security situation in parts of Iraq steady enough to grab new contracts.

Iraq has the third largest known oil reserves in the world. There are very few opportunities elsewhere in the world for the oil companies to extend production. So, in the first auction, Shell and Exxon/Mobil took the West Qurna field, while BP and the Chinese CNPC took Rumaila, the largest field. In the second auction on 11 December, Shell and the Malaysian company Petronas outbid Total for the Majnoon field, and a consortium of CNPC, Petronas and Total took the Halfaya field.

Significantly, there were no bids for fields in the less secure regions east of Baghdad. The Iraqi government plans to raise total output from the present 2.5 million barrels per day (mbpd) to 10 or even 12.5 mbpd in the next ten

years. Such an output would match that of Saudi Arabia and could cause other countries to cut production or face a fall in prices.

Bloody role of mercenaries

On 1 January, a US Federal Judge dismissed charges against five guards employed by private security firm Blackwater. The guards, on contract to the US military, were accused of murdering 17 Iraqi civilians during a wild shooting spree in Baghdad in September 2007. The judge ruled that the guards' confessions were inadmissible. He did not, however, call any local witnesses or families of the victims. Rahab Abdul Karim, whose nephew was killed, said 'They (the guards) were arrogant with the power they had. They thought they answered to no one. And with this verdict, maybe they were right'.

Since the incident Blackwater has been re-named Xe Services. It employs many ex-CIA and military personnel and has close links with both services. Its turnover is around \$1bn a year. Blackwater mercenaries have accompanied US forces on raids in both Iraq and Afghanistan and are believed to be involved in a secret programme to assassinate members of Al Qaida throughout the world. Blackwater mercenaries have been accused of a number of murders in Iraq.

A former British mercenary told the BBC World Service how they worked with complete anonymity in Iraq. They could shoot someone dead or beat up prisoners with no repercussions. The mercenary spoke of displacing refugees from their temporary homes with no concern for how they would survive. Any mercenary guilty of a crime that might cause difficulties was flown to safety out of the country the same day. The security companies make millions of pounds profit from each contract.

The British security company Control Risks recently announced a big increase in demand for their services, particularly by multinational oil companies in Iraq.

VENEZUELA

Chavez takes over the banks

ALVARO MICHAELS

'These bankers should be shown for what they really are to the public: vulgar robbers, thieves in ties, pick-pockets and obstinate kleptomaniacs'. Hugo Chavez

Chavez's government well knows that the dollar-blinded rich in Venezuela must be defeated politically. A democratic economy is essential, and as private ownership fails to meet the needs of the masses, the state is taking over and formulating alternative ways of managing production and distribution. The pricing system is being moderated and social priorities are replacing market manipulation.

Dealing with the banks

The shift towards a new economic model has ameliorated the effects of the global economic crisis on Venezuela. Preventive measures were taken beforehand: the government diversified its currency holdings in order not to rely exclusively on the dollar, changing them to Euros, Yen and other currencies so that the dollar's fall did not sharply affect the Venezuelan economy. The government also budgeted for an oil price of \$60 per barrel. Since the price fluctuated between \$65 and \$70 until the middle of 2009, state revenues were healthy compared to planned expenses.

As the global banking crisis and its



Chavez supporters on the streets of Caracas on 23 January

scandals grew, the Venezuelan government ensured effective regulation at home. Several small private banks were taken over following revelations of bank fraud. In November the main shareholder of a group of four banks, Grupo Financiero Bolivar, Ricardo Fernandez, known as a Chavez supporter, was arrested. Two of the banks were nationalised, and two were closed. The Institute in Defence of People's Access to Goods and Services took control of four food companies owned by Ricardo Fernandez, to make sure there were no supply disruptions. Subsequently, a further three banks were nationalised and, on 11 December, Venezuela's Superintendency of Banks closed an eighth.

On 21 December the five nationalised banks were merged with a state-owned bank, Banfoandes, to open a new Bicentenary Bank with 20% of the

nation's deposits. This will provide housing credits to those who have been turned down by private banks which only give credit to rich people. Brokerage and insurance houses are also to be investigated. The assets of the three other banks were transferred to the Bank of Venezuela, with deposits guaranteed up to 30,000 bolivars.

Ten bankers have been detained and 28 arrest warrants issued, including nine passed on to Interpol, for involvement in organised crime and unexplained fund movements. 23 of those indicted have since fled to the US, Spain or Curacao while on bail. During 2009, a further 10 banks were fined more than 23 million bolivars, or \$5.34m at the 4.30 bolivar rate, for failing to comply with financial regulations established for the agricultural sector. On 19 January, Venezuela's Superintendency of Banks announced

the takeover of three more small private banks because serious administrative problems had left them unable to cover their obligations. Customers' savings are guaranteed by the state.

This fight against bank crime has alarmed the international bourgeoisie, who dumped Venezuelan bonds, whilst Moody's Investors Service has downgraded credit ratings on two big banks, the private Banco Mercantil CA and the state Banco Venezuela (acquired from Banco Santander for \$1.95bn earlier this year). In November it cost \$1.156m for lenders to insure each \$10m loan to Venezuela. Iceland's debt cost only \$0.4m per \$10m to insure, and Britain's \$0.073m, whilst McDonald's cost \$0.045m. Even Greece's debt was insured at a mere \$0.0202m. Venezuela's rating is clearly political.

Asset seizures

The state has seized the assets of several bank owners who are charged with fraud and has proceeded to freeze their assets abroad. 'The battle that we are waging against these bankers who sabotaged and robbed many people is advancing rapidly,' Chavez declared on 10 December. 'I have ordered the takeover of tuna, fish, corn processing and rice companies, as well as [the bankers'] estates and cattle... this will become wealth for the people'. He added: 'We are confronting these problems in a coordinated manner with the whole state, and we are taking over companies that were forming a kind of network... We cannot wait until tomorrow. At the first sign, [we take] immediate action and inexorably apply the established laws and procedures.' The government is waging a full-scale battle against corruption in the financial sector. 'The traitors have many forms of connecting with each other, and we have to unmask them', said Chavez. In this battle the media is central, and on 23 January RCTV and five other cable

channels were temporarily taken off the air for breaking transmission laws requiring them to televise government announcements. On 14 January the state expropriated the sugar mills 'Casta', in the state of Tachira and the 'La Batalla' agricultural mill in the state of Barinas, to turn them into social property.

Currency realignment

On 8 January, a decree created a dual exchange rate in order to conserve foreign exchange and to prevent speculation against the national currency (the Strong Bolivar). Priority imports – food, medicines, machinery – will be paid for at 2.60 bolivars per US dollar instead of the previous 2.15 bolivars; the rest will be paid for at 4.30 bolivars. The government also aims to legalise and intervene in the 'parallel' or 'free market' where the dollar had reached 5.8 bolivars. The large multinationals will now not be able to draw such large quantities of US dollars from the country when converting their profits, which will strengthen Venezuela's reserves. Colgate-Palmolive, the world's largest toothpaste-maker, will now cut its earnings forecast to reflect the decline in its bolivar holdings.

The conditions are being created to encourage domestic manufacturing production. This will be supported by state measures to ensure that the necessary technology is not blocked by overseas corporations. Oil exports from PDVSA produce just under 90% of Venezuela's export income (and one third of its GDP), and the decree now means that PDVSA will have twice the bolivars it previously received. The further result is that the government will have a surplus on its budget this year. The overall aim is to overcome the economic model imposed for decades by the United States with its dependency on oil exports.

*Expropriate! Educate!
All resources to the people!*

USAID: arm of US imperialism

LUKE LUCAS

On 4 September 1961, US Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act which established the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). For the last half century, USAID has been working as a front organisation for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to channel and filter funding and strategic political support to groups and individuals that support the US agenda abroad. Under the pretext of 'promoting democracy' it has awarded grants to counter-revolutionary and right-wing terrorist groups to aid 'regime change' wherever US imperialist interests have been challenged, from Afghanistan to Cuba, Venezuela to Vietnam.

Eva Golinger, in her blog www.chavez.code.com, has recently analysed USAID and its latest international programmes. Golinger quotes former CIA officer Phillip Agee saying that USAID, along with Development Alternatives Inc and the National Endowment for Democracy 'are instruments of the US Embassy and behind these three organisations is the CIA' and that USAID representatives 'maintain close collaboration with other embassy offices in identifying opportunities, selecting partners and ensuring the programme remains consistent with US foreign policy.' Here are some examples of where USAID has recently been or is currently active:



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

- **Cuba** On 5 December 2009 an employee of Development Alternatives Inc, funded by USAID, was detained in Havana after being found distributing mobile phones, computers and sophisticated satellite communication to counter-revolutionaries and mercenary groups. Last year alone the US Congress approved \$40 million for USAID to 'promote transition to democracy' in Cuba through infiltration, espionage and subversion.
- **Venezuela** The Office for Transition Initiatives, a specialised branch of USAID, funds more than 533 organisations, political parties, programmes and projects, mainly in opposition to the progressive Chavez government, with a budget next year of nearly \$15 million. The US is stepping up its attacks on Venezuela through USAID, funding groups and individuals involved in violent demonstrations, media warfare and other destabilisation attempts against President Chavez's government.

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- **Bolivia** In September 2009, President Evo Morales terminated an official agreement with USAID that had allowed it to operate in Bolivia, based on substantial evidence documenting the agency's funding of violent separatist groups seeking to break up the country. USAID had spent huge sums of money on projects within Bolivia, \$89 million in 2007 alone.
- **Honduras** USAID funds Hagamos Democracia, the electoral monitoring organisation which was hired by the Honduran coup regime for the recent sham elections.
- **Haiti** Much of USAID's current work in Haiti is carried out as the Haiti Transition Initiative which supports the US-backed government by bankrolling violent repression of resistance. USAID's intervention in Haiti can be expected to increase as resistance grows to the US troops that have been occupying Haiti since the earthquake.
- **Afghanistan** On 16 December 2009 five USAID workers died when their office was bombed by the Taliban. Following this a high-level USAID official confirmed the CIA uses USAID's name to issue contracts and funding to third parties in order to provide cover for clandestine operations as part of the occupation of Afghanistan.
- **Iraq** After coalition forces invaded in 2003, USAID was central in exporting neo-liberalism to Iraq. It created a document for prospective contractors advising that main goals include privatising state-owned assets, including oil, and creating a world-class stock exchange.

HONDURAS

Honduran elections: setback for the resistance

LUKE LUCAS

In the last issue of FRFI we reported on the campaign of the Honduran resistance to boycott sham presidential elections organised by the coup regime for 29 November 2009. Three days after the election, the Honduran Supreme Election Tribunal continued to withhold the official results and claimed a turnout of 61%. Later the Tribunal had to concede that only 49% had voted, fewer than the 55% who voted in 2005 when ousted President Manuel Zelaya, then standing as a ruling class candidate, was elected. However, the turnout has been sufficient for the Honduran ruling class to reassert its authority, even if the only countries to recognise the outcome have been the US, Colombia, Panama, Peru, Costa Rica, Canada and Israel. In recognition of the situation, Zelaya left the Brazilian embassy where he had sought refuge since returning clandestinely to the country in September 2009, accepting an offer of exile in Dominica.

The coup regime pulled out all the stops to maximise turnout: extending voting for an extra hour, attacking peaceful demonstrations that urged a boycott, shutting down anti-coup media outlets and, as reported by farmers in the town of Magdalena, bringing in Salvadorean supporters of the fascist ARENA Party to vote. Honduran employers also threatened

people's jobs if they failed to prove they voted.

Since the elections Honduras has already taken many steps backwards. On 12 January, Congress voted 122 to 5 to withdraw from the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). Honduras joined ALBA in 2008, and with its support, President Zelaya had brought 500,000 Hondurans out of poverty, begun a reforestation campaign and was aiming to eradicate illiteracy in the country by January 2010. Rafael Alegria, a leader of the Honduran resistance, summed it up when he said 'the coup leaders want to return to the past to benefit the empire and the oligarchy.' Repression continues: on 7 December, a death squad gunned down a group of six known resistance members who were walking down a street in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras.

However, the resistance is defiant: as Gilberto Rios Munguia, a leader of the youth movement *Los Necios*, says, 'the popular national identity is fully summarised in one word: Resistance... Suddenly consciousness has come, youth take their freedom seriously... injustice is rejected and now we easily associate the two party system with the oligarchy, injustice with capitalism, coup d'état with fascism, hypocrisy with Obama and imperialism with underdevelopment... We are advancing and we will win.'

Victory to the Honduran resistance!

CUBAN SOCIALISM IN 2010

The ineffectiveness of the US government's enduring campaign to isolate Cuba was clearly demonstrated in 2009 as 41 heads of state and government visited the island, almost one a week, including 18 from Latin America and the Caribbean. There have been more than 180 actions of solidarity with Cuba which have achieved legislative change in 85 nations. There were 115 delegates from 57 countries in a special session of the National Assembly in mid-December 2009 attended by 14 heads of Parliaments and delegates from the European Union, Canada, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Australasia. Cuba has diplomatic relations with 183 of the 192 UN member-states.

The National Assembly of People's Power announced GDP growth of 1.4% in 2009, with a projected 1.9% growth this year. This is well below last year's plan (which had been revised down in spring 2009), but is a good result in the context of the global capitalist crisis and the cost of hurricane damage (\$10bn) in late 2008. Cuba's export earnings have been hit by the fall in the international price of nickel from \$50,000 per tonne in late 2007 to \$9,000 in 2008, and by decreased tourist spending on the island. Although there was a 3% increase in tourist numbers there was an 11% decrease in the revenue from the tourist industry. These factors led to deficits of hard currency for trade, which is especially tough for Cuba which has to pay for many imports upfront and in hard currency because of the US blockade. However, not all its economic problems can be blamed on the blockade or hurricanes. For example, work productivity decreased by 1.1% on 2008. Despite these challenges, Cuba ended 2009 with a small surplus in international trade. At the National Assembly it was announced that in March 2010, for the first time since 1990, the economy will be directed by a five-year plan, promoting projects to facilitate Cuba's socio-economic development.

The challenge for 2010 remains to raise productivity, increase exports and strengthen import substitution. By November 2009, calculated savings due to increased domestic food production were 58.5 million Cuban Convertible pesos (CUC) – 25 million CUC higher than in 2008. However, the potential for domestic production is much greater. In 2009, 587 million litres of milk were produced in Cuba. Every extra 57 million litres means a saving of \$18 million on 5,700 tonnes of imported powdered milk. However, 2010 plans still require the import of 35 million tonnes of milk, costing \$100 million. Cuba imports a lot of food from the US and Raul Castro recognised in his speech to the National Assembly that 'Food production constitutes an issue of national security; if we rely on imports we are not independent.'

920,000 hectares have now been distributed to over 100,000 beneficiaries as part of the campaign to distribute idle land in usufruct (short-term rent free loan) initiated in 2008, 54% of the total land earmarked for this purpose. The state has increased its payments to farmers for corn, milk, pork and other products to stimulate their production, but it has not raised the prices at which these products are sold to the Cuban people. 2009 saw the average monthly salary increase by 2.9%, up to 427 Cuban peso (national currency). Increases were especially targeted at productive workers, with bonuses and incentives to stimulate productivity. However, education and health care workers also saw wage increases.

debate, reflection and consolidation

Cuba began 2010 debating and reflecting on how to consolidate its socialist system. Three events which took place in December 2009 illustrate the Revolution's challenges and strengths: the National Assembly of People's Power which reviewed the progress and problems faced in 2009 and debated plans for 2010; the 8th Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) hosted in Havana; and a spontaneous mobilisation of ordinary Cubans against US government attempts to create a counter-revolution (see box). From Havana, SAM MCGILL reports.

Cubans mobilise against imperialist mercenaries

For half a century US imperialism has gone to staggering lengths to destroy the Cuban Revolution and damage the example it sets for the oppressed people of the world. The Obama administration is stepping up efforts to create an internal opposition among the Cuban people, 'investing' \$55 million in this endeavour in 2009 alone. These attempts are failing miserably. Imperialist powers and their allies continue to underestimate the revolutionary strength of the Cuban people, demonstrated in December 2009 when a neighbourhood in Havana took to the streets in response to a group of imperialist-paid mercenaries known as the Women in White.

The Women in White are the families of 75 counter-revolutionaries gaoled in April 2003 for being paid agents of the US government attempting to sabotage the Cuban Revolution. For years their monthly demonstrations have been ignored by the Cuban people, who realise they represent nothing more than a photo opportunity for the international bourgeois press. However, last month a crowd of Cubans responded, dancing and chanting as they surrounded the Women in White, banging on the car of a British diplomat who was present. Diplomats from the US and

German embassies were also participating, in violation of international diplomacy laws.

This spontaneous resistance by Cuban revolutionaries was captured on video and posted on YouTube (see it under January's entries on RATB's new blog www.ratbnews.blogspot.com). These ordinary Cubans, mostly women, show disgust at the Women in White's false claims to be fighting for freedom. They are losing patience with the self-aggrandisement of a tiny group of mercenaries who would return Cuba to imperialist domination in exchange for a few material privileges. Questioned by a TV crew, one of the Women in White admits receiving money from an organisation linked to Santiago Alvarez, a leader of the Miami Mafia responsible for many terrorist attacks against Cuba. He was arrested in the US in 2005 in possession of numerous weapons and ammunition.

Raul Castro told the National Assembly: 'The United States won't quit trying to destroy the revolution... They are giving new breath to open and undercover subversion against Cuba... The enemy is as active as ever.' Nonetheless, as the spontaneous demonstration showed, Cuban revolutionaries are also active and they will defend their Revolution.

Luke Lucas

Further increases are planned for 2010.

In 2009, the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) organised a national consultation in every community in order to identify general and specific problems, measuring the pulse of, and strengthening their links with, the population. The two key problems identified were dissatisfaction with the dual currency system (CUC and peso) and the low relative value of wages in national currency. However, as the PCC recognises, the only way to increase wages without generating inflation is to increase productivity and production. For this it is necessary to raise consciousness and promote a stronger work ethic.

No date has been set for the PCC's sixth Congress. This is likely to be the last Congress involving the historic leadership of the Revolution and in Raul Castro's own words: 'if you want things to last you must do them slowly'. Discussions are under way within the PCC about the dual currency, ration system, wages and social security, about raising the political level and commitment to communism, particularly among young people who will have the Revolution in their hands in the future. There are also discussions about the structure of government and of the PCC itself, including how new cadre are elected and developed. *Granma*, the daily newspaper of the PCC, is stimulating discussion by dedicating four pages in every Friday



Cubans mobilise to show their support for the revolutionary government, surrounding the Women in White protestors

edition for public letters and articles.

The daily live televised round-table discussion also promotes debate. Recently it has dealt with the issues of racism in Cuba, tackling social prejudice and police discrimination. Public debate has also been encouraged on the issues of drugs and of sexuality. Cuba has begun providing free transsexual surgery and proposals to allow same sex marriage are being considered. The Union of Young Communists (UJC) is changing its focus from cultural and musical projects to developing cadre and raising the polit-

ical level of young people, engaging them in the Revolution and the preservation of socialism, and in countering counter-revolutionary activities which mainly target the youth.

The government is examining ways of using the economic privileges of Cubans who receive remittances or earn CUCs through the tourist trade, to subsidise the rest of the population. For example, the government phone company imposes a high CUC cost on personal mobile phone use. With the surplus this generates the government then subsidises socially beneficial phone

use. For example, doctors may be provided with a mobile phone and 400 free minutes of airtime a month to use in serving the community. We should expect more changes in the coming year and major policy measures in years that follow. These will be designed to promote equality and strengthen the sustainability of the Revolution and the independence of the economy.

ALBA: A fight not only for justice, but for the survival of the species

The 8th Summit of ALBA-TCP, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Trade Treaty of the Peoples (formerly the Bolivarian Alternative), was hosted in Havana in mid-December. It marked five years since ALBA was set up by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004. They were joined by Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, St Vincent and Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda and, until the coup in June 2009, Honduras. Both Paraguay and Uruguay are likely to join ALBA soon.

ALBA brings a political, economic and social alliance to defend the sovereignty, self-determination, identity and unity between the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, practising the principles of cooperation, solidarity, mutual assistance, social justice and complementary economic planning for sustained integration and development (see FRFI 212). Paraphrasing the *Communist Manifesto*, the Cuban daily newspaper *Granma* quipped that 'a spectre is haunting America... it is the spectre of ALBA'. Yet ALBA is more than a spectre, it is a concrete reality developing from strength to strength in the face of the global economic crisis. There are already over 100 ALBA projects spanning health provision, telecommunication, food and fuel distribution, scientific projects and initiatives for environmental protection.

The ALBA summit concluded with a 25-point agreement including: commitments to assist people with disabilities in productive, economic, social and cultural sectors without discrimination; the extension of public health provision; a continuation of campaigns to eradicate illiteracy, total coverage of primary education; the continuation of ALBA's cultural and sports projects; the development of a network of science, technology and innovation sharing for key sectors; the facilitation of telecommunication services for ALBA populations (including ALBATEL, an enterprise currently building a submarine fibre optic cable between Cuba and Venezuela, and the Simon Bolivar Satellite); and the implementation of the SUCRE, a virtual currency to facilitate trade between ALBA countries without using the US dollar. In January 2010, the first SUCRE transactions took place between Cuba and Venezuela.

Many ALBA initiatives depend on Cuba's knowledge, its capacity and human resources and the oil reserves and wealth of Venezuela. A UJC member, Fioore, told FRFI that 'it is very early to gauge the economic achievements of ALBA, particularly in the face of a global recession and increasing US aggression; ALBA is primarily a political force. In Cuba it is necessary to take the experience of our revolution forward and build on the Alliance to secure the future of socialism.' With the Cuban and Bolivarian Revolutions at its heart, it is clear that ALBA is an anti-imperialist beacon of hope to millions facing global exploitation and oppression. As Raul Castro stated in the closing speech of the Summit: 'United, we will be in a better position to face the economic crisis... a better world is possible.' ■

Greek austerity measures spark resistance

ANDREW ALEXANDER

Greece is in the midst of its worst economic crisis since the end of the Second World War. In the post-war period, the US Marshall Plan brought Greece, then reeling from the impact of civil war and famine, under the economic management of imperialist countries and destroyed the Greek revolutionary movement. Now imperialism is once again determined to maintain control over Greece as it is wracked by economic and political crisis.

Trouble in Euroland

The Greek economy is broke; public debt is expected to rise this year to over 120% of GDP while the annual budget deficit stands at 12.7% of GDP. Unemployment is 7.7% and looks set to rise. The situation is aggravated by Greece's membership of the euro. Poor EU countries such as Greece struggle to maintain a currency that is levelled with much wealthier, imperialist countries like France and Germany. Some economic analysts suggest that Greece and other weak states could be expelled from the eurozone, but in reality European imperialism will not allow Greece to leave the euro. To do this would seriously undermine the EU.

Furthermore, Greece is of strategic importance, a gateway to Turkey, which is due to join the EU, and hence to the Middle East. In an epoch of increasing imperialist rivalry the EU understands that if it is to expand its borders, markets and influence it must maintain the current 'union'. However, neither will Greece be allowed to default on its debt.

Austerity breeds resistance

Greece is under pressure from the EU to introduce huge spending cuts. But such austerity measures will fuel the demonstrations and strikes that have characterised Greece over the past two years. In December 2009, the social-democratic PASOK party led by George Papandreou won the election with a pledge to return the country to economic health without penalising the poor. Papandreou then immediately reneged on his election promise by committing to reduce the annual budget deficit to under 3% in three years.



29 January 2010 Firemen protest in Athens, Greece against public spending cuts

Greece's history of resistance makes it potentially a weak link for European imperialism. During the 1960s, a revolutionary movement against the monarchy led to a right-wing coup and military junta in 1967, supported by Europe and the US. Several thousand communists and militants were exiled. But in the early 1970s, organised working class resistance led to the removal of

the junta and the formation of the modern Greek republic. European imperialism then worked with Andreas Papandreou (founder of PASOK and father of George Papandreou) to integrate Greece into the EU in 1981. Since then there have been intermittent but prolonged demonstrations against austerity measures, but a combination of police brutality and opportunism within the movement have held back real political developments. During the December elections, a series of strikes shut down schools, hospitals and airports in 60 cities and towns across the country. The protests were organised by the PAME trade union organisation, which is affiliated to the Greek Communist Party (KKE), but the country's two

biggest unions refused to support the strike. And PAME and the KKE, who are tied to the opportunist politics of PASOK, in turn failed to support demonstrations by angry students and youth against unemployment and poverty. However, as the economic crisis intensifies, the history of the Greek working class suggests that they will continue to organise to resist.

Ireland: economic crisis deepens

PAUL MALLON

The economic crisis has continued to deepen in Ireland. As we reported in FRFI 211, in October 2008 Ireland became the first eurozone country to enter recession, and the IMF acknowledged that the Republic faced the deepest crisis of any advanced economy in the world. In December 2009, the Irish government announced yet another budget in an attempt to stem the crisis. Living standards are now under serious attack, and the Irish people are having to face up to a reality that the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom is over. More unrest lies ahead.

On 10 December 2009, Ireland's Fianna Fail government, in office for the past 12 years, proposed a budget intended to rebalance the Irish economy over the next three years. Finance minister Brian Lenihan announced a package of €4bn state spending cuts aimed primarily at public sector workers and the poor. The next day, the Irish parliament passed the Social Welfare Bill which cuts benefits by 4.1% on aver-

approach with government, curbing union militancy to facilitate the inward investment which underlay the Celtic Tiger boom. In 1980 union membership reached a peak when 62% of employees were members, but has been falling steadily ever since. The latest figures available from the Central Statistics Office in Dublin show that in 2007 union membership had continued to fall to around 840,000, or 31% of employees. Latest estimates suggest that membership levels are highest in the public sector at about 70%, and lowest in the private sector at approximately 25%. While large-scale opposition to the budget cuts was expected to begin in the New Year, union leaders openly stated that all-out strike action would not be deployed and instead, on 25 January, workers began work-to-rule action. On 26 January, low paid workers from the Civil Public Service Union agreed to escalate industrial action from 1 February.

The most recent unemployment figures reveal the extent of the crisis. According to the Central Statistics Office,



Irish finance minister Brian Lenihan addresses the media after announcing record spending cuts of 4 billion euros

age, with child benefit being reduced by €16 a month, the weekly carer's benefit by €8.20, and big cuts in unemployment benefit for those under 25. Widows and blind people were also targeted for benefit cuts following the removal of the annual Christmas Bonus. Jack O'Connor, the president of the largest trade union SIPTU, said he genuinely feared the government was pushing the country into a severe depression. The charity Social Justice Ireland stated that the budget was 'anti-family, anti-poor and anti-children', and that it placed faith in the neo-liberal economic system which had caused the crisis in the first place.

On 15 December, as the Irish parliament voted on measures which would reduce public sector pay by between 5% and 15%, thousands of public sector workers held a rally. Analysing the budget, 'The Poor Can't Pay' group, a coalition of charities, unions and community groups, stated that one euro in every five cut by the government came from the pockets of the poor. Spokesperson Dr Murphy said: 'Many households will suffer multiple cuts. For those in receipt of social welfare, and low paid workers, this comes on top of job losses and reduced hours. The sick and the elderly will also face new prescription charges.'

For over 20 years trade unions in Ireland pursued a 'social partnership'

unemployment remains at a 14-year high. The Live Register of Jobseeker's Benefit claimants stood at 426,700, up 133,700 on the previous December. 423,595 people are now unemployed. In the year to December 2009, the unadjusted Live Register increased by 133,577, a rise of 46.1%. Estimated unemployment for December remained at 12.5%, the same as in October and November. Further increases are being curbed by the contraction of the labour force, partly as a result of emigration. The Economic and Social Research Institute predicts net outward migration to be 40,000 people in the year ending April 2010, up from 7,800 in the previous 12 months.

The crisis in Ireland still has a long way to go. Part of the agreement which saw the establishment of the National Asset Management Agency in November 2009 (see FRFI 211), the so-called 'bad bank' which socialises the toxic debts of six of Ireland's major banks, was to delay foreclosures until summer 2010. With house prices collapsing, the worst of the crisis still lies ahead. New calls for a public tribunal to investigate the 'wrongdoings' and 'corruption' which led to the crash abound. It is not a mismanagement of capitalism which is at fault for the crisis; but capitalism itself. There will be no quick fixes.

Ireland: impasse over policing

PAUL MALLON

The political dispute over the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Six Counties was still threatening to bring down the power-sharing government as FRFI went to press. Both Gordon Brown and Irish Taoiseach Brian Cowan went to Belfast at the end of January to try to force through an agreement between the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin. The talks follow a three-year impasse following Sinn Féin's acceptance in 2007 of British police in Ireland. Since then the reality of a political settlement enshrining the Unionist veto has paralysed the process much to Sinn Féin's frustration. Allegations of corruption and sleaze levelled in particular at the DUP have complicated matters: the DUP leadership fears it will lose unionist support if there are elections brought about by a collapse of Stormont.

The October 2006 St Andrews Agreement between the parties and the Irish and British governments forced Sinn Féin to accept British police in Ireland as the precondition for the devolution of policing powers to the north. Analysing the balance of political forces at the time we wrote that 'The Unionist veto remains at the heart of the Six County statelet, fully backed by British imperialism - Sinn Féin's reformist strategy of engagement with such forces will come up against severe tests in the period ahead.' (FRFI 195) Since then the Unionist veto has

prevented the completion of devolution as the DUP has insisted upon 'unionist community confidence' prior to the devolution of powers, in particular by relaxing rules the Parades Commission operates in respect of allowing supremacist Orange marches.

December brought revelations that the wife of First Minister Peter Robinson, Iris Robinson, had had an extramarital affair with an 18-year-old in 2008. Robinson has been a DUP MP since 2001, describing herself as a born-again Christian; in 2008 she received the 'bigot of the year' award from the gay equality organisation Stonewall for her comments on homosexuality. The revelations included allegations that she had solicited undeclared loans worth £50,000; her husband was then forced to step down as First Minister on 11 January because of accusations that he had known about the loans and had failed to report them himself. This has hit unionist support for the DUP hard. Also in December, a Dublin newspaper reported that the brother of Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams is wanted by police in the north on 23 charges of paedophilia. In 1987, Gerry Adams was made aware of the allegations but later permitted his brother to remain as a senior Sinn Féin official and work in youth group projects in West Belfast and the border area until as late as 2004.

Despite the efforts of Brown and Cowan, neither Sinn Féin nor the DUP - for whom Peter Robinson remained lead negotiator - were prepared to reach an agreement by the end of January even though they had been given a 48-

hour deadline. The DUP is determined not to appear 'soft' to its bigoted unionist constituency, while Sinn Féin would have even less to show for its engagement in the peace process if it conceded on the parades issue.

Figures released on 21 January show that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) had tripled its use of anti-terror legislation in 2008/09, with almost 10,000 stop and searches across the north compared to 3,234 in 2007/08. 2,612 of these incidents occurred in the Republican areas of Derry and Strabane, compared to only 700 in unionist east and south Belfast. In January, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the use of the stop and search powers under section 44 of the Terrorism Act, which allows police to act without reasonable suspicion, was illegal. On 8 January Republican militants, using a remote-controlled bombing device, critically injured a PSNI officer in an attack in Randalstown, Co Antrim. The following week 10,000 PSNI personnel were issued with special mirrors to check under their vehicle for bombs.

As we have argued any 'progress' with the political process will be judged on the streets, where the feeling is that the devolution of policing powers is neither here nor there. That Sinn Féin supports British justice in Ireland shows how far it has travelled on the road from resistance to collaboration with British rule. As the economic crisis deepens, the Six County state's dependence on British state subsidies in order to exist will come under increased pressure. Political prisoners remain in jail, unemployment and social inequality are on the rise, as is state repression - all concentrated in nationalist areas which have been the historic bedrock of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. A new campaign against British rule must be built, learning from and not repeating the mistakes of the past.

Racism against Muslim prisoners

I want to highlight an incident that has seriously affected my situation in prison. I am serving a ten-year sentence. Since my conviction I have been exemplary in behaviour and incurred no disciplinary reports prior to the incident I am about to describe. I am of Pakistani origin and until recently had not experienced any discriminatory treatment in prison or ill-treatment at the hands of other prisoners. **SUNNY NASIR AHMED** writes from HMP Glenochil.

In February 2008 I began to feel targeted by a small group of prisoners who behaved in a racist way towards me. Rather than confront them and risk an escalation, I requested a cell change to another area of the prison. This was eventually granted. Soon after, my cell was subjected to a special search by security staff, which confused me because such searches are only carried out because of definite information or intelligence. No explanation was given and I hoped that it would not adversely affect my progress in prison.

In about June a prisoner called Mohammed Siddique was released from segregation and allocated a cell close to mine. A young second-generation Pakistani from a small town in Stirlingshire, he had been convicted of downloading 'terrorist material' from the internet. There was some controversy surrounding his conviction and a view that he was in fact a naive and



On 29 January, Mohammed Atif Siddique, pictured here, won his appeal against convictions under the Terrorism Act. The Scottish appeal court judge stated that the trial jury had been misdirected and that this amounted to a miscarriage of justice.

impressionable young man, guilty of little more than stupidly downloading material from websites that in the current political climate are considered extremely risky. Within Glenochil prison he was considered quite vulnerable because of the general mood against 'Muslim extremists' – although in reality he could hardly be described as such.

I formed a friendship with Mr Siddique because of our shared ethnic background and because we attended the Muslim class together and worked in the same work-shed. Prisoners in this work-shed often took items such as sticky tape and magnets without permission for their own personal use. Those found in possession of such items were usually given warnings or placed on disciplinary reports for possession of unauthorised articles.

In August 2009 Mr Siddique took a roll of sticky tape and two small magnets from the work shed and casually left them in my cell. Considering them of no great importance I left them on open display. During a routine search they were discovered and I was placed on report for being in possession of unauthorised items. At the subsequent disciplinary hearing I pleaded guilty and was given three days' segregation and 10 days' loss of privileges – a fairly standard punishment.

However, the following day I was seen by a governor who subjected me to intense questioning along the lines of: 'Who are you intending to harm?', 'Are you planning to escape?', 'Did you intend to construct a bomb?' I was totally confused and protested that I was innocent of such accusations. Nevertheless, I was made subject to 'special security measures' – placed on the 'escape risk' category and 'high supervision level' and made subject to closed visits with immediate family only. I was also held in isolation and photographed. Stories were leaked to the tabloids about a 'terrorist conspiracy' involving Mohammed Siddique,

who at the time was awaiting the appeal against his conviction. The reality was completely different and had the items concerned been discovered in the cell of white prisoners a completely different interpretation would have been put on it. Because I am a Muslim of Asian background it was automatically assumed that I must be involved in terrorist activity, especially as I shared a prison friendship with a man reviled by the media as a professional terrorist.

In September 2009 I was finally released back into the prison mainstream and there was a gradual acknowledgement by the Glenochil administration that the 'terrorist conspiracy' was nonsense. Open visits were reinstated and I was taken off the high supervision level. But my situation has changed completely and I am treated differently by both staff and prisoners. Despite the quiet acceptance that I was guilty of nothing, officially the claim is that I was segregated because of my alleged involvement in unspecified 'subversive activities'. Inevitably, this will impact upon my ability to progress to an open prison or my chances of parole. The attitude of most staff and prisoners is that there is no smoke without fire, and so I am now viewed by many as a potential terrorist, which increases the racism against me.

I can be philosophical about prisoners, who on the whole are poorly educated and therefore easily influenced by crude racist ideas. But I am less accepting of the behaviour of the prison authorities who misused their power to taint me as a terrorist purely because I happened to be of colour and of the Muslim faith. Despite my Pakistani origins I was born and raised in Glasgow and have always considered myself first and foremost a Scotsman with no interest whatsoever in politics. However, now I feel alienated and victimised and hold the prison authorities wholly responsible for this.

Strategy and tactics in the struggle for prisoners' rights

In **FRFI 209** Ben Gunn wrote about how he envisaged the Association of Prisoners (AOP) taking forward struggles for improved conditions and treatment. In subsequent issues John Bowden and Dermot Donovan responded. Here we print Ben's response to their criticisms and a further response from John Bowden. (Both have been edited due to lack of space.) Further contributions are welcome.

Ben Gunn

Some people have allowed wishful thinking and ideology to obscure their intelligence in their criticism of the AOP.

Some believe the 1990 riots were the start of positive change. I disagree. Whilst the 1990s did see physical refurbishments across the estate, including in-cell sanitation, it would be a lie to claim that this was a direct result of the riots. These critics overlook the range of new mechanisms brought in to control us after the riots: the IEP Scheme; Sentence Planning; Volumetric Control; MDT; risk assessments; offending behaviour courses; NOMS; C&R; Close Supervision Centres... I could go on.

Even on the most positive reading, the riots got us the Ombudsman, TV and bogs. That's it. On the other hand, it saw us being wrapped up in a mesh of control mechanisms that mess with our daily lives to an extent greater than ever known in prison history. It can easily be argued that the 1990 riots were a disaster. And I say this as some-

one who was on the roof at Bristol in 1990, not as some armchair historian.

I think that violence has only one use – as self-defence against brutality. When a prison is out of control, when governors, area managers and IMB cannot or will not restrain the worst excesses of staff, then rebellion is a just method in a just cause. Think of the old Dartmoor or Scrubs in the late 1990s as examples where violence was the only means left to prisoners to defend themselves.

Apart from that, I believe violent rebellion would be wrong on every level. Politically, it would be a disaster for prisoners' rights, playing into the hands of those who characterise us as animals. Practically, it would lead to even greater methods of control.

This doesn't mean we are powerless. What critics overlook (whilst calling me naive) are the lessons from other situations where one side seems to have the preponderance of force. That lesson is the one that Gandhi taught the British Empire and Vaclav Havel taught the Czechoslovak dicta-

torship. The lesson is simple – whilst the system may have Force, it is the masses that have Power.

Without our co-operation, the system could not function for a day. We cook the meals, clean the landings, march to the workshops, populate psychology courses and walk to our cells at bang-up. We walk into servitude day after day, accept endless indignities, and say nothing. All we have to do is say 'not one more step', and there aren't enough segregation blocks or privilege warning forms in existence to deal with it.

My critics (who never offer solutions of their own) also argue that we should never enter negotiations with the system. How the hell is that meant to work? Movements need not specify their end and the aims of the AOP are but a beginning. But to say, 'no talks' is to guarantee that nothing is ever achieved. It is yet another self-serving avenue to excuse our own inaction. The only way forward, short of global socialism popping up soon, is to alter the balance of power within prisons. Once that is achieved, the system will be forced to talk. And are we meant to send them away? Or are we to sit and negotiate so that prisoners can begin to exercise influence over how we are treated? That is the beginning. History will reveal how it ends.

John Bowden

Ben Gunn's response illustrates exactly why prisoners should treat the AOP with caution. His position is essentially this: any radical ideas that

support the struggle of prisoners in a revolutionary way are foolish and false; violent protests and open resistance are counter-productive and inevitably result in even worse treatment; the only way forward is negotiation with the gaolers. This message is one frequently sent out by those who administer the system – 'Don't have anything to do with dangerous and radical ideas; if you openly resist and fight back your punishment will be harsher; bring your grievances to us and we'll decide whether they're legitimate or not'.

Gunn says that violent rebellion is only ever justified in self-defence against brutality. What does he imagine it was that provoked prisoners into open rebellion in virtually every single major prison riot? Parkhurst 1969, Hull 1976, Gartree 1972, Strangeways 1990 etc were all provoked by prison officer brutality and violence. Prisoners do not rise up and suffer even

greater retributive repression unless the brutality they're already subjected to becomes unendurable.

While criticising those who embrace a revolutionary analysis, Gunn offers an ideology of his own – a Gandhi-like philosophy of peaceful moral protest. Maybe he would tell us how the poor neo-colonised masses of India were liberated from extreme economic poverty and political powerlessness by Gandhi's peaceful protests, or indeed why Vaclav Havel was feted by the imperialists but never by the poor of Czechoslovakia? The reality is, of course, that the concept of peaceful protest is an absurdity, based on the ridiculous belief that those who wield total power are susceptible to moral persuasion. Apparently prisoners should spontaneously become aware of their common interest, *en masse* withdraw co-operation and, while infused with 'people's power', seek out negotiation with a morally responsive prison system. Ben understands nothing of the realities of power or political struggle or what prisons truly represent in a society viciously divided by class, wealth and power.

The AOP has nothing to offer prisoners beyond an illustration of how collaboration is often dressed up and disguised as reform.

Obama's prisons – a brief snapshot

- One year on from his election, President Barack Obama has failed to deliver on his promise to close the US torture camp at illegally occupied Guantanamo Bay.
- The US holds approximately 2.5 million people in prisons, with another 5 million subject to parole or probation supervision – in total one out of every 31 adult residents or 3.2% of the population.
- On 19 January the Supreme Court threw out an earlier ruling setting aside the death penalty ruling against former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, who has been on death row since 1981.
- In Richmond, Virginia, nine Rastafarian prisoners have been in solitary confinement for ten years, following their refusal to comply with a local rule that all prisoners must keep their hair short.

FRFI ROUND UP

Fight racism, fascism and imperialism



On 5 December, FRFI supporters in Newcastle held a rolling picket through the city centre under the slogan 'Israel: off your trolley'

With the General Election looming most of the left, running scared at the thought of a Tory victory, are openly calling for a vote for the racist war-mongering Labour Party. We say don't vote, organise the fightback!

Fight racism!

In Newcastle FRFI continues to play an active role in Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR). TCAR's monthly Speak Out Against Racism events continue to provide a lively and consistent anti-racist presence on the streets. Similar events have been taking place in **Sunderland**, most recently on 12 December.

In **London** on 23 January FRFI supported a No Borders event called 'Life is too short to be controlled'. No Borders is a campaign against border controls and in defence of migrants suffering because of racist immigration controls. Hundreds of activists gathered outside Kings Cross/St Pancras Station, where the British Border Authority has detention facilities for migrants. Activists then took over London streets to march two miles to Piccadilly Circus, where they held an open-mic rally with speeches in the middle of the road. An RCG supporter spoke, highlighting the racist nature of immigration controls in imperialist Britain.

In February, **Glasgow** and **Dundee** FRFI supporters will be mobilising to confront the Scottish Defence League's attempt to take to the streets of Edinburgh. Anti-fascists in Edinburgh have already begun mobilising, and Glasgow comrades will be aiming to share the experience gained through combating the SDL's mobilisation in Glasgow last November, exposing the opportunist manoeuvres of Unite Against Fascism.

End the siege of Gaza!

Just over one year on since the murderous Israeli attack, conditions of life for the people of Gaza continue to deteriorate. The siege of Gaza is intensifying and the Palestinian people demand our solidarity. FRFI supporters are active around the country helping to build this movement.

On 5 December FRFI supporters in **Newcastle** held a rolling picket through the city centre under the slogan, 'Israel: off your trolley', targeting high street companies involved in supporting Israel economically and politically. For a full report see: <http://tinyurl.com/israeloff>. A similar event

is planned for **Manchester** on 6 February, with a public forum the following day.

In **Dundee** on 23 January an FRFI supporter spoke to a crowd that had assembled to commemorate and protest on the anniversary of the brutal assault on Gaza. Hundreds of children's shoes were poignantly laid out to represent those who had died at the hands of the Israeli Defence Force.

On 20 January in **London** the LSE FRFI Student Society screened the 1991 film *Palestine: the First Intifada*. This documentary is about the Palestinian struggle against British imperialism and Zionist colonisation. The film links the Palestinian rebellion of 1936-39 to the first Intifada which began in 1987. A Palestinian speaker highlighted the continuity between the racism and terror used by the British government against Palestinian anti-colonial struggles in the 1930s and British complicity with Israeli war crimes today.

FRFI's weekly pickets of Marks & Spencer's flagship store on Oxford Street, London, continue every Thursday from 6-8pm. We target this com-



FRFI joined London No Borders demonstration against immigration controls on 23 January

pany because of its continuing links with Israel. Hundreds of shoppers sign the petition and join the boycott every week. RCG supporters in north London have also held regular pickets of M&S stores in Wood Green and Holloway, and pickets of Newcastle M&S continue weekly.

Viva Cuba! Latin American solidarity!

New Year's day is the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. On 2 January Rock around the Blockade celebrated the anniversary with a colourful rally

EVENTS

LIVERPOOL

Mondays 1 and 15 February, 1 and 15 March 7.30-9.30pm
What is imperialism?
A series of educationals organised by Liverpool FRFI starting with Lenin's analysis of imperialism
Liverpool Methodist Centre, Bold Street (next to News from Nowhere)

MANCHESTER

Weekend of Action in Solidarity with Palestine, 6-7 February
Saturday 6 February 12 noon
Rolling picket of shops and banks that trade and profit from their links with Israel
Meet outside the Co-op Bank on Corporation Street in the city centre

Sunday 7 February 2pm
FRFI Forum: Why is Britain afraid of Palestinian democracy?
Discuss why we need to build an anti-imperialist Palestine solidarity movement
Cross Street Chapel, M2 1NL

Tuesday 2 March 7.30pm
FRFI Readers Group: regular meetings where we can discuss articles in FRFI and current events
Upstairs in The Lass O'Gowrie, Charles Street (by the side of BBC) M1 7DB

Weekend of Anti-Racist Action

13-14 March
Saturday 13 March 12 noon
Anti-Racist Speak Out: open mic for all those fighting deportations and organising against racism
Piccadilly Gardens

Sunday 14 March 2pm
FRFI Forum: Fight racism - don't vote Labour!
Cross Street Chapel, M2 1NL

GLASGOW

Wednesdays 3 February and 10 March 7.30pm
Anti-imperialist educationals
Join FRFI supporters to discuss revolutionary developments across the world, based on the latest edition of FRFI *Langside Hall*, 1 Langside Avenue, Glasgow, G41 2QR

Contact Glasgow FRFI at glasgow_frfi@yahoo.co.uk or 07779 785529

EDINBURGH

Saturday 20 February 9.30am
Oppose the fascist Scottish Defence League!
Join FRFI supporters at the Edinburgh Anti-Fascist Alliance counter demo.
Assemble outside Princes Mall, Princes St
For information updates see <http://tinyurl.com/stopsdl>

NEWCASTLE

Friday 5 February 12-2pm
Newcastle College Anti-Racist Society presents:
Who is more dangerous, Labour or the BNP?
Newcastle College Students Union (room at back of Parsons' Canteen)

Saturday 6 February 3.30-5.30pm
TCAR Book Group
The end of tolerance: racism in 21st-century Britain
Big Lamp Youth Project, 297 Westgate Road NE4 6AJ
Introductory meeting, no prior reading needed

Saturday 27 February 12-2pm
TCAR Speak Out Against Racism
Grey's Monument, Newcastle city centre

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

Every Saturday 3.30pm
Weekly meeting of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees
Big Lamp Youth Project, 297 Westgate Road NE4 6AJ

Monthly general meetings are held in St Thomas Church, Haymarket
tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk
07989 879310

Every Saturday 11am-2pm
Street actions in Newcastle and around the region: for details call 07858 346276
Or email frfinortheast@googlemail.com

LONDON

Wednesday 24 February 6.30-9.30pm
London School of Economics FRFI Student Society presents:
Capitalism: the enemy of nature
LSE Room H103, Connaught Building, Aldwych WC2
Nearest tubes Temple/Holborn

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Demonstration for Palestine - Boycott M&S
Outside M&S, Oxford Street, WC1
Nearest tube March Arch

For further details call 020 7837 1688
Or email londonfrfi@gmail.com, frfi_lse@yahoo.co.uk

With **Liverpool** Colombia Solidarity Campaign, RATB is organising a meeting to explain how Haiti has been systematically plundered by French and US imperialism and so unable to create an infrastructure to deal with the natural disasters it regularly faces. We will show the film *Aristide and the endless revolution*, which shows how the US organised two coups against Aristide because of his attempts as president to represent the Haitian poor.

Our monthly reading groups in **London**, based around the book, *Che Guevara: the Economics of Revolution* by Helen Yaffe, are drawing to a close. On 13 January we discussed the penultimate chapter, about Che's critique of the Soviet *Manual of Political Economy* - an outstanding contribu-

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE

NEWCASTLE

Rebel Cinema! - in association with Northumbria FRFI society
All films are followed by time for discussion.

Tuesday 9 February 7pm
Let's make money

Tuesday 23rd February 7pm
Posada Carriles: terrorism made in the USA

Tuesday 9 March 7pm
Matewan A story of coal miners' struggle in the 1920s United States

Tuesday 23 March 7pm
RATB Cuba Brigade 2009
Training Room, 1st Floor Northumbria University Students Union
Sandyford Road (5 mins walk from Haymarket Metro)

DUNDEE

Wednesday 17 March 7-9pm
Fidel Castro: We send doctors, not soldiers
Discussion on Cuba's aid and solidarity to Haiti
Room G7, Dundee University Tower, Perth Road

MANCHESTER

Sunday 21 February 2pm
Cine Revolution presents *Che* Part 2
Cross Street Chapel, M2 1NL

Thursdays 11 February and 11 March 7.30pm
Regular campaign meetings
Downstairs in The Vine, Kennedy Street, Manchester, M2 4BQ

LIVERPOOL

Tuesday 9 February 7.30pm
Hands off Haiti! No to occupation! Cancel the debt!
Joint meeting between Liverpool Rock around the Blockade and Colombia Solidarity Campaign
El Rincon Latino, Roscoe Street, L1

LONDON

Wednesday 10 February 7-9.30pm
Discussion of Chapter 10 Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution
London School of Economics, Room H103, Connaught Building, Aldwych WC2
Nearest tubes Temple/Holborn

Sunday 7 March 7.30pm
Film showing and discussion: Cocalero - about Bolivia and Evo Morales
Upstairs at The Compass, Corner of Penton Street and Chapel Market, N1
Nearest tube Angel

For further details and to confirm venue call 020 7837 1688
Or email office@ratb.org.uk

tion to socialist theory. The last chapter, summarising Che's legacy, will be discussed at our next RATB reading group on Wednesday 10 February at the London School of Economics, room H103.

FRFI supporters are active on the streets around Britain every week, but we understand that action needs to be linked to analysis. In order to rebuild a movement for socialism in Britain, education is essential. In **Liverpool**, following a very successful series of meetings discussing the question 'What is capitalism?', FRFI is organising a follow-on series, 'What is imperialism?'. Similar meetings are taking place in other areas. We need you to be part of this important work. Contact us today to discuss ways you can get involved.

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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email _____

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Banks saved by drug money

In Colombia, more than \$5bn has been spent in recent years in order to deliberately fail to end the 'war on drugs'. Narcotics are the economic base of Uribe's political, army and paramilitary allies. Narcotics profits are also a vital component of the US-dominated international financial system. The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Costa, has asserted that as much as \$325bn in narcotics profits helped to fund major international banks through their liquidity crisis in 2008 and 2009. His apparently startling announcement covers up the reality that international off-shore tax havens routinely channel hundreds of billions of illicit funds into the international financial system.

ALVARO MICHAELS
London

Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

On 19 January the US Supreme Court took a clear step toward the legal lynching of Mumia Abu-Jamal. The Court vacated a 2001 decision by federal district court judge William Yohn overturning Mumia's death sentence.

Mumia was targeted by the police and FBI in his teenage years as a Black Panther leader and later as a journalist and MOVE supporter renowned for his searing exposés of cop brutality and racist oppression. In a blatantly racist and political frame-up, Mumia was railroaded to death row in 1982 on false charges of killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. Without a shred of actual evidence, he was convicted on the basis of phony ballistics and other manufactured 'evidence', a 'confession' concocted by cops and

prosecutors, massive police intimidation of witnesses and racist jury rigging.

The hugely disproportionate number of black people on America's death rows is a testament to the racist subjugation of the black population, which is fundamental to the maintenance of American capitalism. The 'justice' system threatens Mumia with the ultimate state sanction that it used against earlier militants deemed to be threats to capitalist 'order' – the Haymarket Martyrs (1877), IWW militant Joe Hill (1915) and anarchist workers Sacco and Vanzetti (1927), to name a few. The state vendetta against Mumia began as part of the FBI's COINTELPRO campaign to wipe out the Black Panther Party in which some 38 Panthers were

killed and hundreds of others framed up and railroaded to prison.

From the time we first took up Mumia's cause more than 20 years ago, the PDC has supported the use of every possible legal avenue available to Mumia, while having no illusions in the courts or any other agency of the capitalist state. Our fight has centered on the struggle to mobilise the multiracial working class in the US and working people internationally, based on the fact that the proletariat is the one force in this society with the social power to effectively challenge the capitalist rulers.

Free Mumia!

PARTISAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE
partisandefense@earthlink.net

Michael Mansfield QC – memoirs and lies

Michael Mansfield's recently published *Memoirs of a Radical Lawyer* (which was favourably reviewed in FRFI) contains certain factual inaccuracies and lies concerning myself that need to be answered and refuted.

A chapter in his book dealing with 'Prison Riots' devotes five pages to a siege at Parkhurst prison in 1983 that I was involved in and subsequently received ten years' imprisonment for. Mansfield's role in the siege was one of intermediary and to accompany a national newspaper journalist to the prison to hear and record our grievances. The taking hostage of a prison governor and subsequent two day siege at Parkhurst was an action motivated by a desperate need to highlight brutality at the prison. Our demand that Mansfield be brought to the jail was based on a hope and belief that he would represent our interests and prevent the prison authorities and police

from ending the siege violently and with loss of life. In *Memoirs of a Radical Lawyer*, a book full of self-praise verging on the narcissistic, Mansfield describes his role at Parkhurst during the siege as one of heroic and fearless saviour of the imprisoned governor held at knifepoint by psychopathic prisoners; he aligns himself always with the prison authorities in securing the release of the hostage and claims to have single-handedly assisted them in ending the siege. In fact, he played an insignificant role in the events at Parkhurst and was never central to either the negotiations to end the siege or the dynamic of the siege itself.

More seriously, and with the obvious intention of increasing the dramatic effect of the personal physical danger he faced at Parkhurst during the siege, he describes me in the following way: 'I had defended John Bowden at the Old Bailey in relation to what

became known as the Camberwell Murders, a series of particularly grotesque and gruesome killings, which had involved carving up homosexuals or winos while they were still alive and freezing the cuts.' This is a blatant lie. I was never convicted of such crimes and in fact he attributes to me the crimes of the infamous serial killer Dennis Nilsen. I now intend to sue Mansfield and his publishers for libel.

Mansfield, as my senior defence counsel at my original trial in 1981 defended me on one count of murder that involved the death of a single individual at the hands of three men during a drunken party. Neither the police nor prosecuting authorities have ever claimed that I was responsible for any other murders. Mansfield's lie that I was a serial killer was intended purely to lend drama to his invented account of his role at Parkhurst during the siege. Michael Mansfield now considers himself a celebrity figure and icon of the liberal establishment; in fact he's become an integral part of the establishment and shares its institutional interests.

JOHN BOWDEN
HMP Glenochil

Political asylum for Faiz Baluch

Faiz Mohammed Baluch was forced to leave Balochistan and seek refuge in Britain in September 2002. This was because of the current state of Balochistan, which is a legacy of British colonial policy. Britain occupied Balochistan in 1839 and divided the country in three. Subsequent divisions meant that Eastern Balochistan was controlled by Britain and Western Balochistan by Persia. An artificial line called the Durand line gave the northern part of Balochistan to Afghanistan. In 1928, Iran occupied Western Balochistan and Pakistan forcefully annexed independent Eastern Balochistan in 1948.

Faiz Baluch grew up with

occupying forces everywhere in his homeland and witnessed countless military campaigns against his native people. He grew up in a country where there was discrimination against his people in terms of language, education, culture, everything. He was drawn into civil and political protest against inhumane colonial acts perpetrated by the Iranian and Pakistani states – aware of the imprisonment, torture and execution of his fellow Baloch political and human rights activists. In the last 15 years he has found himself at the forefront of the democratic struggle for a free Balochistan. During this period Balochistan has been turned into a theatre of military operations. Many thousands of Baloch men, women and children have been imprisoned, tortured, executed,

disappeared or displaced.

Faiz Baluch escaped almost certain death to come to this country, a safe sanctuary, or so he thought. In Britain he has been an active campaigner for the rights of the Baloch people, organising pickets, political meetings and discussions and an online journal about Balochistan. However, he is now threatened with deportation. We ask the court to reconsider his case and offer him political asylum.

DR SHAHZAFA KARIMZADI
Senior Lecturer in Economics,
London Metropolitan University

To sign the petition for Faiz Baluch
email s.karimzadi@londonmet.ac.uk

Struggle and hope

Let me extend positive Red Season's greetings to all of you and all your comrades. A new year ahead, with new opportunities, struggle and hope. Continue doing your good work and putting out your informative paper.

'and watch and dream (and work) with us when we enter the night or arrive at the day, in love with your name – Freedom' (Rene Castillo)
Issue 14 of 4SM
(www.4strugglemag.org) is up – issue 15 will be out in early March.

JAAN LAAMAN
USP Tucson,
Arizona, US

Pro-Kurdish party banned in Turkey

On 11 December 2009, the Turkish Constitutional Court issued a ruling closing down the Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party, DTP) – the first pro-Kurdish party in the Turkish parliament in 14 years. The decision bans 37 DTP members from politics for five years and may pave the way for a wave of prosecutions against them following the lifting of their parliamentary immunity.

Politicians and parties representing Kurds and Kurdish aspirations have faced systematic persecution in Turkey, with efforts by the establishment to restrict their activities, threaten their members and ultimately disband the party. This has included, among others, the People's Labour Party (HEP), the Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖZDEP), Democratic Party (DEP) and pro-Kurdish People's Democracy (HADEP).

The decision to shut down the DEP in 1994 led to a number of DEP MPs being arrested and imprisoned, some of them sentenced to 15-year terms,

because of their public expression of their Kurdish identity. The European Court of Human Rights later found that their rights had been violated under the European Convention on Human Rights.

We believe that parliamentary immunity ought to protect the electorate, allowing the candidates they have selected to talk openly and adopt policies without fear of prosecution, as is the practice in most democratic countries. Closing down elected political parties in Turkey is a clear example that the rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression and fair elections are not safe in Turkey. This latest party closure is not only a major setback to the Kurdish issue, but it is also another devastating blow to democracy and political stability in Turkey and indeed to the country's reform vis-à-vis its EU accession bid. Once again the severe failings of the Turkish legal and political system have been laid bare for all to see.

PRANJALI ACHARYA/KERIM YILDIZ
Kurdish Human Rights Project
www.khrp.org

New Year greetings censored

We have been requested by Mr Barot (Eesa Barot A6317AC Full Sutton) to notify you that he wished to send you a thank you New Year's card, however he was prevented from doing so by Full Sutton prison on the grounds that your address is a PO box address.

He stated that we should notify you of this.

ARANI SOLICITORS
Middlesex

Darkest before dawn

The wan light of the winter solstice attests to the depths of leaden winter. The socio-political environment reveals an equally bleak season. Economic disaster wrought by greedy speculators afflicts poor and working class people across the world.

Oppression and wars waged by rapacious imperialists kill and maim our class brethren and sistren. Rampant capitalism enforced by wealth or power chains people to an environmentally and socially destructive cycle of production and consumption. And our supposed saviour from a realm ravaged by Bush the loser's party is turning out closer to their party and its imperial capital interests than the people he purports to represent.

All the clichés, however, say it is darkest before the dawn, storm, return of the light. It may be dark, but the storm that will sweep away the old order and bring socio-economic dawn gathers at an accelerating rate. The signs and portents say it as surely as the solstice marks the change from descent into dark winter to ascent towards bright spring and its renewal, rebirth, reinvigoration. May you and yours have even more cause than that to celebrate the solstice! The future holds promise, and so do you.

BILL DUNNE 10916-086
USP Big Sandy, PO Box 2068, Inez, KY-41224, US

Make my day

Hiya, FRFI. Got my paper (FRFI 212 December 2009/January 2010) today. Tops to you! Sure made my day, first real paper in six months. No back issues given, but let's see how long they play the game. It's good to read the truth. Love to all of you and thanks.

DAVID BRIGHT JB4191
C Wing, HMP Wakefield, 5 Love Lane, Wakefield WF2 9AG

FRFI campaigns against the censorship of our paper in prisons and has recently forced the governors of HMP Wakefield and HMP Whitemoor to stop preventing prisoners from receiving FRFI.

Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours

This Rock around the Blockade pamphlet covers everything you need to know about the Cuban Revolution, from Columbus to Batista, the Bay of Pigs invasion to the Battle of Ideas. Buy your copy today for only £3.95 inc p&p

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Labour government criminalises protest and attacks free speech



Anti-war protesters oppose the march by the Royal Anglian regiment, Luton, March 2009

Demonstrators on the March 2009 event in Luton, which had been agreed in advance with the local police, held up placards with slogans such as 'Anglian soldiers - Butchers of Basra', 'British government - terrorist government', 'Illegal war in Iraq' and 'Muslims rise against British aggression'. The protest was small and peaceful - the only violence being from aggrieved supporters of the army who attacked the demonstrators. None of the men who were tried were arrested at the time; instead they were detained following a subsequent police investigation and charged for shouting 'child-killers', 'murderers', 'rapists' and 'go to hell' at the passing soldiers.

The police action was clearly prompted by the massive press coverage that followed the demonstration, with front-page headlines on every tabloid newspaper proclaiming 'Hate for heroes - Muslims in vile demo' (*The Sun*), 'Sickening' (*Daily Express*) etc, and labelling the protesters 'The enemy within' (*Daily Star*). In the wake of the event a 'nationalist' counter-protest organised by the 'United People of Luton' took place on 24 May, during which an Asian-owned shop was smashed up and three men in a car attacked. This was swiftly followed by the founding of the English Defence League (EDL) to 'oppose Islamic extremism', while Conservative MP David Davies tabled a bizarre amendment to a bill on religious hatred in an attempt to make it an offence to incite hatred against serving soldiers.

Although Davies' attempt to squeeze defence of the military into protection from religious discrimination was merely a publicity stunt, his views are completely in tune with those of the Labour government, which reluctantly accepts a degree of opposition to its wars but is desperate to maintain an absolute embargo on any criticism of those actually doing the fighting, torturing and killing on the ground. The proliferation of 'Soldiers are Heroes' Facebook groups, the hysterical insistence that every presenter on British TV wear a poppy in the run-up to Remembrance Day and the creation of a spectacle around the Wootton

On 12 January 2010, five Muslim men were found guilty of using threatening, abusive or insulting words and behaviour likely to cause harassment and distress. They had protested against British involvement in the war in Iraq during a march by the Royal Anglian Regiment through Luton in March 2009. Two others were acquitted. On the same day their trial ended, the government announced it would be using its powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 to ban the organisation Islam4UK, which had declared its intention to stage a protest march on an unspecified date through Wootton Bassett, the village which has become synonymous with the patriotic 'repatriation' ceremonies which accompany the return of dead British soldiers from Afghanistan. The more bogged down in never-ending war the government becomes, the more determined it is to stifle and criminalise protest against its warmongering. NICKI JAMESON reports.

Bassett 'repatriations' are all part of this propaganda war.

Islam4UK is a small organisation but has generated and attracted a lot of publicity. The decision to ban it has been widely opposed - largely on the basis that using draconian legislation, designed to proscribe groups that are armed and dangerous, against those who merely hold repugnant opinions is counter-productive and will increase their appeal. Gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell and *Spectator* columnist Rod Liddle, who are both outspoken critics of much related to Islam, are among those vociferously arguing in favour of freedom of speech for all, while anti-fascists point out that, although Islam4UK and other groups

connected to it have been proscribed, the EDL, BNP and other blatantly racist organisations are free to do as they please. Meanwhile, cheerleading for the ban is government-funded 'counter-extremist' think-tank, the Quilliam Foundation, whose declared aim is to 'foster a genuine British Islam, native to these islands, free from the bitter politics of the Arab and Muslim world'.

This attempt to foster a 'Church of England Islam' that supports imperialism, while censoring and criminalising all other manifestations of the religion, is being vigorously pursued, particularly in prisons and universities. Prison staff are issued with guides on 'spotting extremists', prisoners encouraged

to spy on one another, 'moderate' imams recruited at immense salaries, and over-zealous converts segregated.

Universities have been increasingly encouraged in recent years to spy on students. This government interference with education and freedom of speech has met some opposition from university authorities; however most have willingly collaborated and in some cases gone beyond what was asked of them. For example, in 2008 over-zealous monitoring led to the arrest and detention of post-doctoral Nottingham University student Hicham Yezza, following his downloading of an Al Qaida manual from a US government website for another student's research project on 'radical Islam'.

Following the arrest on Christmas Day 2009 of former University College of London (UCL) student Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, UCL willingly distributed a police request for information about his 'activities' while at the college in 2005-08 and has now set up an 'independent inquiry into what transpired whilst he was here and his association with the student Islamic Society and their activities'.

Alongside the formal inquiries, a number of informal witch-hunts are being conducted, designed to pressurise university administrations to sack or expel 'radicals' and close down Islamic societies that do not conform. At Birmingham University a massive media campaign, supported by Dennis MacShane MP, was mounted against the Islamic Society, following its invitation to London-based Palestinian academic Dr Azzam Tamimi to speak on the anniversary of the massacre in Gaza.

At the London School of Economics (LSE) PhD student and lecturer Reza Pankhurst has been subject to a similar campaign. On 15 January, following contact with the Quilliam Foundation, *The Times* carried an article entitled 'Senior member of extreme Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir teaches at LSE'. Hizb ut-Tahrir is not an illegal organisation in Britain but is banned in Egypt and Pankhurst spent four years in prison there for membership, a fact he has always been open about and never sought to hide from the authorities at LSE.

FRFI defends the right of Muslims in Britain to express their political and religious views and opposes all attempts to criminalise protesters against the murderous wars being conducted by British and US imperialist forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Defend the right to protest against imperialist wars!

Ethnic cleansing in Italy

The fascist policies of the Italian government are finding fertile ground, as blame for everything from crime and social instability to unemployment is heaped on Italy's immigrant population, who are bearing the brunt of the economic crisis.

Immigrants battle racists

At the beginning of January, hundreds of African immigrants were driven out of the town of Rosarno in southern Italy by its white citizens who were spurred on by the local Ndrangheta mafia and supported by the police.

Rosarno has for years depended on immigrant labour to pick the oranges, tangerines and kiwi fruit on which its economy relies. The immigrants, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, were housed in disused factories and barracks, often with no electricity or running water, in the most appalling conditions, described by the local priest as 'something out of Dante's inferno'. During the picking season, they worked a 12-14 hour day, for which they were paid €20 - a quarter of which had to be handed over to the Ndrangheta, who control the area.

On Thursday 7 January, white youths, thought to be from the Ndrangheta, fired from a car at a group of immi-

grants returning from work, injuring two of them. In response, and in protest against their conditions, hundreds of immigrants took to the streets, accusing the townspeople of racism and demanding to be treated with dignity. Cars were burned and windows smashed as they fought pitched battles against residents, who were spurred on by the mafia, and the police, who used tear gas against the protesters. Some were beaten with iron bars. Roberto Saviano, author of *Gomorra*, an exposé of gangs of southern Italy, praised the immigrants for their stand, saying they had done more than anyone else in Italian society to confront the mafia. However, Interior Minister Roberto Maroni, of the fascist Northern League, declared an 'immigration emergency' and formed a regional task force to 'guarantee public order'. Its main task was to drive the immigrants out of town. A van with loudspeakers drove around Rosarno blaring: 'Any black person who is hiding in Rosarno should get out. If we catch you, we will kill you.' Representatives of the white population occupied the town hall, demanding the removal of 'i negri'. The next day more than 1,000 immigrants - including those with documentation - were bussed out of Rosarno to government holding cen-

tres, with promises that they would not be deported. Roberto Maroni then declared that they would all be expelled after all. He claimed the government had 'brilliantly resolved the problem of public order' and thanked police for organising the exodus 'in an exemplary way'. On Sunday 10 January, bulldozers were sent in to destroy every trace of the immigrants' wretched homes, including all the possessions they had left behind.

White Christmas

In December, in northern Italy, the town of Coccaglio launched Operation White Christmas - an official drive to identify and expel as many 'non-

Europeans' as possible before Christmas. Northern League Mayor Claretta was given new powers to check the residence status of all foreigners in the town with house-to-house searches: 'We just want to start cleaning the place up.' His councillor for security Claudio Abiendi, also a member of the Northern League, said that Christmas was not about hospitality but 'the Christian tradition and our identity'. 3,000 people - out of a population of 8,000 - marched through the town to protest against such ethnic cleansing.

Backed by the vicious racist law passed by the Berlusconi government in August 2009 that criminalises 'illegal' immigrants, fascist elements in Italy's police force, government and in the mafia are being given free rein to scapegoat, attack and expel immigrant communities. In Rosarno, some of the resi-

dents stood by the immigrant population against the racists and the mafia; in Coccaglio more than a third of the population protested. They demonstrated that resistance to fascism is possible, even in the League's northern heartland. It has certainly never been more necessary.

Cat Wiener

Anti-Zionist political prisoners in Britain

In January this year, two young women, Layla Lahouidek and Bana Hablegiorge, who took part in protests in solidarity with Gaza outside the Israeli Embassy in January 2009, were sentenced to 15 months imprisonment each for violent disorder. Over 60 others are also on trial. Many were arrested up to six months after the protests in dawn raids on their homes and questioned without legal representation. The majority are aged between 15 and 19.

In addition, nine people are still awaiting trial for criminal damage to the EDO-MBM arms factory in Brighton, following a 'decommissioning' action on 17 January 2009 in solidarity with the people of Gaza. EDO supplies components to the Israeli military. One of the accused 'decommissioners' Elijah Smith, has been remanded in custody for over a year. You can write to him at: Elijah Smith VP7551, HMP Sheppey Cluster (Elmley), Church Road, Eastchurch, Sheerness, Kent ME12 4DZ.



Protest in Rosarno, 11 January