

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Saturday 28 March: demonstration against G20 in London

INSIDE

Editorial p2

CAPITALIST CRISIS

Capitalist crisis: no way out p13
US: same illness, same medicine, same solution p2

TRADE UNIONS

Construction workers strikes p4
The state of the unions p4

NEWS

Ireland: Blow against normalisation p5

CHINA

Between a rock and a hard place p7

CUBA 50th ANNIVERSARY

Socialism is healthier p8

LATIN AMERICA

Venezuela/El Salvador p9

PALESTINE

Israel's war crimes in Gaza p10

IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN

US extends war to Pakistan p11

FIGHT RACISM!

British police, racist police p16
+ news, review, prisoners fightback, round-up and letters

CAPITALIST CRISIS NO WAY OUT

Ed Balls, Labour Minister for Children, Schools and Families, expressed the fear that is at the heart of government in Britain when he blurted out, at a Yorkshire Labour Party meeting in February 2009, that we are in the midst of 'the most serious global recession...for over a hundred years'. That would mean more serious than the 1929 Great Depression, when US industrial production fell by 50% and its economy declined by 25% between 1929 and 1932.

Could Balls be referring to the crisis that led to the first imperialist war in 1914? That crisis only ended after world war, depression, fascism and world war again had resolved temporarily inter-imperialist rivalries with the domination of US imperialism after the Second World War. Whatever he meant, his statement created outrage among the political class – it was far too close to the truth. This was, after all, the period that led to the Russian Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union. DAVID YAFFE reports on the political and economic impact of this global crisis.

The international financier George Soros expressed something similar to Ed Balls when he argued, on 20 February 2009 at a Columbia University dinner in New York, that the world financial system has effectively disintegrated, and that there is no prospect of a near-term resolution to the crisis. The turbulence is more

severe than the Great Depression and there is no sign that we are at the bottom of the financial crisis.

Martin Wolf, chief economic commentator of the *Financial Times*, reminds us of the results of the Great Depression. 'This transformed capitalism and the role of government for half a century'. It led to the collapse of

liberal trade, strengthened the credibility of socialism and communism and shifted policy towards import substitution as a development strategy. The period also saw the growing influence of the Nazis in Germany, whose vote increased from 18% in 1930 to 37% in 1932 at the height of the Great Depression. Wolf says that there has been a move towards the national and away from the global, especially evident in the financial sector. This protectionism is likely to be extended to other sectors. He warns that confidence in local and global elites, in the market and even in the possibility of material progress will weaken 'with potentially devastating social and political consequences'. Globalisation might be reversed. He reminds his readers that the integrated economy of the decades before the First World War collapsed. 'It could do so again'. He draws comfort from the belief that 'unlike in the 1930s, no credible alternative to the market economy exists' (*Financial Times*, 9 March 2009).¹

This crisis is global. No part of the world can escape its consequences. It originates in the main centres of imperialism and has already had a devastating impact on much of the underdeveloped world, including the ex-

Soviet bloc countries. It will eventually lead to dramatic economic, social and political changes even in the imperialist countries.

Global meltdown

The Asian Development Bank warned in early March that financial assets worldwide could have fallen in value by more than \$50 trillion, equivalent to a year's global output. Asian and Latin American economies have been battered by the financial crisis with losses in Asia, excluding Japan, having reached \$9.6 trillion and in Latin America \$2.1 trillion. In the main imperialist countries, banks and financial institutions are being 'nationalised' as governments take controlling stakes to prevent them from going bankrupt and devastating the imperialist economies. On an unprecedented scale, public funds are being used to buy up and insure trillions of dollars of 'toxic assets' held by the major imperialist banks. The market values of what were the largest financial corporations in the world have been decimated. Citigroup, worth \$255bn in the second quarter of 2007, is valued now at around \$13.7bn. RBS's value has fallen from \$120bn to \$17.5bn; Barclays from \$91bn to \$14.4bn and one of the strongest

banks today, HSBC, from \$215bn to \$78.3bn over the same period.² AIG, once the biggest insurance company in the world and now nearly 80% owned by the US government, after the biggest loss in corporate history of \$61.7bn, is worth \$1.2bn (share price 42 cents) compared with around \$131bn a year ago (share price \$46). AIG operates in 130 countries, has 74 million customers and covers/insures some \$2 trillion financial products, half of this for 12 global banks. Its far-reaching international operations determine that it is too big to go under.

The main imperialist centres are facing a deep recession. The US economy fell 6.2% at an annual rate in the last quarter of 2008. Eurozone countries face the worst recession for 50 years with a fall of 1.5% in the fourth quarter of 2008 (an annual rate of just under 6%). Japan has experienced the largest economic fall for 35 years of 3.3% in the fourth quarter – an annualised fall of 12.7%. Its exports fell 46% in January 2009 from a year earlier. The International Monetary Fund has said that world output will fall in 2009 for the first time since the Second World War. The World Trade Organisation sees the volume of

continued on page 3

A question of class

It has been 25 years since the miners' strike in 1984-85 when British coal miners, their families and supporters fought a year-long battle to defend their jobs and their communities against the threat of redundancies and pit closures. The anniversary provoked comment in the press and on television which showed, once again, that the bitter divisions that were opened up during the strike have not disappeared. They are as deep as they ever were. Where you stand on the miners' strike is a question of class.

The anniversary was an opportunity for a number of Tory ex-ministers to parade their prejudices. Many of the chief players like National Coal Board (NCB) chairman, Ian MacGregor, are dead and Prime Minister Thatcher (now Baroness) is senile. Instead former Energy Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson (now Lord) stepped forward to deny there was a plan to destroy the coal industry and to blame the NUM President Arthur Scargill for the outcome (unlike the miners themselves who were 'good chaps', he said). Norman Tebbit (now Baron), Trade and Industry Secretary in the 1983 government, accused Scargill of 'declaring war on democracy'. They hadn't really meant to close the pits or provoke a strike. Having lied their way through the strike itself, the Tories are happy to maintain the habit of a lifetime.

The 1979 Thatcher government came to power, with the backing of the City of London, specifically to solve the economic crisis in the interests of the ruling class. This would require the liberalisation of financial regulation – they immediately abolished exchange controls to allow the free export of capital – and a fundamental attack on working class living standards. In particular trade unions and workers' employment rights were targeted. It was no accident that MacGregor, with a history of anti-union activity across the US and Africa, merchant banker and darling of both Labour and Tory politicians, ended up as Chairman of the NCB. As chair of the British Steel Corporation he had managed to halve the workforce in the space of two years. His next appointment to the NCB was with the specific intention of destroying the NUM. In 1983 a list of proposed pit closures across the Yorkshire, Kent, South Wales, Durham and Scottish coalfields was leaked to the NUM. The battle had begun.

Sections of the British bourgeoisie who count themselves liberal (like *The Guardian* newspaper), the Labour Party and trade union leadership, and even some bizarre reaches of the British Trotskyist left, still blame the NUM leadership for not calling a national ballot on the strike. Such a ballot was in fact rejected by the miners themselves at a national delegate conference because it would have put the decision on striking in the hands of miners in the well-paid Midlands coal-



Massed riot police escorted coal supplies into Orgreave

fields who thought (wrongly) that their jobs were safe, rather than in the hands of the threatened miners. The NUM was split and the ruling class encouraged an army of scabs, not just in the NUM but also in crucial allied industries like steel and electricity, to side with the government and betray the strikers. The media played their role as hired liars, paying the scabs to tour the country, lying about the violence of the pickets, editing television coverage of Orgreave to make it look like rioting strikers instead of vicious policing. The strikers were soon facing the armed brutality of the British state organised to defeat them. It was not just the NUM that was split: the division in the British labour movement between opponents of the British state and the opportunists who defended it opened a gulf that still prevails.

As always, in a fight with their rulers, the British liberal bourgeoisie, what passes for a Labour movement and most of the left, who actually preferred the defeat of the strike to a working class victory, dressed up their cowardice and treachery as rationality and humane realism. They are doing it still. 'If only they had held a ballot...' *The Guardian*, under the heading 'A war no one deserved to win', called the strikers 'Lions led by donkeys'. These 'victims' should have 'allowed their industry to decline more humanely'. Others like Neil Kinnock (now Lord), Labour Party leader at the time, accuse Scargill of 'suicidal vanity'. 'He [Scargill] fed himself the political illusion that as long as the miners were united they had the right to destabilise and overthrow the democratically elected government.' This would have been the working class victory to make Kinnock and his ilk tremble! 'The miners didn't deserve him' said Kinnock, 'they deserved much, much better.' That would have been why Kinnock refused to share a platform with a Yorkshire miner during the strike and why he and cohorts of trade union leaders actively scabbed, ensuring that the coking plants at Orgreave, Ravenscraig and Llanwern received enough coal to continue operations. They play the game that they would have supported the strike if there had been a ballot, but pigs might fly.

Twenty-five years have passed, the coal industry is destroyed, all the miners, including the

scabs and the 'good chaps', lost their jobs and their communities were literally devastated. The state's hirelings, on the other hand, received their rewards. Scargill's predictions were right. In the wake of the strike other unions and other workers were defeated as the neoliberal agenda prevailed. Nevertheless the miners' strike is still a brilliant example for the future. The miners organised in the coalfields and related industries, the pickets bravely fought the police and their families and communities widened the support network as they recognised common cause with other oppressed groups. When the South Wales miners hoisted a noose over Norman Willis (TUC) on a rally platform, they sent a shudder through the ranks of opportunists which still reverberates. And times, once again, are changing.

The neoliberal programme which allowed the financial services and banking sector full rein is self-destructing. Workers who, like the Nottinghamshire miners, were previously privileged enough to ensure their loyalty to the British state, are losing their jobs and their homes. Despite the fact that under successive Tory and Labour governments the British state has armed itself to the teeth against any opposition, just as it did against the striking miners, there are people who know the multinational capitalist agenda must be challenged. There are young men who, against all the odds, emerge from the imperialists' secret torture chambers to expose barbarity. Internationally there are people like the Palestinians who despite onslaught after onslaught against them continue to fight for their liberation. This issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* is full of examples.

For all of them, the battle waged by the striking miners 25 years ago holds vital lessons about the treacherous role of the Labour Party and the opportunists and the importance of building support across working class and oppressed communities that can challenge the capitalist state and next time win.

*A full account of the Miners' strike can be found in *Miners' Strike 1984-1985 People versus State*, by David Reed and Olivia Adamson, Larkin Publications, 1985, ISBN 0 905400 05 4. We intend to make it available on our website in the near future.

US – same illness, same medicine, same solution

The US central bank – the Federal Reserve Bank (Fed) – has come up with programme after programme to try to fix the credit crisis by devising solutions to problems as they show up. Each has its own acronym. We've had the TAF, the PDFC, the ABCP MMMFLF, the TSLF, the MMIFF, CPFF, the TALF and the TARP. Now we've got PPIP, the 'Public-Private Investment Programme'. This is the magic programme, the final solution, supposed to fix everything by removing what it calls 'legacy assets' from banks' balance sheets once and for all, thereby strengthening the creditworthiness of the banks and restarting lending.

What, you may ask, is a 'legacy asset'? Family heirlooms? Valuable antiques? Nope. It is just a polite way of referring to a pile of poop, around \$1,000bn, sitting on the banks' balance sheet and masquerading as an asset – the mortgage-backed securities. At the moment, banks say these are worth around 80c per dollar, while realistic buyers are talking 20-30c per dollar.

PPIP has been devised by the Obama administration to use taxpayers' money to fill the gap between buyers and sellers. Although it paints the programme as if there is equal sharing of risk and reward ('equity co-investment on a

unload, they can join PPIP, put down some \$60m and get paid say, \$840m from the PPIP to let their poop be carted away. So, instead of taking a loss of \$1bn, they lose around \$200m at worst. Clever, eh?

We have now arrived at the highest stage of imperialism: State Monopoly Finance Capital. Imperialism is now so rotten that Finance Capital cannot survive without being propped up by the state. Economically, the state has become a giant investment bank digging deep into the people's pockets to provide funds for the private banks. The US government has now taken over the world's largest insurance company,

imperialism.

The entire policy of the state has become a hunt for ways of passing on the costs of the capitalist crisis onto the ordinary working people in the United States and onto people outside the country. There is nothing the imperialists want more than for us to get dragged into the details of how to save their dying and diseased economic system and caught up in arguments about how much to pay them as they leech us dry. When Treasury Secretary Geithner talks about 'our financial system' he means 'their financial system', the imperialists' financial system.

Instead, we have to concentrate on defending ourselves, our lives, our homes and our jobs from the relentless onslaught which is just beginning. Capitalist profits in the US have dropped sharply: total corporate profits in the fourth quarter of 2008, at an annual rate in billions of dollars, were \$1,264.5, an absolute fall of 16.5% from third quarter profits of \$1,514.8. This is the steepest quarterly fall in profits in more than 50 years. Some 38% of these profits were from the rest of the world, up from



Tent City, California. Homeless people have been forced to set up tent cities in order to survive

side-by-side basis'), the bulk of the risk falls on the taxpayers. In its own example of how the programme works, the government shows how a capitalist can purchase these assets by contributing just over 7% of their price – the government provides the rest. This is yet another leveraged asset – at a ratio of about 14:1. Now, instead of private capital participating in a leveraged hedge fund, the US government is the one supplying the financing. The profits will be shared on an equal basis. In the official example, if the assets can be sold with a 10% profit, then the private investor will have a return of about 70% on their capital, while the government will receive less than 6%.

It gets better. Banks with 'legacy assets' are going to pull out the ugliest, sickest, most worthless assets out of their portfolios to sell. They can even participate as investors. So, if they have \$1bn of 'legacy assets' they need to

AIG; the world's largest mortgage securitisation companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; it has Citigroup and Bank of America on life support; it has bent over backwards, month after month, to bail out the investment banks, to sell them to other banks or to let them go under.

While ordinary citizens have been turned out of their houses, fired from their jobs and left to rot in tent cities, 'their' government has been hard at work propping up the bloodsucking parasitic banks. No involvement in these policies – no 'democratisation' plans, nor even the seemingly so-radical demand to 'expropriate' the banks – can be considered. 'Expropriation' of the banks, far from challenging the power of the financial oligarchy, does the exact opposite: by throwing the burden of resuscitating the bankrupt institutions onto the shoulders of the working and middle classes it helps strengthen finance capital and

26% in 2006. In order to survive, imperialism has to grab all this back by sucking more profit out of the US working class and by looting it from others.

The middle classes are going to be squeezed dry, like a piece of fruit, and tossed into the gutter alongside the working class. State expenditure is going to be ruthlessly cut. The imperialists will be demanding pay cuts and threatening to cut our jobs, trying to speed up work and get us to work longer hours. US unemployment has leapt almost 70% in the last year, from 7.4 million in February 2008 to 12.5 million in February 2009.

These kinds of attacks cannot continue forever without the working class spontaneously rebelling against them. When it does, it will have to get rid of the whole system if it is to defend itself. This is the only real solution to this wretched crisis of imperialism.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

CAPITALIST CRISIS NO WAY OUT

continued from page 1

world goods trade plunging by 9% in 2009, the largest drop since 1945. Global trade has, in fact, been in freefall for more than four months, contracting at a greater rate than during the Great Depression (*Financial Times* 2 March 2009).

The less developed countries are being devastated by this global crisis. The Institute for International Finance predicts that capital flows to emerging markets will be only \$165bn in 2009, less than half the \$466bn inflow in 2008 and less than a fifth of the \$929bn in 2007. This predicted decline in capital flows is equivalent to about 6% of the combined GDP of these countries, far worse than the decline of 3.5% which occurred during the Asian crisis of 1997/98 with its devastating social and economic consequences in that region. The less developed countries have \$1,440bn of bank loans coming due in 2009. Central and Eastern Europe, predominantly the ex-Soviet bloc, with foreign loans mainly from western European banks of \$1,656bn, will see a decline in GDP for the first time in a decade. Without significant international aid, in the present global situation, many of these countries will have no alternative but to default on their debts. UNESCO estimates that 390 million of the poorest people in Africa will see their already meagre incomes drop by 20%. The falls in commodity prices and decline in investment flows mean sub-Saharan Africa will lose around \$18bn or \$46 per person, leaving millions more at starvation levels.

The International Labour Organisation is forecasting a dramatic increase in unemployment this year, 18-30 million additional unemployed and more than 50 million if the situation continues to deteriorate. The latter increase would mean 7.1% of the world's labour force would be unemployed or 230 million jobless – a clear underestimation of the real unemployment situation.

The World Bank has warned that a wave of social and political unrest could sweep through the world's poorest countries if the G20 summit does not come to their aid. Kofi Annan, former secretary general of the United Nations said in January, in suitably diplomatic language: 'I believe we are also facing a crisis of governance at a national and international level'. Hence the desperate attempts to find some common global economic policy – to prevent trade protectionism, to have more regulation of banks and tax havens, etc – at the G20 conference in London on 2 April, while in reality the major imperialist powers are riven by both external and internal conflicts and are forced to protect their own national interests at the expense of everyone else. The lead-up to the G20 meeting has exposed a growing split between the US and Europe. The US is calling for another larger co-ordinated fiscal stimulus to lift the world out of recession, with Germany and France resisting this because of concerns over the scale of their public deficits and the potentially inflationary consequences. Europe is putting the emphasis on regulating the banks, outlawing tax havens and bank executive bonuses, viewing this as fundamental to averting repeated meltdowns.

Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown is hosting the summit and is attempting, with increasing difficulty, to keep a foot in both camps. At the

end of 2006, FRFI asked how long the British economy could sustain itself outside Europe, with Britain becoming more and more dependent on the parasitical dealings of the City of London.³ The international financial crisis and the dramatic collapse of major British banks are beginning to provide an answer. On 20 March 2009 Brown agreed to a significant tightening of European financial regulation, measures that he had firmly resisted during his 10 years as Chancellor of the Exchequer. On 24 March Brown gave an uncharacteristically pro-European speech to the European parliament, which suggested that Britain would enhance its global influence through the European Union. He insisted that Britain's place 'was not in Europe's slipstream but firmly in its mainstream' (*Financial Times* 25 March 2009). The significance of these developments will take some time to become clear. The British ruling class is deeply split on the issue of Europe and those divisions will fester over the coming period. The global crisis is however forcing the issue.

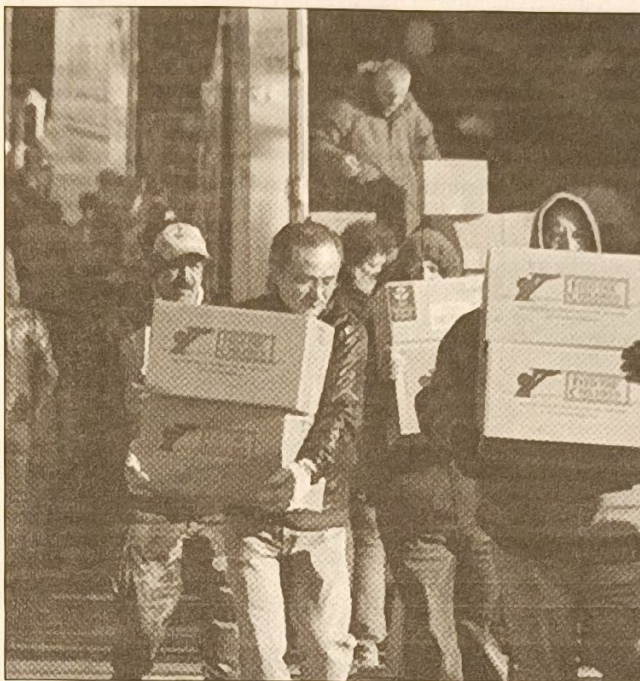
For the present we can be sure that the major imperialist powers will take all the measures necessary to protect their own national interests. A World Bank report published on 18 March found that 17 out of the 20 countries attending the G20 summit had already adopted 47 measures aimed at restricting trade since October 2008.

British capitalism

British capitalism, we have argued over a long period of time, with its bloated and usurious banking sector, is the imperialist economy most vulnerable to external financial shocks. Britain, the oldest imperialist country, sustains the high standard of living of its citizens through the income generated by the financial services sector of the economy and the 'gigantic usury capital' of its parasitic banks and financial institutions based in the City of London. That is why this crisis of the world capitalist system threatens the economic foundations of British capitalism.

On 5 March, interest rates were cut to the lowest level ever of 0.5%. The Bank of England is buying assets, particularly government bonds from banks and financial institutions, by initially creating £75bn of new money over the next three months to try and kick start the British economy – so-called 'quantitative easing'. The hope is that the sellers of these assets will use the extra funds on other investments or lend them to businesses and households. If the injection of £75bn, equivalent to 5% of GDP, does not appear to be working, an additional £75bn will be made available. With traditional monetary measures having little impact, such an unconventional measure taken by the Bank to stimulate the economy is a desperate last resort. It could eventually have serious inflationary consequences. The outlook for the City of London and the financial sector is, to say the least, very bleak.

Britain is already heading for the biggest budget deficit among the G20 countries in 2009-10 of nearly 13% of GDP, around £180bn, way above the record 7.7% deficit set by the Tories in the 1990s. The national debt has already reached £717bn, 49% of GDP. This could more than double once the estimated liabilities of RBS and Lloyds are put on the government's books.



Unemployed families in Wilmington, Ohio, US get their food parcels from a relief local organisation

The failure of a government bond sale to raise £1.75bn on 25 March underlines the serious state of public finances. Investors are questioning the government's ability to pay for the bank bailouts and fill the gap left by dramatically falling tax revenues over the coming years. The Centre for Economics and Business Research has said that the tax take alone from the financial services sector will fall to £39bn in 2009-10, down from £67bn in 2006-07. The day before the bond sale failed, Mervyn King, the Bank of England Governor, was warning that Britain could not afford 'another significant round of fiscal stimulus'. This will make it very difficult for Brown at the G20 summit to side with the US and call for an even larger co-ordinated fiscal stimulus in the face of European and Bank of England opposition.

The UK economy is forecast to shrink 3.8% in 2009. Unemployment already at 2.03m, will rise above 3m over the coming year, and, with the dramatic fall in the financial services sector, will begin to affect significant sections of better-paid workers and the 'middle class'. One third of London's 4.2m jobs are supplied by finance and business services. House prices have fallen some 18%, 46,750 homes were repossessed in 2008 and repossessions could rise to 75,000 this year. With Labour's privatisation agenda unravelling, pension and savings income collapsing, serious economic, social and political problems are inevitable. This rapid deterioration in the economic situation is creating the material conditions once again for an anti-capitalist alliance between the poorer sections of the working class and sections of the 'middle classes' confronting proletarianisation.

This is the background to the outburst from Superintendent David Hartshorn in February 2009, warning that middle class anger at the economic crisis could erupt into violence on the streets. Hartshorn is Britain's most senior police officer with responsibility for public order. He raises the spectre of a return to the riots of the 1980s with people who have lost their homes or savings becoming foot

soldiers in a wave of potentially violent protest. He talks of 'known activists' returning to the streets, claiming they will foment unrest with these new foot soldiers joining the protests. It is an interesting thought, but for it to come to fruition, a new anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist movement has to be built in this period, strong enough to push aside the traditional opportunist forces of the British left. The traditional left will do its utmost to control any such movement and direct it into respectable channels to prevent it becoming a movement for serious radical change – as we saw with the anti-war movement and more recently with the demonstrations in support of the Palestinians.

The roots of the crisis

It is important to understand that we cannot explain the crisis by what precipitated it – for example the role of sub-prime mortgages and their impact on the banks. We have to ask what drove such lending in the first place. Yes, bankers are corrupt and greedy and government regulation of their activities was almost non-existent. It is morally obscene that Sir Fred Goodwin received a £16m pension pot and now has a yearly pension income of £703,000, despite overseeing the collapse of the RBS. Yes, Lord Myners the City Minister allowed this to happen, unsurprisingly as he spent 26 years working for investment banks where large payouts and bonuses were accepted as part of banking culture. But all this was brought to our attention after the crisis broke out. It was exactly the same in 1929 when incorrect government and central bank policy decisions were blamed for the depression. What is being said is that the crisis is due to wrong policy decisions by bankers and governments. If that is the case it can be overcome by more adequate policies and better regulation and control of the banks. This is subterfuge; an ideological position which is saying that the crisis is not systemic to capitalism and that its roots do not lie in the contradictions inherent in the capitalist economy. But they do.

The tasks that lie ahead

In an important contribution in *Granma International* (8 February 2009) 'Crisis of capitalism with no way out', Raul Valdes Vivo, President of the Party School of the Cuban Communist Party, argued that there were three ideological positions on the present global crisis. The first is 'capitalism's advocates, who attribute the crisis to bad management by bankers and governments, believing it surmountable'. The second is 'capitalism's opponents, for whom the crisis is systemic. Among the latter, some believe it is the latest of the cyclical crises of the system of the modern system of exploitation, which will end up overcoming it and which will even strengthen it, despite its extreme gravity, like in 1929'. Many of the intellectuals on the British left – if they mention imperialism at all – hold to a version of this position, some seeing a shift in the balance of power internationally towards Asia as the outcome of the present crisis. Valdes Vivo continues that there is a third position: 'There are those of us who believe that the only way out is to establish a communist means of production, whose first moment is socialism, after a non-capitalist way of development'.

For the opponents of capitalism what is decisive, he continues, is not quotes from theorists but practice. He warns: 'Any combatant against capitalism can fall into the utopia of thinking it will automatically fall, without a struggle that will have the most contradictions, progress and defeats and that will be the most difficult ever waged by the human species, and which if it is not won in a historically brief period of time, will end up disappearing'. The choice is clear: 'socialism or barbarism'.

This is the period when the vast majority of the world's population is confronting the barbarity of imperialism. For millions it has become a life and death struggle for an alternative. It is also the period when social and economic developments are creating the conditions for building a new socialist movement even in the imperialist countries, and that means in Britain as well. A crisis of this order is going to change the political landscape. As a first step we have to join the resistance to imperialism. We have to join with the oppressed people of the world by resisting imperialism right here in the heartland of a parasitic and decaying capitalism.

1 What a reversal! In 2002 (*Financial Times* 4 September 2002) Wolf asked if the second era of global capitalist integration would end like the first, which went into reverse between 1914 and 1945. His unequivocal answer was no, as conditions were very different this time. In an article 'The world economy facing war and recession' in FRFI 171 February/March 2003, we argued that he was wrong and that 'globalisation has gone into reverse' and that 'the movement to war [against Iraq] is an expression of the global crisis of capitalism'. See www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frfi-pages/171/FRFI_171_eco.html

2 Share values are volatile and so the market values of these financial institutions today are constantly changing around these very low levels.

3 See 'Britain: parasitic and decaying capitalism' FRFI 194 December 2006/January 2007. www.revolutionarycommunist.org/downloads/FRFI194_07_10_parasitic.pdf

Construction workers' strikes - standing against chauvinism

'British jobs for British workers' screamed the tabloid headlines when construction workers at Lindsey Oil Refinery went on strike at the end of January in protest at a sub-contractor's intention to use exclusively immigrant labour. As support for the strikers spread, fears grew that we might be witnessing a chauvinist backlash by trade unionists against immigrant workers. Rumours spread of BNP involvement. However, as the days passed, it became apparent that, despite the determined attempts of the bourgeois media to whip up racist sentiment, the strike leaders stood firm on basic trade union principles and were able to carry the majority of the strikers with them.

The Lindsey strike, and others which have followed, have centred on the EU Posted Workers Directive, passed in 1996 which allows EU companies operating in other EU countries to bring in their own workers for a limited period of time. Several cases at the European Court of Justice, most recently in April 2008, have suggested that in some cases it may be permissible for companies to operate outside local agreements.

On 28 January shop stewards at Lindsey in North Lincolnshire told workers for Shaws construction company that IREM, an Italian company which was due to take over a third of the contract for Lindsey, was refusing to employ British labour. Shaws had issued 90-day redundancy notices in mid-November so that not only would part of its workforce lose their jobs in mid-February, but they would not be allowed to apply for the IREM jobs because of their nationality. They were also told that the Italian and Portuguese workers brought in by IREM would be housed on floating barges for the duration of the job, and would be bussed back to the barges for lunch: clearly a move to keep them separate from British workers and trade unions. The entire workforce



Derek Simpson, joint General Secretary of Unite, alongside a backward political message for union members

across all subcontractors voted for strike action, and the following day over 1,000 workers from Lindsey, Conoco and Easington sites picketed Lindsey. Following this, the unofficial strike spread to over 20 sites across Britain.

Neither local strike leaderships nor their unions ever officially endorsed

the slogan 'British jobs for British workers', despite the efforts of the media and the Labour government, which argued that the jobs should go 'primarily to British workers'. Attempts by the BNP to intervene in the strikes and recruit to their 'Solidarity' union front appear to have been firmly

rebuffed by strikers, and BNP members were reportedly chased out of the car park outside a mass meeting at the Lindsey plant.

Strike leaders and their supporters have fought chauvinist trends by pointing out that British construction workers have been dependent on regular work abroad, from Dubai to Germany. The success of this strategy has been such that by the time of the Staythorpe march on 24 February, openly nationalist placards had been removed. Keith Gibson, a Socialist Party member elected onto the unofficial strike committee at Lindsey, said:

'The workers of Lindsey, Conoco and Easington did not take strike action against immigrant workers. Our action is rightly aimed against company bosses who attempt to play off one nationality of worker against the other and undermine the NAECI agreement.'

A mass meeting at Lindsey confirmed a set of strike demands that made no mention of British workers, calling instead for all workers to be covered by national agreements regardless of nationality, trade union assistance for migrant workers and the development of links with trade unions in other EU countries.

The strike has resulted in growing opposition to the Labour Party; this has been reflected in discussion on the strikers' online forum about withdrawing from the union's political fund. Pressure from those leading the strikes may have helped ensure that the official trade union leadership also took a progressive position. Frustration at the inability of the unions to respond effectively to the government's attacks led strikers to heckle

Unite leader Derek Simpson as he spoke at the Staythorpe demonstration on 24 February. In response, he dismissed the opposition by saying 'I went on every TV programme and put your argument in front of the British population far better than this march can do' and then shouted that the hecklers were opposing him either because they were standing against him in the election for Unite general secretary, or because they were 'from the BNP, or just because [they] were a tosser who's had too many pints.'

Although the Lindsey strike has been settled with an agreement that included an end to the segregation of foreign workers, other disputes continue. The GMB union reported on 19 February that contractors and subcontractors building a new power station on the Isle of Grain in Kent are seeking planning permission to use an accommodation barge moored on the Medway and a disused army barracks to house several hundred workers it plans to bring from Poland. More recently the unions have announced that they have in their possession a contract for a Polish worker at the Isle of Grain site with wages 30% below nationally agreed rates. Although the ACAS report into the Lindsey dispute said that IREM had agreed to national rates and conditions, it gave no evidence that IREM had been observing them prior to the strike.

The strikes have demonstrated the determination of the British ruling class to channel any working class resistance to the crisis into a racist dead end. Yet it has also demonstrated that despite the chauvinist history of the British labour movement, these attempts can be defeated.

Thomas Vincent

The state of the unions

With unemployment rising to over 2 million for the first time in ten years, we look in vain for signs of serious trade union resistance. One explanation for this is that trade unions have not organised amongst those workers whose jobs have been most at threat over the past few months - in the retail sector and the lower-paid in financial services. Yet this is not the only reason. The trade unions remain committed to supporting the Labour Party; they continue to form larger and larger monopolies; they continue to have a significant stake in capitalism with their immense wealth. Their leadership continues to be paid at an extravagant level, and they continue to organise preferentially amongst a narrow section of the working class, mainly better-off workers in the public sector.

Supporting Labour

Unions remain responsible for about three quarters of Labour Party funding. In 2007 and 2008, the three biggest trade unions gave over £13 million in donations of more than £250,000, with the Unite conglomerate giving £8 million in such donations. This has staved off bankruptcy for the Labour Party for the moment, and the unions will ensure that it remains solvent in the lead-up to a general election which will have to take place within about a year.

Membership

The proportion of workers in a trade union fell to 28% in 2008 from 32% in 1997, with membership of TUC-affiliated unions falling to 6.4 million from 6.8 million over the same period. The combined membership of the two largest TUC affiliates - Unite and Unison - stands at 3.3 million, over half of TUC membership. Unions have continued to take on the form of giant monopolies with the formation of Unite from the T&GWU and from Amicus - itself a merger of the old engineers' union AEU and the MSF in 2001. There is nothing progressive about these developments: they are designed to increase the powers of the union leadership over the membership.

Growing wealthier

Trade union wealth continued to grow up until 2008. Gross assets of Unite were £241.4 million (up from £215.2 million in 2005) with an annual income of £173.1 million. Second largest union Unison also did well: gross assets were £160.4 million in 2007 (up from £111.2 million in 2005), whilst annual income was £168.1 million, up from £132.8 million in 2005 on an unchanged membership of 1.35 million. The ten largest TUC-affiliated unions had an annual income of £600 million and gross assets in shares and property worth £614 million (up over £100 million since 2005).

'More than half of trade unionists, 52.7%, were either managers, professionals or associate professionals (41.9% for all employees). The figure in 1991 was 34%'

Trade union leaders have shared in this bonanza: in 2007, eight general secretaries from the ten largest TUC-affiliated unions earned more than £100,000. Many general secretaries of smaller trade unions also earn more than £100,000: Brian Caton of the POA, for instance, was on £120,000 including benefits. Top of the pay league was Unite-Amicus general secretary Derek Simpson, with a remuneration package worth £155,000. He has the use of a grace-and-favour house for life worth £800,000 just outside London. On the occasions when the 35-minute train journey home from his Holborn office has been too much for him, he has stayed in a luxury suite at the Waldorf Hilton, £399 a night. His union was completely unabashed, saying of Simpson:

'He is the joint leader of a multi-million-pound organisation, in which capacity he represents our members in dealings with employers of all sizes, including leaders of global companies

as well as government. It would be undermining to his ability to deliver for those members if the union prioritised cheapness of accommodation above appropriate facilities and location as necessary for the particular event.'

Trade union leaders act more and more as if they were company chief executives.

Organising amongst better-off workers

Trade unions continue to organise amongst the better-off sections of the working class, particularly in the public sector. By the end of 2007:

- 58.6% of trade unionists worked in the public sector compared to 27.2% of all employees.
- More than half of trade unionists, 52.7%, were either managers, professionals or associate professionals (41.9% for all employees). The figure in 1991 was 34%.
- 45.7% of trade unionists had a degree or other higher education qualification compared to 33.9% of all employees.
- 40.9% of trade unionists worked in health and education compared to 10.5% in manufacturing; the figures for all employees were 22.9% and 13.7% respectively.

Fewer than one in six workers in the private sector were trade unionists - 16.1%. The figure in 1997 was 19.8%. Trade unions barely figure for young

people: fewer than one in ten aged between 16 and 24 is in a union.

At the end of 2007, when the median wage for full-time workers was £457 per week, approximately 4.5 million, or 60% of all trade unionists, were earning between £500 and £999 per week. This was nearly ten times the number of trade unionists in full-time employment who were earning less than £250 per week.

Are there signs of change?

No. The number of days lost through industrial action in 2008 remains at the historic low it has been at throughout the years of the Labour government: 758,000 (average 600,000 since 1997); nearly half these days were due to a one-day public sector stoppage in July. In the recent ballot for the post of Unite-Amicus general secretary, Derek Simpson got 60,000 votes on a mere 12% turnout; his left-wing opponent Jerry Hicks got 25% of the vote with 40,000. *Socialist Worker* commented:

'The size of the vote for Jerry Hicks shows the mood that exists among members for a left wing and fighting trade union. If the left in Amicus had united behind Hicks instead of a number backing Simpson, the left vote would have been even higher.' (14 March 2009) This is just wishful thinking. If such a mood had really existed, then members would have voted - but 88% didn't. Unwilling to risk their fiefdom for a struggle against the anti-trade union laws, most trade union leaders will be actively campaigning for Labour in the next general election, ignoring its record of betrayal both at home and abroad.

Robert Clough

IRELAND

Blow against normalisation



PSNI riot police keep nationalist and loyalist demonstrators apart at a Belfast parade of British soldiers returned from Iraq in November 2008

PAUL MALLON

On 7 March, Irish Republicans shot dead two British soldiers at the Massereene barracks in County Antrim. They were the first British soldiers to be killed in Ireland since the 1998 signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Both soldiers, members of the 25 Field Squadron of 38 Engineer Regiment, were set to fly out the next morning to Helmand province in Afghanistan and were dressed in desert fatigues. Four others were wounded in the incident, including two pizza delivery men. Less than 48 hours later, an armed officer of the Police

Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was shot dead in Craigavon in north Armagh. The attacks, which were carried out by the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA respectively, both organisations opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, represent a blow to the British strategy of normalisation in the north of Ireland.

For over ten years, the north of Ireland has been presented as a normal part of the United Kingdom, basking in the glory of peace after a 25-year campaign against British rule led by the Provisional IRA. The 1994 cease-fires and subsequent Good Friday Agreement were said to be the culmina-

tion of a political process. The national question, the continued British involvement in Irish affairs, was said to be resolved. The overwhelming majority of the Irish people supported the moves towards peace. However, the end result has not been British withdrawal from Ireland but the return to devolved rule at the Stormont Assembly outside Belfast. Many of the social problems which gave rise to the national struggle today remain. By taking part in the negotiations which led to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the Republican movement accepted the British precondition that the Unionist veto would stay, ensuring that the constitutional status of the Six Counties would remain unchanged. The IRA were forced to disarm and it was later reported to have disbanded in response to Unionist demands. More recently Sinn Féin has been forced to support the PSNI. The final phase of the political process is the transfer of policing powers from London to the north and their direction by local politicians. This is the political context in which these latest attacks took place.

The peace process changed the economic and social situation in Ireland – north and south. In the north, a new middle class emerged within the nationalist community which drew material benefits from increased capital investment and peace subsidies from Britain, the United States and the European Union. Sinn Féin emerged

in this period as the dominant nationalist party in the north of Ireland clearly representing the interests of this middle class. At the same time, a significant number of working class nationalists received little or no material gains. They view Sinn Féin, once leaders of the national liberation struggle, as divorced from the reality of their lives.

Changing economic circumstances in Ireland now pose a serious threat to the political process. In the south, the once buoyant economy, the 'Celtic Tiger', is in recession. In the north, the housing bubble, the source of much of the affluence of the new nationalist middle class, has finally burst. Nationalist resentment at the peace process has grown and many have become increasingly frustrated at the failure of Sinn Féin to have any strategy towards a united Ireland.

The Republican attacks on British military personnel in Ireland provoked vicious condemnation from the political establishment – including Sinn Féin. Before jetting off to the United States for the annual St Patrick's Day jamboree in the White House with the US President, Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness denounced the attacks as the acts of 'traitors' and called on nationalists to help the British security services. Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams evoked the language of former foe British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in calling for the 'oxygen of publicity' to be denied to the Repub-

lican militants. Sinn Féin has crossed another Rubicon as it continues to strive for political respectability from imperialism. Labour's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Shaun Woodward, echoed the language of his predecessors in the 1970s when he labelled those Republicans opposed to British rule as 'criminals and gangsters'. Nationalist youth have responded on the streets, rioting against police incursions into nationalist areas following the arrests of eleven suspects for the shootings. As FRFI went to press, four people had been charged in connection with the attacks. Bourgeois commentators have been forced to acknowledge that although support for the Republican militants is not widespread, it nevertheless exists in some northern areas and is, in the words of PSNI Chief Constable Hugh Orde, concentrated among 'disenfranchised youth'.

As we argued in FRFI at the time of the beginning of the peace process, the struggle to free Ireland from British rule is not over. The economic, political and social problems which keep forcing the national struggle on to the political agenda remain. Discrimination and social deprivation remain for a large proportion of the nationalist working class. Today, more than ten years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, Sinn Féin is now part of the political class which helps sustain British rule in Ireland. As economic and social changes force the national question once again to the fore, new forces will have to emerge from within the nationalist working class, prepared to build a new campaign which learns from and does not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Police gear up for 'summer of rage'

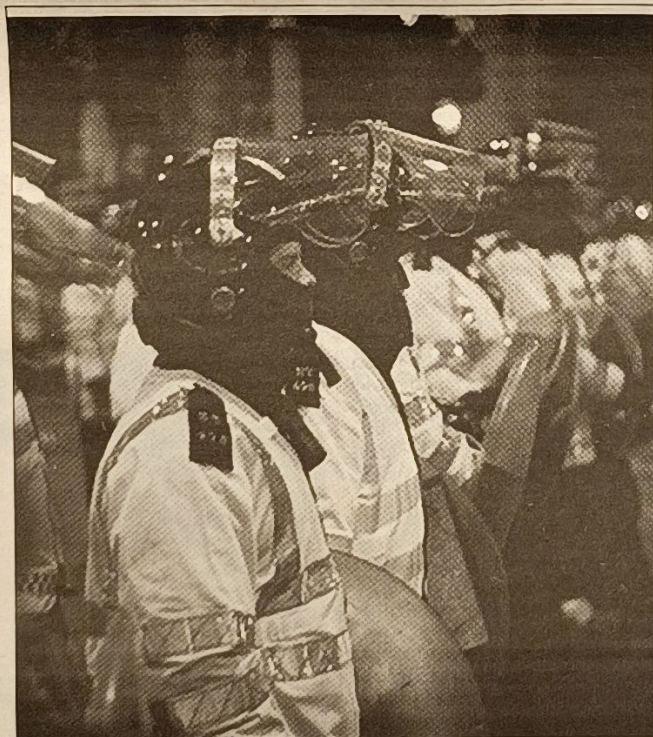
LUKE LUCAS

The recent police prediction of a forthcoming 'summer of rage' was widely reported in the bourgeois press, with Superintendent David Hartshorn of the Metropolitan police stating that he expects to encounter 'footsoldiers...intent on coming onto the streets to create public disorder'. The recently-exposed tactics used by police against protestors at the demonstration outside Kingsnorth power station last August show that the state is desperate to make this prophecy self-fulfilling and is gearing up for the expected protests against the G20 demonstrations planned for early April.

The ruling class expects 'violent protests as anarchists threaten to bring chaos to the Group of 20 summit meeting in London', with banks urging employees to 'dress down' to avoid becoming targets. Some 10,500 police shifts will be worked in London that week, with officers drafted in from Bedfordshire, Sussex, Essex and the Thames Valley to work alongside the Met, British Transport Police and City of London forces. All police leave has been cancelled and all 2,600 special constables called up in an operation estimated to cost £10m.

It is clear the police are desperate for confrontation, already provoking demonstrators and spreading propaganda to pre-justify their planned heavy-handed approach. Senior police commanders have said the 1 April demonstration will be 'very violent', that they are 'up for it, and up to it' and that anti-terrorism legislation may be used.

The tactics used against the Kingsnorth protestors, which included sleep deprivation and psychological operations, give some indication of what is to come. Activists were woken early in the morning when the pigs blasted



'Up for it and up to it': police are gearing up for confrontation with demonstrators

The Clash's 'I fought the law and the law won' at top volume and exposed to frequent dawn raids and low-flying helicopters at night. The same helicopters were used to disrupt speeches and workshops. Throughout the protest, police attempted to provoke confrontation, deliberately setting out to create a media image of 'individuals' who will 'seek to vent their anger through protests this year'. By demonising activists as 'minority groups' of 'violent anarchists' or, as Jack Straw recently said, 'Muslim Trotskyists', the state can cover up its political oppression of the working class.

The estimated cost of policing the Kingsnorth protest was finally revealed at around £6 million. 1,500 officers were called in from 26 forces and £4,000 per head was spent on intimidating attendees. Police accounted for this massive expenditure by saying the protestors had caused 70 injuries to officers; only months later were they forced to admit that most of those injuries existed only in their febrile imaginations and the few that did occur were mainly due to mosquito bites and toothache! Only four of the 12 reportable injuries involved any contact with protestors at all and

all were at the lowest level of seriousness with no further action taken. The police fabricated a 'violent minority' who they said had 'criminal purposes', but the Home Office has now admitted that was complete fiction.

At the time, however, this was used as justification for illegal police searches of individual protestors, often two or three times, before allowing them to enter the camp, and police were authorised to carry batons for two days of the protest. Videos shot by the campers show cops using these batons brutally and, it's obvious from the footage, unnecessarily. Assistant Chief Constable Gary Beauridge of Kent police denied all claims of heavy-handedness.

Rather than holding the police officers and their master, the Labour government, to account, the bourgeois press instead reported police claims of a weapons stash. These claims were

proved to be entirely fictitious when at the end of the operation the list of confiscated materials included no weapons but, rather, board games, rolls of toilet paper and a clown costume. Police claims that environmentalists at a camp allowing only vegan food had hidden 'makeshift weapons' with the intention of 'causing harm' to 'the horses or dogs we are using on patrol' are preposterous lies.

In our fight against imperialism we must also be ready to fight the imperialists' puppets: the police, the army of the state. If you were involved in the miners' strikes, if you are young, black or politically active you will certainly know that the police are not here to serve the community; they are here to control the working class.

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

Babar Ahmad: TSG brutality

On 18 March the High Court ordered the Metropolitan Police to pay £60,000 compensation to Babar Ahmad for a vicious beating meted out to him by eight armed members of the Territorial Support Group who arrested him under the Terrorism Act at his home in south London in December 2003.

Despite putting up no resistance to his arrest, he was repeatedly kicked and punched in the head and body, and his head was pushed against a window with such force that it shattered. His house was ransacked and items smashed. He was strip-searched in a humiliating manner and his religion insulted. His wife was handcuffed as she looked on in horror. Babar himself was then handcuffed with his arms twisted up his back, marched to a van, with police stamping on his bare feet, and taken to Charing Cross Police Station, with police strangling him on the way.

Following this ordeal, Babar was re-

leased from police custody a few days later but rearrested in 2004 on an extradition warrant from the US to face vague charges of 'supporting terrorism'. Under an extradition deal signed by David Blunkett when Home Secretary, the US can demand extradition without having to make out a case that they would successfully be able to prosecute someone. Babar Ahmad is still in prison awaiting a judgement from the European Court of Human Rights on his extradition. He has not been charged with any crime under British law. As well as highlighting the brutality and tuggishness of the police, this case exposes the impotence and collusion of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). Babar complained to the IPCC immediately after the incident; it rejected most of his complaint, referring a narrow aspect of it back to an internal police tribunal which resulted in all-round exoneration and one officer being commended for his bravery!

Binyam Mohamed: Labour torturers exposed

CAT WIENER

'I remain concerned that the investigations shouldn't just focus on the small people and that one agent shouldn't be the scapegoat for what was a government policy'.

Binyam Mohamed 2009

The release of Binyam Mohamed from Guantanamo Bay concentration camp on 23 February 2009 was a victory for those who have campaigned long and hard for the truth to be known. The British government now finds itself under the spotlight for a criminal policy of collusion with torture and illegal rendition sanctioned at the highest level. Rendition – the extrajudicial kidnapping and transfer of detainees in a shadowy network of CIA-run or approved 'dark prisons' across the world – is illegal. For any country to collude with such an operation is also illegal. Torture is internationally abhorred: it contravenes international treaties including the Geneva Conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and British domestic legislation. Collusion with torture, in any form, constitutes a war crime.

British collusion with torture

'For myself, the worst moment came when I realised in Morocco that the people who were torturing me were receiving questions and material from British intelligence.' Binyam Mohamed

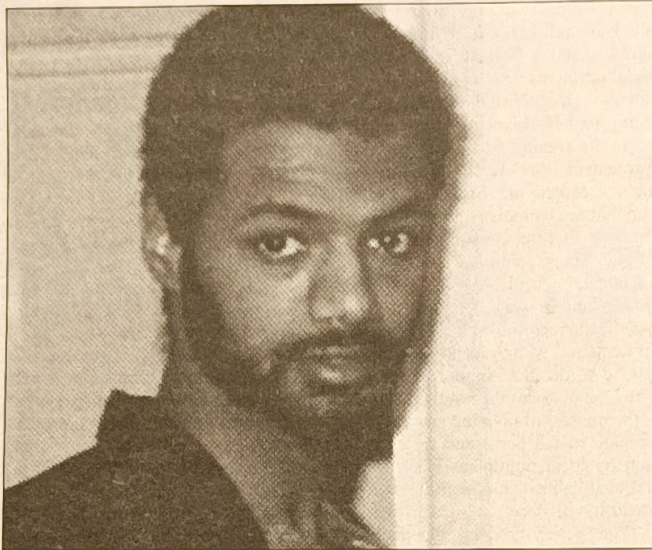
Binyam Mohamed was tortured in Pakistan in 2002 by the Pakistan intelligence services (ISI) at the behest of the CIA. During this time, he was interrogated by an MI5 officer. Evidence has emerged that other British residents were also 'softened up' before MI5 interrogation. For example, Rangzib Ahmed from Rochdale, questioned by MI5 in August 2006, was subjected to sleep deprivation and had three finger nails extracted. Human Rights Watch has interviewed ISI officers who insist British intelligence officers in Pakistan were fully aware of the treatment of detainees. In the case of Mohamed, the High Court has ruled that MI5's involvement went 'far beyond that of a bystander or witness to the alleged wrongdoing'.

MI5 also passed on information and questions concerning Mohamed to the CIA. His Moroccan guards told him 'Why do you think the Brits sold you out so cheaply?... We have been working with the British and we have photos of people given to us by MI5'. This collusion with CIA torture was replicated in dozens of other cases (see cagedprisoners.com/downloads/FabricatingTerrorism_Report.pdf).

The point is that none of this was maverick behaviour by a few rogue British officers, but rather reflected a policy sanctioned at the very top, by government and security and intelligence service lawyers. The MI5 officer who interrogated Binyam Mohamed, identified only as 'Witness B', when asked about the treatment of Mohamed, said: 'I was aware that the general question of interviewing detainees had been discussed at length by security service management legal advisers and government and I acted in this case, as in others, under the strong impression that it was considered to be lawful and proper'.

Labour changes the rules

After the 2001 attacks on the US, new policies were secretly agreed in both



Binyam Mohamed

Washington and London as part of the 'war on terror'. In the US, as Cofer Black, director of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center, put it, 'After 9/11, the gloves came off'. Britain's Tony Blair warned 'The rules of the game have changed'. New laws were drafted and secret policies formulated which abrogated fundamental and inalienable rights in the name of national security. Out went international treaties on human rights, and ancient entitlements to *habeas corpus*; in came a brutal imperialist free-for-all where to be a Muslim was *de facto* to be an 'enemy combatant' on the new global battlefield of the 'war on terror', stripped of all legal or human rights. In the US, this led to the legalisation of torture, arbitrary detention, and international kidnapping. Britain enthusiastically followed suit. And thus, as the United Nations found in March 2009, Britain

- co-operated with the US rendition programme to places where detainees were likely to be tortured
- sent British intelligence officers to interview detainees held incommunicado in Pakistan in 'so-called safe houses where they were being tortured'
- sent interrogators to Guantanamo in an example of what 'can reasonably be understood as implicitly condoning torture and ill-treatment'.

Meanwhile, in Britain itself it created what Reprieve has described as 'Guantanamo in our own back yard'. In 2001, the Kafkaesque 'Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act' allowed the Home Secretary to designate any foreign national as an international terrorist who could be held indefinitely on the basis of secret evidence – some of it extracted under torture – unseen even by the detainee's lawyer. It was, essentially, an updated form of the internment practised by Britain in its war in the north of Ireland, a point emphasised by human rights lawyer Gareth Peirce, who has likened the treatment of the Muslim community in the 'war on terror' to that of the Irish community in the 1970s – 'internment, "shoot to kill", the use of torture... brutally obtained false confessions and fabricated evidence'. When this arbitrary detention was declared illegal by the House of Lords, it was replaced with 'control orders', essentially a form of house arrest. Others remain detained under immigration laws facing possible deportation on 'security grounds', including to countries that practise

torture, again on shadowy evidence which they may neither see nor challenge.

Clearly, the British thought they would never be held to account for their crimes. But the case of Binyam Mohamed has changed all that. That is why, even after Mohamed's release, Foreign Secretary David Miliband continued to lie to prevent the publication of 42 documents crucial to proving Mohamed's innocence. It seems highly likely that these provide evidence that implicates the whole war-mongering Labour Cabinet of 2001, as well as the present government, rendering them liable to prosecution. No wonder both the Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary Jacqui Smith have refused to appear before Parliament's human rights committee to answer questions relating to British collusion in torture. No wonder, despite the head of steam building up in and outside parliament demanding accountability, the government continues to squirm, preferring to leave any 'review' in the safe hands of the Intelligence and Security Committee – chaired by former Labour Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells, responsible for counterterrorism during much of the time abuses were taking place. The Attorney General is considering possible criminal prosecutions, and some material has been passed to the Metropolitan Police – hardly a neutral arbiter – but, as Mohamed himself has made clear, the prosecution of a few operatives will let the government off the hook: 'It's very important that we get to the truth, for everyone in the future.' Only an independent judicial inquiry can determine, in the words of Reprieve, 'whether the government has been involved in the systemic rendition and abuse of prisoners'.

This vicious, lying Labour government must be held to account for what it is – a bunch of war criminals, prepared to sanction torture and kidnapping in the name of a fictional, self-serving 'war on terror'. When war criminal Henry Kissinger won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, satirist Tom Lehrer gave up performing because 'It was at that moment that satire died. There was nothing more to say'. What then would he have made of the Foreign Office's celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, where David Miliband presented a human rights award? ■

EDUCATION NOTES: reasons to be cheerful

As the recession deepens and cuts are made in state education, we can find reasons to be cheerful. Resistance to further academy schools at the expense of local authority schools is growing. Ofsted the inspectorate are exposed as fools and privatisation plans are in a total mess.

The anti-academy alliance

Tony Blair's pet idea of giving rich individuals and institutions ownership and control over state schools is in trouble. The list of wealthy sponsors with a taste for patronage who turn out to have dodgy business practices is growing. Carphone Warehouse mogul David Ross, who failed to declare that he had backed a personal loan with £120m-worth of shares, is the 'first and founding sponsor' of Havelock Academy in Grimsby. That means he appoints the majority of the governors and owns the land and buildings. Ross has resigned from the Olympic Games organising committee, but it is unclear whether he is still regarded as a suitable owner of an academy school. In March, Lord Bhatia, founder of Edutrust, an education business with the subsidiary Edutrust Academies Charitable Trust, had to resign. It was found that £60,000 'excess' rent was paid to the Ethnic Minority Foundation of which Bhatia is co-founder. But irrespective of entrepreneurs who are a little too eager to put their hand in the till, the whole notion of the supremacy of the private sector over the public is shown to be a sham. Revelations about the incompetence and sheer greed for profits that has driven the banking sector into bankruptcy have knocked the academies agenda on the head. Council after council, often pushed on by parents' and teachers' protests, have abandoned plans to demolish local schools and open academies. Dudley, Sheffield and Ellesmere Port councils are among the growing list of local education authorities to axe academy proposals.

factory' – in December 2008 and put into 'special measure' with the words, 'the school does not have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses'. However, in January 2009, Ofsted awarded the school grade 1 and the comment, 'The head teacher is outstanding in inspiring the school'. The long-suffering head says, 'I feel I haven't got the heart any more and it has left me with a lack of confidence about the system'. Teachers, parents and pupils all suffer from the consequences of such heavy-handed Ofsted inspections, the results of which seriously affect the funding received by schools. But finally the bullies from Ofsted are being dislodged from their heights and the day will come when the results of their data-crunching inspections are used for nothing more than toilet paper.

Brown's PFI gets the blues

Prime Minister Brown's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was designed to make it look as if the government was spending less than it was by paying private firms to build hospitals, schools, the London Underground, and so on. The private sector would find the money and the state would repay it over a period of years. The virtue of this arrangement for the Labour government was two-fold. It would appease middle-class taxpayers who, although anxious for improved hospitals and schools, are against paying higher taxes. It would also deliver well-paid projects, with guaranteed profits, into the hands of Labour's friends in the multinationals and corporations of the City of London. The plan did not include the calculation that businesses would go bust – which is what has happened. As a result the government now intends to give funds to the private sector so that it can finance public sector activities, and be paid back at a profit over time. Currently the Building Schools for the Future PFI programme is two years behind schedule, with just 42 schools rebuilt instead of the



David Ross, Carphone Warehouse mogul and sponsor of Havelock Academy

Yes but, no but – Ofsted

Caistor primary school in Lincolnshire experienced an extreme example of attending the education inspectors' ball. In March 2006 an Ofsted inspection report concluded that 'The leadership of the head teacher is outstanding' and the school was graded 1 – 'outstanding'. With the same head and basically the same team, the school was graded 4 – 'unsatisfactory' – in October 2008.

200 expected by now. In October banks stopped providing funds for schools and so the government has sought emergency funds from the European Investment Bank. Despite these problems, executives at Partnerships for Schools (PFS), the government agency that oversees the programme, received 11%-18% bonuses for meeting targets last year.

Susan Davidson

China: between a rock and a hard place

Bourgeois and left-wing analysts alike view China as either a potential saviour of the capitalist system or rival to US hegemony of the world or maybe both. Currently it will play neither of these roles. Despite China's economic growth and increased military spending it cannot challenge the dominance of US and EU imperialism, except within its regional sphere of influence, and that may be intolerable to imperialism. **TREVOR RAYNE** reports.

The SWP's Alex Callinicos and *Socialist Register's* Panitch and Gindin have described China as a potential challenger to the US (see FRFI 193). That challenge may be for the future, but it is not imminent. The influential US academic Marxist Robert Brenner describes the underlying cause of the economic crisis as being an over-production of goods exacerbated by 'the emergence of the Chinese leviathan'. (Interview 22 January 2009, *Links: international journal for socialist renewal*). Brenner says that China prefers US hegemony as a means of allowing its economy to expand and he denies the existence of inter-imperialist rivalry, saying that Europe also approves of US hegemony. He foresees China 'still pouring as much money as it can into the US to try to keep the US economy going, so that China can keep developing the way it did'. This is wrong! The Chinese ruling class will assert its own interests in conflict with the US when it needs to and 'the way it did' can be no more.

Brenner's conception of the crisis as a consequence of the over-production of goods that can be resolved by a reduction in supply and adjustment in demand is false. Another influential US academic Marxist, David Harvey, describes the crisis as 'a capitalist surplus absorption problem', meaning a surplus that has to find new places to invest in, for example, in urban expansion and construction. Harvey depicts the crisis as one of geographical limitation. What Brenner and Harvey share is a view of the resolution of the crisis by managing global demand. A crisis of the production system for commodities under capitalism, the system of exploitation, they view as being resolved by changes in the system of circulation of commodities. Variations on this perspective surfaced and gained influence with the onset of the crisis of accumulation in the early 1970s (see *Revolutionary Communist* 3/4). From this viewpoint, an accommodating China, with 1.3 billion people, and India with 1.2 billion people, are integral to the imperialists' solutions: great untapped markets and geographical expanses to be exploited.

Nowhere in Brenner or Harvey will you find Lenin's concept of imperialism: the domination of monopoly capital, the fight for spheres of global influence between rival imperialist powers, the division of the world between oppressor and oppressed nations, the inevitable militarism and the tendency to war as methods of resolving crises. Rather you will find illusions that capitalism and imperialism can re-emerge reformed, extricated from the crisis without wars and destitution; illusions that immobilise the oppressed.

Foreign invested companies account for 60% of China's imports and exports. Trade exceeds 60% of China's GDP. Its economic miracle has been

achieved by selling low cost manufactured goods to the world, especially to the European Union, the US and Japan. The problems of international capitalism are refracted upon and magnified within China.

Awkward manoeuvres

During her February 2009 visit to Beijing, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: 'The global community is counting on China and the US to collaborate to pursue security, peace and prosperity for all.' She added: 'By continuing to support American Treasury instruments, the Chinese are recognising our interconnectedness. We are truly going to rise or fall together.'

In recent years the US has taken up to 70% of the world's surplus savings. These have sustained US consumption and contributed to the costs of its wars. China's trade surpluses have allowed it to amass \$2 trillion in foreign currency reserves. Surplus earnings have been recycled to the US as purchases of US Treasury bills (US government borrowing) and other dollar assets by China's central bank. This has enabled the US to continue buying China's exports. China's dollar asset investments amount to \$1.7 trillion, some 72% of China's foreign assets. In 2008 China lent the US over \$400 billion, equivalent to 10% of China's GDP. If the dollar falls against other currencies then China's investment depreciates. If China sells US assets then those that it retains will fall in value. When the dollar has fallen, criticisms of the government's purchase of US assets have grown within China. Luo Ping, director general of the China Banking Regulation Commission, recently said in New York, 'Once you start issuing \$1-\$2 trillion... we know the dollar is going to depreciate, so we hate you guys but there is nothing much we can do.'

On 13 March Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao expressed his worries about US government policies: 'President Obama and his government have adopted a series of measures to deal with the financial crisis. We have expectations



Jobseekers look for information at a job fair in Shanghai, China, March 2009

as to the effects of these measures. We have lent a huge amount of money to the US. Of course we are concerned about the safety of our assets. To be honest, I am definitely a little worried.' He called on the US to 'maintain its good credit, to honour its promise and to guarantee the safety of China's assets'. US government budget deficits are forecast to amount to \$5 trillion over the next four years. Regardless, and defying evidence that US debt is already unsustainable, Obama said on 14 March, with Brazil's President Lula at his side, 'Not just the Chinese government, but every investor can have absolute confidence in the soundness of investment in the United States.' Fine words indeed, but the US government is offering \$1.75 trillion of Treasury bills to the world in 2009. As Paul Kennedy, author of *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, asks who will buy this Treasury paper, and if they do who will buy 2010's and then 2011's offer, 'as the US plunges into levels of indebtedness that could make Philip II of Spain's record seem austere by comparison?' (*Financial Times*, 13 March 2009).

After Wen Jiabao's remark the US Federal Reserve announced it would buy \$1.15 trillion of securities to prop up the financial system. China's central bank governor responded on 23

Between 1998 and 2008 exports rose from 20% to 40% of China's economy. China's exports to the EU fell by 9.8% and to the US by 17.4%, at an annualised rate to January 2009. Exports were down 25.7% over the year to February 2009. The monthly trade surplus fell from highs of around \$40 billion to \$4.8 billion in February. The embrace between China and the US will be broken because China will not earn sufficient revenue to buy the expanding volume of US debt.

In January 2009, before he became head of the US Treasury, Timothy Geithner accused China of manipulating its currency to keep it down and thereby maintain its trade surpluses with the US. The *Financial Times* said Geithner 'was playing with fire'. However, the paper argues that China should expand its internal market and commentators argue that China should revalue its currency to reduce the trade imbalance. If China allows its currency to revalue upwards it will lose export revenue with which it buys US debt. If China keeps its currency down it faces protectionist measures from the US and others. It is caught between a rock and hard place.

Class struggles

Premier Wen Jiabao promised 8% economic growth for China for 2009, down from nearly 12% in 2008. It is believed that China's economy must grow by 8% a year to absorb peasants migrating from the countryside to the cities and new graduates into employment. 130 million people have migrated to urban areas in China in the last ten years. China now has 600 million urban people. Rural areas are dependent on remittances from migrant workers.

In the recent period 26 million migrant workers have been made unemployed; 60,000 factories have closed over the past year and 670,000 businesses have shut down. China's construction has dropped by 20-30%. Wen Jiabao said that 'factors that harm social stability will increase'. Strikes and protests are rarely reported by journalists in China; there is evidence of persecution of those that try to report such events. However, there are reports of violence with protestors and state forces using clubs and guns. On 2 December 2008 hundreds of traffic police in Leuyong smashed the Communist Party, local government

premises protesting over low pay.

In February 2009 China's President Hu Jintao called on the army and police to remain loyal in the face of growing discontent and protests. Speaking at the headquarters of the People's Armed Police he called on police to 'engage in comprehensive military training, step up patrols, and boost their capability in handling emergency situations'. China has a large new working class that is not integrated into political networks that support the state. Many come from families that were driven from the land by Communist Party (CCP) administrators pursuing the capitalist road. China's government recognises that this working class is unpredictable and volatile, but repressive measures alone will not subdue the working class.

The government has launched a \$585 billion spending programme, a larger package compared to the size of economy than either the British or the US governments' stimulus packages. This spending is directed at education, health, housing and pensions and should benefit the urban and rural working classes. China's budget deficit for 2009 is anticipated to be \$139 billion or 3% of GDP, five times the 2008 deficit. The government hopes to substitute public spending for exports, generating an internal market to maintain growth, but it is unlikely to be sufficient given the scale of dependence on international markets for employment and revenue. The CCP has over 70 million members and a revolutionary socialist history. The coming class struggles in China will emerge within the Communist Party and are likely to revive a socialist element standing against the capitalist road and corruption.

Military tensions

China's military budget will grow by 14.9% in 2009 to \$70.2 billion. Since 1995 China has added 37 submarines to its navy and intends to build three more each year. US military strategy seeks to control the flow of oil and other resources to China from the Middle East and Africa across the Indian Ocean and through the Straits of Malacca to the South China Sea. On 9 March the US accused China of using coastguard vessels, fishing trawlers and naval vessels to harass the USNS *Impeccable*. China then accused the US of an 'illegal' intrusion into its exclusive economic zone. The *Impeccable* was monitoring China's biggest submarine base. US President Obama sent a destroyer armed with missiles and torpedoes to escort the *Impeccable* as it continued its surveillance operation. This is one of a number of recent incidents in the South China Sea. Chinese aircraft have also buzzed US vessels.

On 14 March, the day after Premier Wen Jiabao expressed his 'worries' about Chinese investments in the US, China signed a \$3.2 billion gas deal with Iran, in defiance of US attempts to impose sanctions on Iran. In February, Russia and China agreed a deal in which China lends Russia \$25 billion in exchange for oil supplies from Siberia for 20 years. In March Russian President Medvedev announced that Russia's military spending would be increased by 13.4% in 2009 and a further 14.7% in 2010 and that the Russian forces would be updated. Medvedev observed that NATO 'has not curbed its efforts to station some of its military infrastructure close to our borders'. Russia, China and Iran see benefits from manoeuvring together against US and other imperialists' plans for the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia. They intend to defend their interests in what they regard as their spheres of influence and to confront US imperialism's bid for global hegemony. We are moving into a context of rising tensions wherein events can swiftly follow each other and a destructive trajectory unfold, if imperialism is not confronted and defeated by the forces for socialism and humanity.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meets Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Beijing

ing much we can do.'

On 13 March Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao expressed his worries about US government policies: 'President Obama and his government have adopted a series of measures to deal with the financial crisis. We have expectations

March calling for the creation of an alternative to the dollar as the global reserve currency. Perpetually expanding US government debt signals a forthcoming fall in the dollar and China is seeking to protect its assets, now at the expense of the US.

Socialism is healthier

In the 50 years since the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Cuba has shown what is possible when society's priority is not profit, but the needs of the people, and when those needs are met not through the anarchy of the market, but through a democratically planned economy. Without socialist planning, Cuba's staggering achievements in health care both domestically and internationally would have been impossible. Capitalism has failed the overwhelming mass of the people in oppressed nations, leaving millions to die every year of preventable diseases. It is now failing increasing numbers in the advanced capitalist countries as well. HANNAH CALLER reports.

In 1978, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Alma Ata Declaration set down 38 targets for health improvement to be met by 2000. The only country to meet these targets was Cuba. Approximately 1.2 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water and 2.4 billion people lack access to sanitation services. The result? Half the hospital beds in the world are occupied by people suffering from water-borne illnesses. About 200 million people are infected with dysentery. Worldwide, diarrhoea and vomiting illnesses kill five to eight million people per year, and these are leading causes of death among children under five.

Half a million women die every year from pregnancy and childbirth related problems. Globally, the annual death rate from malaria is well over one million; 3,000 African children die every day from this largely preventable and treatable disease. Despite the WHO pledge to cut the number of malaria deaths by half by 2010, the number of victims continues to grow. In sub-Saharan Africa, millions are dying from HIV/AIDS.

And in Britain

If you are poor in Britain, you will live five to seven years less than if you are rich. Access to health care is now being rationed and its quality undermined as hospitals seek to meet government targets which promote privatisation.

In 2004 and 2005, there were two outbreaks of *Clostridium difficile* at Stoke Mandeville Hospital resulting in the deaths of 30 people. A 2006 Healthcare Commission investigation found that the deaths were avoidable and that senior managers were concentrating on controlling finances and meeting waiting time targets. The Commission reported a similar story at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust where at least 90 patients died as a result of the infection between 2004 and 2006.

Nothing changed. On 17 March this year, the Commission reported that over a three-year period there had been between 400 and 1,200 more deaths than should be expected at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. The trust had become obsessed with meeting targets and saving money at the expense of patient care. Three days later, yet another Commission report decided that managerial incompetence and under-staffing had undermined patient care at Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Privatisation of the NHS is leading to deteriorating health care for the poor, for the working class, and for those who are of no consequence to capitalism – the elderly. Week after week sees further examples of discrimination in the health care of elderly people, such as inadequate treatment of Alzheimer's and of fractures arising from falls. Yet in November 2008 the government announced the

postponement of promised legislation against age discrimination in health and social services. Cuts in health care spending that will inevitably accompany the deepening crisis will result in an even worse service.

Socialism's human priorities

The contrast with Cuba is stark. Cuba has established a system where health care is inseparable from politics, education and society. The approach is encapsulated in the Cuban medical graduate's oath:

'We pledge to serve the revolution unconditionally wherever we are needed, with the premise that true medicine is not that which cures but that which prevents, whether in an isolated community on our island or in any sister country in the world, where we will always be the standard bearers of solidarity and internationalism.'

Che Guevara's vision of medical solidarity as a revolutionary weapon has been put into practice through the priority given to health in Cuba. Its achievements in critical health indicators such as infant mortality, life expectancy, HIV infection and low birth weight infants are the best in Latin America and as good as or better than those for the richest countries. Cuba's infant mortality is an astounding 4.7 per 1,000 live births; it has fallen dramatically since the Revolution in 1959 when it was 60 per 1,000.

Cuba's planned economy allowed the country to continue its health care developments throughout the Special Period when its economy was devastated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the tightening of the US blockade. Between 1990 and 2003, the number of doctors increased by 76%, dentists by 46% and nurses by 16%. Family doctor coverage expanded from 47% in 1990 to 99.2% in 2003. Over the same period the number of maternity homes rose by 86%, elderly day care centres by 107% and homes for the disabled by 47%. In 2007, Cuba had 6.5 doctors per 1,000 people. The figures for Western Europe are 3.1 per 1,000, and for the US, 2.4 per 1,000.

International co-operation in health

Cuba sees its international health programmes politically as tools to promote international solidarity and to spread the influence of socialism through example. Cuba's capacity at home is the basis for its international work. By November 2008, Cuba had more than 70,000 doctors, allowing it to send 17,697 abroad to serve in 75 countries, along with 20,847 other Cuban health professionals.

Cuba has medical brigades in 27 countries, including Guatemala, Haiti, Belize, Honduras, Botswana, Ghana, Mali, Gambia, Namibia, and Timor Leste. Its programmes use Cuban doctors who are then replaced over a ten-year period by students from the host country who have been trained by

Cuba. All such students are on full scholarships which include tuition, board, food and a living allowance. Cuban doctors abroad work under local direction but the Ministry of Health in Cuba encourages them to work in rural areas, prioritising areas where primary care is absent and focusing on preventative health care. Where necessary, a literacy programme runs alongside the health programme.

Cuba's co-operation programme with Bolivia is the largest after Venezuela with more than 1,000 Cuban doctors; 5,000 Bolivian medical students are training in Cuba. There are also over 100 Cuban doctors in each of Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Timor Leste, Ghana, Namibia, Gambia, Belize, and Mali. In areas served by Cuban medical teams between 1999 and 2003, infant mortality rates showed significant falls: from 45 to 16.8 per thousand live births in Guatemala, 121 to 61 in Gambia, and 59.4 to 33 in Haiti. Between 2003 and 2008, the Cuban medical brigade in Timor Leste is estimated to have saved over 11,400 lives and contributed to a significant fall in infant mortality.

Disaster response contingents

The first Cuban disaster relief medical team went to earthquake-devastated Chile in 1960; relief was provided to another 16 countries over the next 20 years. Cuba offered help to the US following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, an offer the Bush administration ignored. Cuba's largest disaster relief programme has been in Pakistan and followed the earthquake that killed 75,000 people and left hundreds of thousands injured and homeless in October 2005. The first Cubans arrived within six days of the earthquake, entering areas where previously there had only been one doctor for a population of 25,000 people. Overall, 2,500 Cuban health workers went to Pakistan. They set up 32 field hospitals within five months of the disaster, treated over one million people, performed over 10,000 operations, and carried out almost half a million rehabilitation treatments. They outstayed all other international agencies. 1,000 scholarships were offered



Cuban eye surgeon working in Bolivia



Cuba's Henry Reeve medical brigade ready to leave Cuba to help disaster victims

to poor Pakistani students to study medicine in Cuba and a number of Pakistanis with limb loss were flown to Cuba for rehabilitation.

Battle of Ideas

The Battle of Ideas, initiated in 2000, represents a revalidation of socialist principles. As Abel Prieto, Cuban Minister for Culture, said in 2004:

'What should be globalised, are not bombs or hatred, but peace, solidarity, health, education for all, culture etc. That is why, when our physicians go to help in other countries, although their mission is to work for medical attention, they are also bearers of our values and our ideas of solidarity. This is the essence of the Battle of Ideas.'

The expansion of international health work and the role of the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) were part of this. At the inauguration of ELAM in 1999, Fidel Castro said 'This institution is an attempt at a modest contribution by Cuba to the unity and integration of the peoples of Latin America.' Since 2005, 1,500 students from over 40 countries have graduated every year. Everything is free to the students for six years; in return they agree to return to work in marginalised areas in their own countries. There are also about 100 US medical students in Cuba on Pastors for Peace scholarships.

Cuba-Venezuela

Cuba's medical programmes contribute to the revolutionary process in Venezuela. In 2003, a strike by the Venezuelan Medical Federation threatened the breakdown of medical services. Venezuela sought help, and within months hundreds of Cuban doctors arrived and the Caracas pilot programme Barrio Adentro ('Within the Neighbourhood') was extended across Venezuela. By mid-2004, 10,000 Cuban doctors were working nationwide. When Chavez became president in 1999, only 4,000 of 35,000 Venezuelan doctors were family doctors, and most were concentrated in the cities. Since then, the number has increased from one primary care doctor per 17,300 people to one per 3,400 and infant mortality has fallen from 21.4 per 1,000 live births to 13.9.

When Cuba began a literacy programme in Venezuela, the number of people who could not begin to learn to write because of eyesight difficulties

led the two countries to set up Operation Miracle. There were an estimated six million people with reversible blindness in Latin America and the Caribbean, most too poor to pay for surgery. Since July 2004, over 1,300,000 people from 32 countries have had corrective operations in Cuba and in the 59 eye hospitals Cuba has donated under the programme.

Revolutionary training

Cuba is conscious of the need to continue to train doctors, nurses and allied health workers, as well as ensuring that they are equipped to deal with their national and international challenges. In 2004 Cuba started a new type of medical training – the University Polyclinic Medical Training Programme; Venezuela followed in 2005. Cuba's revolutionary vision for this programme was to create a 'medical university without walls'. The bulk of the teaching occurs in clinical situations with small group teaching covering traditional subjects. This encourages poor students from rural communities to train as doctors locally. Over 12,000 Cuban students are enrolled alongside the 17,000 Cubans taking the traditional medical course. The course lasts six years and exposes students to the human aspect of health care and the needs of local communities. In Venezuela, 20,000 students are enrolled, with 5,000 entering the fourth year in early 2009.

Venezuela is also starting a branch of the Latin American School of Medicine and has enrolled 800 students from abroad. Cuba and Venezuela are now training more doctors than the whole of the US. The doctors who graduate have no personal debt, come from the communities they will serve, are politically conscious, understand humanity and the ravages of imperialism, and are the ideological opposite to the doctors formed under capitalism. They, along with the nurses and health workers trained in the same context, are an international revolutionary army with humanitarian weapons. Socialist planning has created this.

As the crisis deepens, the contrast between this and the contempt capitalism has for the health of the mass of the people even in the richest countries will become more apparent. For the mass of the working class, proper health care is possible only under socialism.

Venezuela: a step forward for socialism

'For there to be socialism, we have to transform Venezuela's economic structures, we have to work towards social property of the means of production, which will allow us to generate the conditions required to achieve social justice, for there to be no misery, poverty or crime in Venezuela ... socialism is scientific or it is nothing.' Hugo Chavez, February 2009

On 15 February the national referendum to remove limits on periods of office of elected representatives produced a 55% vote in favour, with 45% against. This important victory demonstrated the successful political consolidation of the new United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). President Chavez is now able to fight a campaign for re-election in 2012 as leader of a socialist party with a majority in Congress, a great step forward from the previous cross-party alliances.

The nationalisation and regulation programme

The Bolivarian socialist project emerged in earnest in 2006, as the process of political education and consolidation progressed, with the promise to renationalise industries privatised in the pre-Chavez years. The first wave of nationalisation, at the start of 2007, focused on the electricity, telecommunications and petroleum sectors.

From August 2008 steps were taken to nationalise the Banco de Venezuela, owned by Spain's Santander Group. Now complete, the government's payment reflects the new global economic reality. Nationalised during the 1994 banking crisis, then privatised in 1996, it has assets of some \$900m, a 12% share of the loan market, 285 offices and three million customers. The Venezuelan banking sector was previously dominated by four private groups: two Spanish multinationals, BBVA and Santander, and two Venezuelan banks, Mercantil and Banesco. Santander bought the Banco de Venezuela at the ridiculously cheap price of \$300m. This nationalisation strengthens government control over the banking network. It follows the collapse of the Stanford Antigua-based International Bank in February. The Venezuelan government then guaranteed the \$220m of deposits in Stanford's banks in Venezuela. However, the reactionary wealthy elite, who have plundered Venezuela for years, bought \$3bn of the \$8bn worth of fraudulent Certificates of Deposit sold by Stanford in Antigua, concealing their loot from the people of Venezuela, and have now paid dearly for their greed.

In April 2008 the nationalisation of the principal steel factory in South America, the Sidor plant, and of 60% of Venezuela's cement industry, was announced. Additionally, several milk producing plants were bought with the subsequent takeover of 32 large farms. In 2008 the Law on Food Security and Sovereignty was passed, granting decree authority to President Chavez for 18 months. The law defines food security as a matter of 'public utility', permitting Chavez to order expropriation of property if necessary. On 28 February 2009 temporary direct control was taken over the rice processing plant in Guarico state owned by Venezuela's largest food producer, Polar. The plant was operating at half capacity and adding artificial flavouring to 90% of its rice in order to evade government price controls (60% of all plain rice has to be sold at regulated prices). Officials from the National Institute in Defence of People's Access to Goods and Services (INDEPABIS) had found more than 16,000 tons of unpackaged, unmodified rice



stored at the plant, which the workers immediately began packaging. A spokesperson for the union at the plant confirmed that the rice was sufficient for two months' production. There is now 300,000 tons of stored rice, with the dry season harvest underway, so Venezuela's monthly demand of 90,000 tons of rice should be satisfied if processors and packagers comply with the government's food security laws.

On 5 March further inspections led to the initial expropriation of a plant owned by the multinational food company Cargill in Portuguesa state, also found to be modifying rice to evade price controls. INDEPABIS found approximately 18,000 tons of non-modified rice stored in the plant's warehouse. Cargill reported nearly \$4bn in net earnings worldwide in 2008, a 36% increase over 2007, while the number of people suffering hunger worldwide increased to a record 923 million.

As Chavez has stated, 'We have to transform the economic model, basing it on social property over land, industry, the means of production. This is part of life or death, of the hope that the Bolivarian revolution will not fail.'

Opposition disruption and murders

According to the Ezequiel Zamora National Farmers' Front, since the 2001 land reform law, 214 rural activists have been murdered during campaigns to enforce the law. Now the Simon Bolivar Farmers' Front has been formed following the assassinations of Mauricio Sanchez, who had been leading the struggle for land reform in southern Zulia state, and farmers' rights organiser Nelson Lopez, shot 15 times in the back in Yaracuy state early in March. Despite many arrests for the murders, Braulio Alvarez, a National Assembly legislator who co-ordinates the new Front, has called for a national investigation into a network of large estate owners' and private cattle ranchers' associations for ordering the crimes.

With the fall in oil prices limiting imports, direct measures have to be taken to resolve the historical problem of inadequate Venezuelan food production. Venezuela's National Land Institute has recently taken public ownership of more than 12,000 acres of land previously claimed by wealthy families and multinational corporations and is reviewing tens of thousands more acres across the nation. With the newly acquired land, the Ven-

ezuelan government plans to promote new forms of social property and sustainable agriculture managed by either co-operative businesses or the state.

The March economic adjustment package

The current global financial meltdown presents the government with serious challenges. With declining oil prices, anti-socialist propagandists predicted a return to 'realism', the imposition of the type of anti-working class measures now deepening in all the imperialist states and their neo-colonies; but Chavez is no imperialist lackey. On 21 March an adjustment package was announced, advancing the socialist agenda against the global crisis.

Priority was given to protect all social programmes worth over 20bn bolivars (\$9.3bn) – about 12.5% of the country's GDP. Spending on health and education will also continue. Over 25% of the country's GDP is destined for these sectors (education over 18% of GDP and health care 7.2% of GDP). This spending includes the six new hospitals being built and nine more planned. A 20% increase in the minimum wage is to be awarded in two stages, 10% on 1 May and the remainder on 1 September.

The total budget is reduced by 6.7%, from approximately 167bn bolivars to 156bn (\$77.7bn to \$72.6bn). Originally based on oil revenues of \$60 a barrel, a figure of \$40 is now used, although prices are currently around \$50. To make up the projected shortfall VAT is raised from 9% to 12% and government borrowing limits are increased. This debt is currently less than 14% of GDP compared to the US's 70% and rising. The government says that its \$42bn in foreign currency reserves and joint development funds with China and Russia will protect it from further deficits. Spending on aspects of government administration '...executive vehicles, redecorating, real estate, new headquarters, promotional material and unnecessary publicity...' will stop. Funding for regional governments will increase by 32.6% on the 2008 allocation, an extra 10bn bolivars (\$4.65bn) for provinces and cities.

The opposition

Now roundly defeated in any democratic forum, the favourite tactic of the opposition is to foster shortages by hoarding and raising prices to promote disaffection against the revolution.

Further, opposition groups are hoping to convert the opposition-governed states of Tachira and Zulia into territories beyond central government control. However, the state is moving against prominent figures fomenting separatism, including the recently elected mayor of Maracaibo, Manuel Rosales, previously governor of Zulia. Rosales participated in the defeated coup against Chavez of April 2002, signing the decree that dissolved the Constitution, but did not serve any time in prison. He stood against Chavez in the 2006 presidential election and lost 63% to 36%. Rosales faces possible corruption charges.

The National Assembly reformed the Law on Decentralisation in March to allow the national government to regain control of ports, airports, and highways that weak state governments

have allowed to fall under control of criminals. An executive order followed on 15 March. In response to this measure, the Zulia state legislature declared itself in a state of emergency and vowed not to allow the national government to take over the Port of Maracaibo. Since the ports and airports were transferred to the states two decades ago, complicit or weak state governments have allowed criminal networks and multinational corporations to increase their control over these facilities. Decentralisation, introduced in 2006, sought to transfer power to the people, not to states, municipalities, or political parties.

Less and less room is being allowed for the culture of abuse and corruption created by imperialism in over 100 years. Viva Chavez! Viva PSUV!

Alvaro Michaels

El Salvador: Presidential election victory for FMLN



On 15 March, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front's (FMLN) Mauricio Funes won El Salvador's presidential election by 51.3% against 48.7% for the right-wing Arena candidate, Rodrigo Avila. Whilst Funes ran on a very moderate programme, his election still spells a significant step forward for the people of El Salvador and Central America.

In the 1980s, 75,000 people died in the FMLN-led struggle for national liberation, 90% of them victims of the El Salvadorean army and its paramilitary death squad auxiliaries led by Major Roberto d'Aubuisson. It was d'Aubuisson who set up Arena in 1981, speaking of the need to kill hundreds of thousands of El Salvadoreans 'to restore peace to El Salvador'. Arena has ruled El Salvador since peace accords were signed in 1992, and still dominates the municipalities, even if it is now the second largest party in Congress after the FMLN.

The advent of peace brought no economic benefits to the poor of El Salvador; death squads still operated with impunity against trade unionists and local FMLN organisers. The economy of El Salvador remained completely dependent on that of the US. Although 5.7 million live in El Salvador, 2.9 million have had to go abroad to find employment, more than

90% in the US, most of them as undocumented workers. Remittances from these workers amounted to \$3.8bn in 2008, and made up 17% of GDP. More than a quarter of El Salvadorean families received remittances; for many it is the main source of income. However, such remittances started to fall in the latter part of the year as unemployment in the US rose. In 2005 the proportion of El Salvadoreans living in extreme poverty was 20%; without such remittances it would rise to 37%, according to a UN report. The dollarisation of the economy in 2001 and El Salvador's subsequent affiliation to the Central American Free Trade Association in 2004 merely tightened its dependency on the US.

Funes has promised to increase taxes on the rich – at present the tax burden at 10% is amongst the lowest in Latin America – to pay for better social programmes, including rural health care and crime prevention, and to give subsidised credit to farmers and small businesses. But he is also committed to keeping the US dollar as El Salvador's currency, and has recently reiterated his respect for property rights, economic stability and fiscal discipline. Along with neighbouring Costa Rica, and after an interval of 48 years, Funes has restored El Salvador's diplomatic relations with Cuba, the last two countries in Latin America to do so.

Robert Clough

ISRAEL'S WAR CRIMES IN GAZA

As a deluge of reports appear about Israeli war crimes during the December-January invasion of Gaza, one fact cannot be forgotten: the Palestinian people remain undefeated. Despite the Israeli atrocities and despite the continued siege of Gaza, there has been no rejection of the Hamas government in Gaza. On the other hand, the Palestine Authority under Mahmoud Abbas has been completely discredited by its collusion with the Zionists and imperialism. In Britain, the Labour Party, which completely supported the Zionist onslaught, is now trying to isolate those who support the Palestinian people by threatening to cut links with the Muslim Council of Britain, while police are rounding up protesters from the January demonstrations in London against the attack on Gaza. **BOB SHEPHERD** reports.



Palestinians in Israel confront police and extreme right-wing marchers in Umm El Fahm (see box below)

On 19 March, Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, reported to the UN Human Rights Council that Israel's military onslaught on Gaza 'would seem to constitute a war crime of the greatest magnitude under international law'. He described the assault as 'an inhuman form of warfare that kills, maims and inflicts mental harm'. A series of reports, testimonies and revelations and the many accounts given by Palestinians in Gaza of the atrocities committed by Israeli forces during the onslaught confirm his report.

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* has published the testimonies of Israeli soldiers given to recruits at the Oranim College military academy. These testimonies expressed the racist contempt with which they treated the people of Gaza. One is quoted as saying, 'the climate in general... I don't know how to describe it... the lives of Palestinians, let's say, are much, much less important than the lives of our soldiers'. Another quotes what one of his platoon said to him, 'we need to murder any person who's in there, yeah; any person who's in Gaza is a terrorist'. One testimony describes an

incident where an Israeli sniper shot and killed a Palestinian woman and her two children after they were told it was safe to leave their house. *Haaretz* also reported that Israeli soldiers who had been in Gaza ordered T-shirts afterwards with racist images such as one of a dead Palestinian baby with the slogan 'Better use Durex' and one of a pregnant Palestinian woman with a bull's-eye over her belly and the slogan '1 shot, 2 kills'.

On 24 March, *The Guardian* reported investigations that detailed the use of young boys as human shields by Israeli troops, the targeting of medical workers and hospitals by Israel and the use of drones to target civilians. Three brothers, Al'a, Ali and Nafiz Al Attar, aged 14, 15 and 16, were taken and used as human shields by Israeli troops for five days; they were made to kneel in front of Israeli tanks to stop Resistance fighters from attacking and were placed in front of troops as they moved through Palestinian homes. *The Guardian* also covered the attacks on medical workers and hospitals: 16 Palestinian medics were killed by the Israelis with many more injured. The World Health Organisation reports that over half of Gaza's 27 hospitals were damaged by

Israeli bombs with two clinics destroyed and 44 damaged.

The newspaper also quoted from Amnesty International's investigations into the use by Israel of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or drones, which killed at least 48 civilians. In one incident a missile fired by a drone in Gaza City killed a husband and wife and four of their children as they sat together drinking tea. Mounir Al Jarah, the dead woman's brother, declared: 'You cannot imagine the scene, a family sitting around together and then, in a matter of seconds, they were cut to pieces. Even the next day we found limbs and body parts on the roof, feet and hands.'

In a *Lancet* report, Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah and Dr Swee Ang, who entered Gaza during the onslaught, wrote:

'Gaza is very densely populated. It is eerie to see that the bombs used by Israel have been precision bombs. They have a 100% hit rate on buildings which are crowded with people. Examples are the central market, police stations, schools, the UN compounds used as a safety shelter from bombardment, mosques (40 of them destroyed), and the homes of families who thought they were safe as there were no combatants in them, and high rise flats where a single implosion bomb would destroy multiple families. This pattern of consistent targeting of civilians makes one suspect that the military targets are but collateral damage, while civilians are the primary targets.'

According to the latest figures from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) 1,434 Palestinians were killed during the invasion of whom 235 were resistance fighters. The rest were civilians and non-combatants including 288 children. 5,303 Palestinians were injured in the assault including 1,606 children.

The devastation Israel caused is immense: 90,000 people were made homeless, 22,000 buildings were partially or completely destroyed and 300,000 people still have no running water. This situation will continue as Israel refuses to allow any building material, pipes or concrete into Gaza. The devastation of buildings has left an estimated 600,000 tons of rubble that needs to be cleared. This requires heavy plant machinery which Israel also refuses to allow across the border.

Gazan agriculture was decimated with financial losses estimated at \$200 million. Israeli forces deliberately destroyed greenhouses, egg incubators, wells, irrigation systems and farmland. Vast areas of fruit and vegetable farmland were uprooted and trashed by Israeli forces in a concerted effort to destroy any future Gazan agriculture. This was a deliberate policy to make Gaza even more dependent on external food aid, allowing Israel even more power over their lives. In February Oxfam reported that Israel was stopping half of the aid it, together with UNRWA, was trying to send. In the lead up to a conference of international donors in Sharm-el-Sheikh at the beginning of March, Oxfam declared:

'The people of Gaza have been restricted to survival rations for now over 20 months. Restrictions on food types, clothing and school books are keeping innocent children underfed, cold and uneducated. Hospitals, schools and thousands of homes need to be rebuilt. We cannot talk seriously about rebuilding Gaza without the opening of all crossings.'

Representatives of 71 nations attended the Sharm-el-Sheikh conference and pledged \$4.5bn for the reconstruction of Gaza. Hamas was excluded from the conference as the imperialists insisted that Hamas must neither control nor have access to the funds. They want to avoid a situation

Labour targets anti-Zionists

On 21 March, Minister for Communities Hazel Blears suspended contact with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), alleging that its deputy general secretary, Dr Daud Abdullah, had endorsed a Hamas call for attacks on foreign troops, which might include British troops, if they try to intercept arms smuggled into Gaza. Blears' stand is consistent with Labour's new anti-terrorist strategy Contest 2 which seeks to confront those who reject 'our shared values'. In a letter to *The Guardian*, Blears claims without evidence that the declaration advocates 'attacks on Jewish communities all around the world'. She has insisted that Daud either stand down or be dismissed from his post

before the government resumes contact with the MCB. Not surprisingly the MCB refuses to comply: it would lose all credibility within the Muslim community if it capitulated to such crude threats.

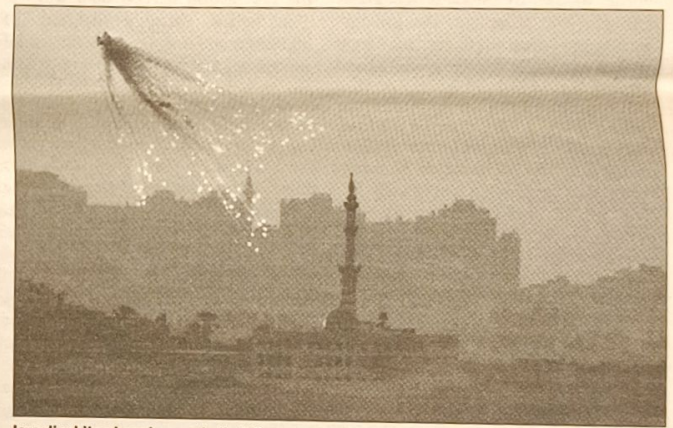
That support for national liberation struggles will be criminalised more and more is evident in the case of six Danish activists from the Fighters+Lovers collective. They sold T-shirts with FARC and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) logos saying that part of the cost would be given to humanitarian projects sponsored by the two organisations. EU law brands both FARC and the PFLP as 'terrorist' organisations. After nearly 18 months on trial, the activists were convicted of sponsoring terrorism and given three and six month suspended sentences.

akin to Lebanon when, after Israel's defeat, Hizbullah consolidated its support by rebuilding homes and providing aid to the people.

Israel now wants to link lifting the siege with the release of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Hamas has always been clear that there can be no such linkage as the release of Shalit depends on Israel releasing Palestinian prisoners. However the Zionists will constantly manoeuvre to prevent any loss of control over the Gazan borders,

and in this they rely on support from Egypt on the one hand, and the imperialists on the other. Socialists in Britain must continue to campaign for an end to the siege and an end to Labour's defence of Zionist war criminals.

Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah will be speaking about his experiences in Gaza at an FRFI Student Society meeting on Tuesday 28 April 7-9.30pm at the London School of Economics, Houghton Street, WC2. Nearest tube Holborn.



Israeli white phosphorus shells fall on a mosque in the Gaza strip

Student occupations in solidarity with Palestine

On 14 January, students at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London occupied the Brunei Gallery Suite in protest at an MoD exhibition and in solidarity with the people of Gaza. Within days, students at the London School of Economics and King's College London had also occupied lecture theatres in protest at the Zionist assault.

The following weeks saw over 25 university campuses occupied by students across the whole of Britain, with students taking confidence from the initial actions in London and the growing momentum of the movement, and sharing their experiences and tactics on-line through blogs and social networking sites. Direct action intensified even after Israel's declaration of a 'ceasefire', with Sheffield University students going into occupation on 23 March. At Nottingham University and Sheffield Hallam, management employed security guards to forcibly evict protestors and cut off all power and supplies. However, real concessions were won from university management in many areas including statements of condemnation against Israeli aggression, donating surplus materials to Gaza, establishing scholarship funds for Pales-

tinian students and divestment from arms companies.

The occupations were the first instance of students in Britain engaging in such political radicalism for over 25 years, and added a significant dimension to the massive wave of Palestine protests across the country. While university campuses in France, Greece and Italy have consistently been arenas for occupation and protest, it was for once British students who took the lead. Their actions gained international news coverage and inspired occupations in New York and elsewhere.

On 23 January the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees hailed the protests as a 'welcome continuation of those efforts aimed at holding Israel accountable for its injustice and crimes' and urged students to widen their demands for a boycott of Israel. At Strathclyde University in Glasgow, St Andrews and Edinburgh students successfully fought for a campus ban on Israeli-owned water company Eden Springs, but in Newcastle the RCG was the only group to oppose the dropping of a call for a boycott from the students' demands.

Joseph Eskovitch

Israeli elections

The Israeli election results have changed nothing of consequence. The new government will be a coalition of Likud, Yisrael Beiteinu, Labour and Shas. Benjamin Netanyahu will be Prime Minister with Labour leader Ehud Barak continuing as Defence Minister and Yisrael leader Avigdor Lieberman becoming Foreign Minister. It will be the fourth time that the arch-racist Lieberman will have served as a minister in an Israeli government.

In the run-up to the election Hamas stated: 'Today we face three heads of terrorism, Livni - who wants to pursue the war on Gaza, Netanyahu - who clearly announced there is no Palestinian partner for peace and won't abide by any agreement with the Palestinians,

and Lieberman - who once wanted to bomb the Aswan Dam, destroy Egypt and throw the Palestinian people into the sea'.

Palestinians in Israel have continued to mobilise in opposition to Zionism, most recently on 24 March in Umm El Fahm. They were responding to a provocation by followers of the extremist Kahane movement who wanted to march through the Palestinian town. The extreme right in Israel, which of course includes Lieberman, has been demanding that the Palestinian population of Israel take an oath of loyalty to the Zionist state. 2,500 Israeli police were drafted in to the town to defend the march of about 100 racists, to be met by thousands of Palestinian protesters who threw rocks and bottles against police lines.

US extends Afghan war into Pakistan

'Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred.' Thus, in the first significant statement of his inaugural address, President Obama reiterated US imperialism's justification for its military rampage in pursuit of global domination. In February he announced that 17,000 extra US troops will be sent to Afghanistan this spring. More will follow later in the year. Obama has requested \$75 billion this year and \$130 billion next year for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to a 4% increase in the Pentagon budget, bringing it to \$534 billion: over \$23,000 a second. **JIM CRAVEN** reports.

The US is preparing more intense aggression over a wider area. Rules of engagement suggested by Afghan President Hamid Karzai to try and prevent civilian casualties were dismissed as 'unworkable' by US/NATO commanders. NATO's senior military commander General John Craddock called for the indiscriminate shooting of alleged drug traffickers. US army chief General George Casey spoke of 'no quick fixes', expecting the military to be in Afghanistan in ten years' time. The arena of war is now referred to as 'AFPAK' - Afghanistan and Pakistan combined. Within days of his inauguration, Obama sanctioned missile attacks on Pakistani villages that killed 22 people, including children; attacks that have continued with bloody regularity since. Rustam Shah Mohmand, former Pakistani ambassador to Afghanistan, said, 'If anything, the policy [of missile attacks] is going to be more focused, more aggressive under Obama.'

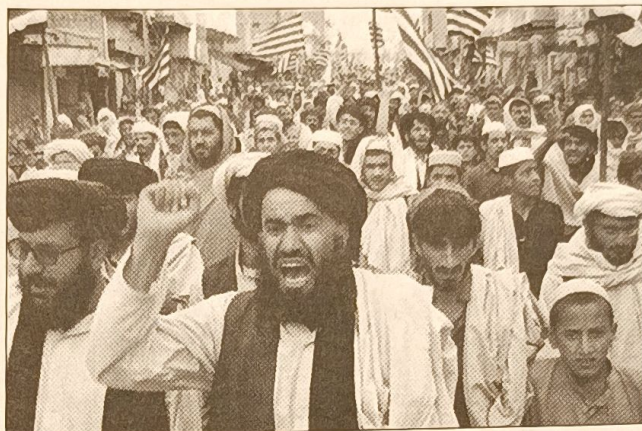
Taliban advances

The escalation of violence by the imperialists is a response to mounting victories by the Afghan Taliban-aligned forces. These forces have a permanent presence in 72% of the country, up from 54% a year ago. There is a growing sense of siege in the capital. Taliban forces attacked Kabul in February, paralysing the city for four hours. US/NATO casualties were more than twice as high in January and February this year as they were in 2008. When asked if the new imperialist assault would result in even greater US casualties, Vice-President Joe Biden, in the chilling jargon of the war machine, confirmed, 'There will be an uptick'. Richard Holbrooke, Obama's special envoy to Afghanistan and Iraq, a man complicit in much of the slaughter in the war on Yugoslavia, said, 'I've never seen anything like the mess we've inherited...It's going to be much tougher than Vietnam.'

Imperialist rivals challenge US hegemony

With the US in such desperate circumstances in Afghanistan, imperialist rivals and other major powers are taking the opportunity to further their interests. The route from Peshawar through the Khyber Pass, along which 75% of US/NATO supplies travel, is under constant threat of being cut by the Taliban. The US had planned to open a new route through Central Asia, but in February Kyrgyzstan announced it was closing the US Manas airbase, a key transit point on the new route. Russia offered Kyrgyzstan a \$150 million grant, equivalent to US payments for the Manas base, together with a \$2 billion loan. Russia has offered the US a route for non-military supplies through its territory but will demand concessions in exchange. Russia opposes US attempts to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO and to encircle it with US bases. It has announced plans to establish a 10,000-strong rapid reaction force, which, according to President Medvedev, 'must be no weaker than similar forces in NATO'. Russia also proposes establishing an air defence system in Belarus and providing a \$354 million package for Cuba.

At the Munich security conference in February, Biden said the US government would never recognise a 'Russian sphere of influence'. He argued the 'absolute necessity' for a closer alliance between the US and Europe. But most NATO members continue to refuse US requests to increase combat commitments in Afghanistan, seeing nothing to be gained from helping the US out of its difficulties. France has rejoined the NATO command structure to strengthen its own influence. Germany refused US demands for the NATO rapid reaction force to be used in Afghanistan. Britain, dependent on US military power to defend its own global interests, will be sending around 3,000 more combat troops this summer.



Supporters of Pakistani religious party Jamiat-Ulema-i-Islam rally against US strikes in Pakistan

Future dictatorships?

In Pakistan large areas of the Afghan border region are in the hands of Taliban supporters. In an attempt to undermine local Taliban leader Maulana Fazlullah, the Pakistani government has agreed to a tentative truce in Bajaur and to establish Sharia law in the Swat Valley, much to the anger of the US military. But there is massive opposition among the Pakistani people to the imperialists' extension of the war into their country, not least because of the indiscriminate US air strikes. Now it has been discovered that Predator drones have been launched secretly from bases within Pakistan itself. Waziri fighters ended their alliance with the Pakistani army and allied with the Taliban after being hit by air strikes. The Taliban have pledged to take the fight against the pro-US Zardari government into the capital Islamabad. Recently, the Supreme Court banned the main opposition leader Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shabbaz from holding elected office for life and tried to put them under house arrest. Violent demonstrations and a massive march on Islamabad followed. The situation was only temporarily defused when Zardari gave way to opposition demands to restore the chief justice minister to office. With the US state intent on taking its war further into Pakistan, there is a growing danger that the US will engineer another military dictatorship.

In Afghanistan, the US is preparing to dump puppet President Hamid Karzai. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described Afghanistan as a 'narco state' with a government 'plagued by limited capacity and widespread corruption'. In response, Karzai's supporters accused the US of behaving like 'colonial masters' and of adding to the lawlessness. Karzai has been pursuing talks with Taliban leaders through third parties. He fears US escalation will upset the talks. The US does not oppose talks as long as they are on its terms, aimed at submission not reconciliation. Afghanistan's presidential election has been postponed until August, ostensibly for practical and security reasons. However, according to the constitution, Karzai would have to relinquish power in May leaving a vacuum period. Karzai tried to insist that the elections go ahead as originally scheduled in April or to call a *loya jurga*, a tribal council, to overrule the constitution. The imperialists are in no position to allow internal political wrangling to stand in their way. British Ambassador Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles said at the beginning of the year that 'an acceptable dictator' may be the best solution.

Iraq - internal conflicts threaten US plans

Between 92,000 and 107,000 US combat troops are to leave Iraq by the end of August 2010, four months later than Obama promised in his election campaign. His top generals wanted an even later date. Up to 50,000 troops will remain in the country. These troops are supposed to leave by the end of 2011. However, Defence Secretary Robert Gates has argued for 'some very modest-sized presence for training and helping' beyond 2011. Furthermore, a get-out clause in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) allows the Iraqi government to 'request continued US presence after the 2011 deadline'. The collaborationist Iraqi regime will be dependent on US money and weapons to maintain its power.

Corruption and election apathy

In January's provincial elections Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki appeared to strengthen his position. His State of the Law coalition now dominates the councils in 10 provinces. Al Maliki, however, has been accused of using the state machinery to buy political support, giving money to tribal councils in return for votes, using the government-controlled media and doling out patronage and jobs. Turnout in the election was 51%, less than in 2005. In Baghdad the turnout was just 40%. As one Baghdad woman told the *Financial Times*, 'What's the point? All the local councils do is give

money to their friends.' In Salahaddin province Faka'a Ahmed Jihad concurred, 'Electricity, water and employment, these are the three main things. But usually, everyone who comes along just pockets the money and changes nothing.' The US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction is investigating the misuse of \$125 billion of aid, including \$50 billion that has 'gone missing'. Senior US military officers are under suspicion.

Problems for US occupation

The elections have opened up potential clashes that could disturb the relative stability on which the US reduction in forces depends. Sunni candidates won the majority of votes in Nineveh province, which the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) had hoped to incorporate. The Sunni coalition wants the KRG militia removed from the region. The Iraqi government has sent troops to the north, prompting fears that Kurdish plans for an autonomous region are to be spoiled. Kurdish officers had been replaced. Khasro Goran, Kurdish deputy governor of Nineveh, warned, 'If non-Kurdish military units try to move into disputed areas we will stop them.' KRG Prime Minister Barzani said that if the Kirkuk question is not settled by the time US troops pull out there will be 'war between both sides'.

The millions of Baghdad's poor working class who formed the main support for the Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr did not vote in large numbers. Al Sadr is in self-imposed exile in Iran, reportedly saying it is time to 'turn a new page' and 'forget the past' and suggesting a possible coalition with Al Maliki. Other Sadrists leaders have been damned by Shia communities for acquiescing in Al Maliki's attacks on the Mehdi Army. The poverty, unemployment and oppression imposed by the occupying forces and their Iraqi puppets that gave rise to the Baghdad poor's resistance still remain and could again threaten US strategy.

A February statement addressed to President Obama from the political committee of factions of the Iraqi resistance in Baghdad said, 'Our people seek a complete end to the occupation and not the fulfilment of a strategic treaty that was rushed against the will of our people in the last days of your predecessor.' As part of a plan for the liberation and rebuilding of Iraq, it demanded that all foreign advisors leave with the troops, that mercenaries be tried for their crimes and that militias 'equipped by your country and Iran' to divert the battle towards sectarianism must be dismantled. 'The resistance of the people of Iraq will continue until the last boot of US/British/Iranian occupation is thrown across the borders of our country...We continue to fight on behalf of all the oppressed people of the world.'

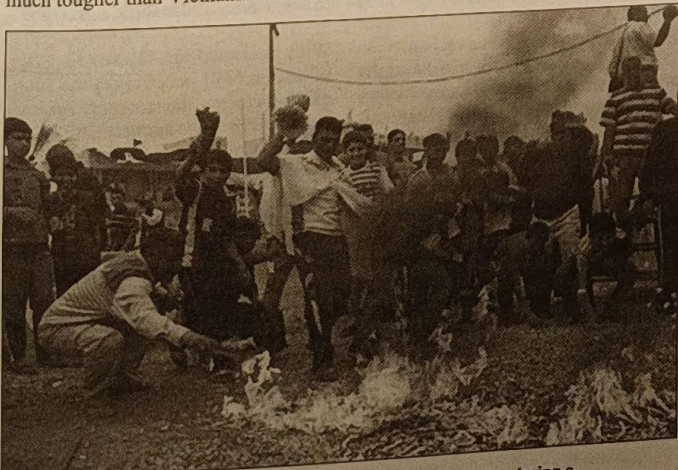
Labour conceals truth about Iraq invasion

In February, the so-called Justice Minister Jack Straw decided that we must not know why the Labour government agreed to attack Iraq. Minutes of the Cabinet meetings on 13 and 17 March 2003 are to be kept secret, even though the Information Commissioner Richard Thomas ordered their release. Ironically, Straw used Section 53 of the Freedom of Information Act to justify his decision - a further example of how Labour has legislated to attack civil liberties. It follows an earlier Labour government decision to refuse an official inquiry into the Iraq war at least so long as British troops remain, despite 72% of the population wanting such an inquiry. Then, on 25 March, Foreign Secretary Miliband said that an inquiry would be approved 'as soon as practicable'. However, the inquiry would be held in private because confidentiality is 'very, very

important for all of our troops'.

'Confidentiality' is very, very important for former Prime Minister Blair and his Labour Cabinet. Although forbidden access to the minutes, we know that deliberate lies such as that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which could be launched against British bases within 45 minutes were used to bolster the case for war. We know the Attorney General was persuaded to reverse his earlier decision that the war would be illegal. It is also thought the decision to go to war had already been made and that Blair promised to ignore any Cabinet decision to the contrary. What other deceit, threats and agreements to ignore the wishes of the British people were made before the Labour government launched its murderous assault on the people of Iraq? No private inquiry will tell us.

Trevor Rayne



Baghdad, March 2009. Supporters of Moqtada Al Sadr burn a US flag during a demonstration marking the 6th anniversary of the invasion

'Pure' class struggle ignores imperialist reality

■ The trouble with diversity – how we learned to love identity and ignore inequality, Walter Benn Michaels, Holt Paperbacks, New York 2006, £10.58

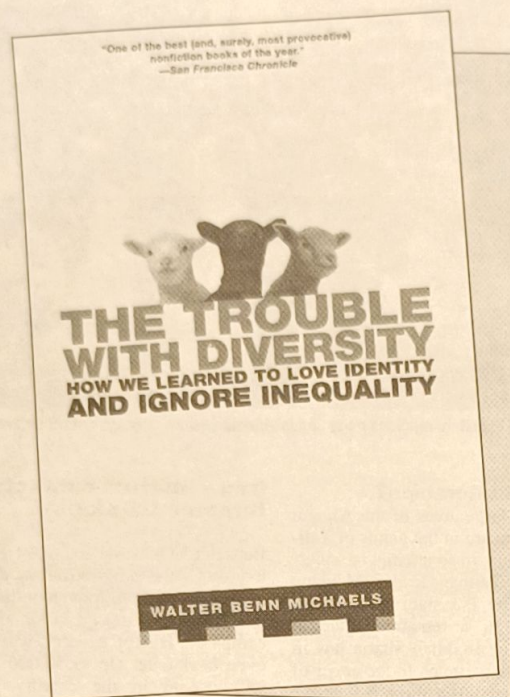
When a heartfelt, lively and argumentative book challenges the left for fighting racism, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* is obliged to make our case.

Michaels argues that 'identity' politics has replaced 'class' politics. He says that religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability, age, race, indigenous rights and cultural heritage have displaced economic inequality as the causes of the left. Any complaint arising from identity rights has come to be regarded as progressive. Solidarity is automatically on offer to those who feel themselves to be humiliated, disregarded or discriminated against. Objectivity, he says, has been supplanted by subjectivity and a thing is asserted as true because it is felt to be true. Michaels concludes that the left has been subverted from targeting the real discrepancies of wealth and class and has joined the right wing as the champion of identity rights.

These are serious charges and Michaels is a fluent defender of his position, giving plentiful examples from the US today. When a female Wall Street banker is awarded \$1 million compensation for gender discrimination this is claimed as a triumph for feminism. Wal-Mart women workers would have to work for 60 years to gain the same income that the Wall Street woman earns in one year. Male Wal-Mart workers would have to work 57 years to achieve parity with one year's earnings of that Wall Street woman. What reality shows is gender discrimination within a context of vast economic disparity. Nevertheless, male chauvinism and discrimination against women are not illusory but are harsh truths, and the declared aim of this book is that the truth about the USA must be told. It is for this reason that Michaels complains at great length that the truth becomes the victim in Philip Roth's acclaimed 2005 novel *The Plot Against America*.

Roth has written a counter-factual history in which the US elected a Nazi president in 1940 and Jews became the persecuted minority of the nation. The author includes references to the one historical case of a Jewish lynching that occurred in 1915. He ignores, however, the 3,500 lynchings of black people that took place in the USA over the fifty years up to 1930 and indeed all the history of anti-black discrimination. He does this because he wants to, and because his imagined history has priority over actuality. The novel's commercial success comes from the fashion for art under the heading of post-modernism in which the narrative or 'point of view' is validated (made true) by the wishes or feelings of the creator.

This pervasive culture of subjective views where a thing is true because it is felt to be so has become big business, says Michaels. In the US today, the well-paid politics of the superficial gesture dominates. Every state institution, every capitalist organisation has a department dedicated to equality objectives, mission statements, separate funding and celebration days to enhance diversity opportunity. It is the same in Britain where money will be made over the next four weeks with World Book Day, Fairtrade Fortnight and Multilingual



Month. In this, its centenary year, the head of the US NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is on a salary of \$300,000 a year.

Michaels' contempt for this multi-million dollar diversity business impairs his ability to see that even institutional anti-racism, despite its limitations, is an advance on the historic acceptance of racism as an unquestioned fact of life. The long and often heroic struggle for race equality raised questions and consciousness to a higher level than any other political movement in the history of the USA. That is why, in the words of Lenin, socialists support the fight for democratic rights:

'That is the crux of the matter. All "democracy" consists in the proclamation and realisation of "rights" which under capitalism are realisable only to a very small degree and only relatively. But without the proclamation of these rights, without a struggle to introduce them now, immediately, without training the masses in the spirit of this struggle, socialism is impossible.'

Michaels protests that race is used as a cover for glaring and gross economic inequality and this is shown in the US health system. US medical care is extremely expensive and, apart from the very rich, only those with medical insurance can pay for it. However, health insurance is affordable only to those on an adequate income and the lack of it is a marker of poverty and impacts upon mortality rates (see *Sicko*, the film by Michael Moore). The rate of the uninsured for the black population is 19.7 per cent, compared to 11.3 per cent of whites. A 2005 report, *Closing the gap: solutions to race-based health disparities*, says, 'racial disparities in health constitute a national crisis. Equalising mortality rates between African Americans and whites alone would have saved five times as many lives as all advances in medical technology saved between 1991 and 2000'.

But the rate of the uninsured among people with incomes under

\$25,000 is 24.2 per cent and the rate of those with annual incomes above \$75,000 is 8.2 per cent. Michaels says: 'This gap is a lot bigger than the racial one (and given the disproportionately large number of poor blacks, it does a lot to explain the racial one). Given this, why is the national crisis of medical insurance called the "racial" disparity in health care and not the "economic" disparity in health care?' The answer, he says, is that: 'The first fits neatly into the acceptable category of identity, the other raises the need

maras would oppose capitalism, for example, and not all Bolivian socialists are Aymara.'

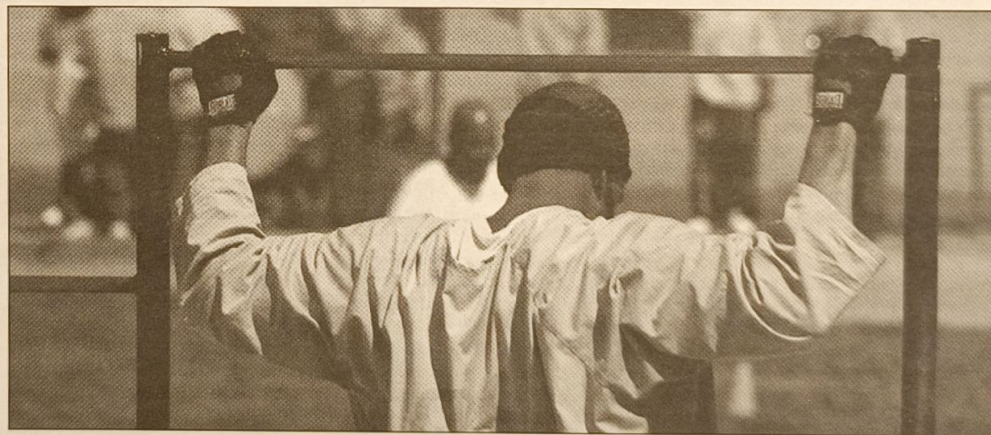
Michaels leaves these statements as contradictions hanging in the air saying: 'How successful Morales will be in opposing globalisation, I have no idea.' He fails to recognise that the 'pure' class position he champions is inadequate to the circumstances in which the struggle for socialism takes place. The reality is that the productive forces, which bring into being the proletariat as the working class in opposition to the capitalist class, develop unevenly. Capitalist relations of production expand with brutal force, crushing all previously existing social relations: tribal, familial and ancestral. These populations are either flung into the periphery or pushed down into a reserve army of labour. It is the task of the socialist movement to consider these social relations of production in totality and this includes the role of the capitalist state. As Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*, quoting Engels: "The shabbiest police servant" has more "authority" than the representatives of the clan'.

The bourgeois state arises to carry out public functions in the service of capital, with special bodies of armed men: the military and the police. The state also acts to contain the class struggle by dividing the working class from its own interests and from its constituent parts, in order to keep it in control. Racism is one of the major tools of division in the working class. This is seen in the double oppression of black workers, both as black and as proletarians, and the triple oppression of black women workers. Incarceration rates in the US illustrate the point. With just 5 per cent of the world's population the US holds 25 per cent of the world's prisoners (see FRFI 207). But the figures show not just the aggression

In a world divided into oppressed and oppressor nations, nationalism, racism and chauvinism play a material role in the drive for imperialist expansion, military conquest and the extraction of superprofits from the poor world. The armed forces of imperialism depend upon the military mobilisation of the US (and British) working class to carry out the slaughter. These often not very well-paid troops are nonetheless that part of the proletariat who act in the interest of their own ruling class and do so under the flag of national unity.

Large sections of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries benefit directly from the distribution of the super-profits of imperialism. It is often the indigenous people, immigrants and black people who make up the poorest levels of the working class and lack the rights, status and earning power of the more privileged sections.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! supports struggles against racism and all forms of discrimination mindful that, as Lenin said, concessions by the ruling class for democratic rights are granted for a purpose. 'Revolutionaries never forget that sometimes the enemy surrenders a certain position in order to disunite the attacking party and thus defeat it more easily.' Socialists never underestimate the brutal and cunning strategy of the state to divide the working class both nationally and internationally. It is the duty of socialists to work unflinchingly in the real world. It is both lazy and self-indulgent of commentators like Michaels to project a 'pure class' position onto the turmoil of imperialist USA. Likewise, Hardt and Negri in their political manifesto *Empire* (2001) imagined 'the multitude', a sort of inter-national movement of unity that can dissolve capitalism. Socialists must confront the reality of imperialism, or fail.



Racism is one of the major tools used to divide the working class: Black and Hispanic people are over-represented in US prisons

to provide a national public health service.'

Michaels extends his arguments beyond the borders of the US. He describes how Evo Morales was inaugurated twice as President of Bolivia in January 2006. Once was in La Paz, the capital, where he wore a suit and took the oath of office in Spanish. The other was in Tiwanaku, where, dressed in the red robes worn by the pre-Inca priests, he was vested with sacred powers by two shamans in the Aymara language. On both occasions he vowed to resist globalisation and neoliberalism. However, Michaels notes, 'in one capacity Morales speaks of an ideology, socialism, in the other of his identity as Aymara. These may conflict', says Michaels. 'Not all Ay-

of the US state but also its racism.

Overall, more than 1 in 100 adults in the US are in prison today (www.nytimes.com/2008/02/28/). Incarceration rates are higher for some racial groups than others. The US population is 69 per cent white, 12.4 per cent black and 8 per cent Hispanic. In 2006 35 per cent of the prison population was white, 41 per cent black and 21 per cent Hispanic. Classified by age group the figures show the most extreme disparities. Rates are 1 in 9 for black men between the ages of 20 and 34. For women between the ages of 35 and 39 the rates are: 1 in 335 for white women and 1 in 100 for black women.

Racism has utility for capitalism both domestically and internationally.

With Lenin we say, 'Revolutionaries, of course, will never reject the struggle for reforms, the struggle to capture even minor and unimportant enemy positions, if these will serve to strengthen the attack and help to achieve full victory.' The lessons of history show that 'full victory' can be won only by defeating opportunism and challenging the better-off sections of the working class to make common cause with the oppressed people of the nation and the world.

This book is politically weak because it ignores imperialism which is the global inequality. However, despite this severe limitation, it gives a revealing picture of the appalling inequalities in the US today.

Susan Davidson

'Managing challenging behaviour' – spreading the control unit regime throughout the prison system

A framework for surveillance, control and repression

MCBS extends the current control unit regime whereby the Prison Service 'manages' prisoners perceived to be a problem by consigning them to Close Supervision Centre (CSC) facilities and allows CSC-type control measures to be used on ordinary segregated prisoners. CSCs are the most recent in a long line of 'control units' and 'special units'. They came into existence in 1998, when the Prison Rules were amended to allow a small number of prisoners to be consigned to behaviour modification units from where they can only return to the mainstream prison system after 'progressing' through a number of levels. There are currently three units: at Woodhill, Whitmore and Wakefield prisons. In addition there are 'designated Rule 46' cells in Long Lartin, Frankland and Belmarsh segregation units, where CSC prisoners who refuse to co-operate or are not 'progressing' are sent on 'lay-downs' for lengthy periods.

Produced by the Prison Service High Security Prisons Group in January 2009 at the same time as a new 'CSC Referral Manual', the MCBS policy document states that its purpose is: 'to provide a framework for the management of prisoners whose behaviour is dangerous, disruptive and particularly challenging to manage whilst in custody'. In fact, that 'framework' is structured as an entire apparatus of surveillance, control and repression with a presence in every prison. The strategy then facilitates the removal of 'difficult' prisoners into control units operating a 'robust management approach' – in practice a regime of complete isolation from other prisoners but where 'interaction' with staff, who will continue monitoring and reporting, is compulsory. CSCs have a very high staff-to-prisoner ratio with all movements and visits being accompanied by large numbers of uniformed officers who, at any sign of non-compliance, react with violence.

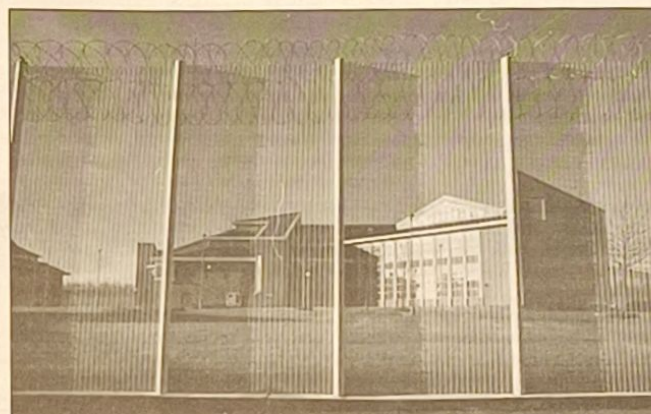
Two features particularly distinguish the current control unit strategy from earlier attempts to target and isolate specific prisoners. Firstly, the open recruitment of 'non-disciplinary' prison staff (doctors, psychiatrists, probation officers etc) in a 'multi-disciplinary approach' to eradicating dissent in prisons; secondly, a massive broadening of what constitutes 'difficult' behaviour.

The role of non-uniform prison staff

The strategic role of uniformed prison staff, governors, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, probation officers, teachers and even chaplains is well defined in the MCBS and in every prison they are all to collaborate in identifying, assessing and recommending prisoners for control unit regimes. All information collated by the local multi-disciplinary staff team will then be forwarded to 'Central Management Group' at Prison Service HQ, who, in addition to co-ordinating the transfer of 'difficult' prisoners around the system, will share that information with groups like the 'High Security Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Unit', which suggests that the prison population is being trawled for politically motivated activists.

The Prison Medical Service (PMS), which ran prison health care until 2003, was completely unaccountable and doctors were notorious for sanctioning the brutality of uniformed staff and administering psychotropic medication such as largactyl for control, rather than medical, purposes. During the 1990s, evidence of the collusion by non-uniformed, non-disciplinary staff, such as doctors, in covering up the brutalisation and, in some cases, torture of prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs prison was criticised by Amnesty International and the Chief Inspector of Prisons. Prison health care is now run by the NHS but the MCBS has ensured that the collusion of non-disciplinary staff in the maltreatment of 'difficult' prisoners is once again institutionalised and legitimised.

The abuse of prisoners who refuse to co-operate with intolerable conditions and regimes is common in British prisons and for decades the use of control units, long-term solitary confinement and continuous transfers (ghosting) have been standard weapons of repression against prisoners who have questioned, challenged and resisted abusive regimes. **JOHN BOWDEN** reports on the most recent manifestation – the Managing Challenging Behaviour Strategy (MCBS).



Woodhill prison, where the main Close Supervision Centre is located

'Challenging behaviour'

The MCBS policy document claims that the aim of the current control unit system is to 'remove the most significantly disruptive, challenging and dangerous prisoners from ordinary location and manage them within a small and highly supervised unit' whilst responding to 'the changing nature of the population, with increasing management challenges surrounding gang affiliation and extremism'.

In their determination to blame and stigmatise a minority of 'persistently difficult and challenging prisoners' for the cruelty and ill-treatment inflicted on them, those who enforce the system have always constructed myths around the existence of dangerous prison malcontents and in the process created systems and methods of control that have been used against all prisoners inclined to complain and protest. However, the guidance to prison staff at a local level on criteria for what constitutes challenging behaviour is extremely broad and diverse, and includes behaviour not remotely threatening or challenging to the stability of the prison regime.

Apart from obvious 'troublemakers', prisoners considered suitable for transfer to control units include those suffering from mental illness and prone to self-harm and suicide attempts; even a failure to take medica-

tion is considered justification for being labelled a 'control problem'. In fact, the MCBS document openly admits that some prisoners in the control unit system will 'have a range of complex and diverse psychological and psychiatric needs'. It is a disgrace that, instead of being provided with specialised medical intervention, these prisoners are subjected to regimes based on sensory deprivation, crude behaviour modification techniques and psychological cruelty.

Apart from the mentally ill, prisoners innocent of any breach of discipline are also susceptible to the attention of MCBS, which is deliberately designed to provide prison staff with a weapon of arbitrary victimisation against any prisoner not absolutely compliant with their authority. Once a CSC referral has been made, the assessment process will consider any 'negative behaviour', from open defiance to 'rudeness and ignoring staff,' as sufficient reason to recommend a prisoner for a place in a control unit. But being free of 'negative behaviour' does not guarantee a return to normal location. Indeed, the Referral Manual says: 'Positive behaviour can provide evidence that the prisoner is able to control himself in certain situations. However, if the prisoner is known to manipulate staff, such compliance may actually indicate a risk to others.'

Inevitably, the MCBS considers all 'triggers' to rebellious behaviour to be located within the personalities of the prisoners themselves and to have nothing whatsoever to do with how they are treated by the prison system or its staff. Prisoners who refuse to conform to prison authority are simply 'psychopaths', inherently predisposed to behave destructively, regardless of circumstances and context. Prisoners selected for MCBS or removal to a control unit are issued with an information sheet which tells them: 'It is your behaviour alone that has triggered the decision to manage you in this way/start CSC assessments. You can change your behaviour with or without the help of prison staff.' The message is clear: you will conform to prison authority – or you will be made to do so.

Prisoners referred for CSC 'assessment' are usually moved first to the segregation unit at Long Lartin where they are subjected to a regime of intimidation and psychological bullying in preparation for the control unit proper. The intention is to push the prisoner to the limits of psychological endurance and eventually render them incapable of fighting back or mustering further resistance. It is punishment by ordeal and for those prisoners already psychologically damaged, the descent into serious mental illness is inevitable.

Control units are sold to the public as a place to consign the 'worst of the worst' but just as the infamous Marion control unit in the US, which was constructed on this basis, ended up housing political prisoners who were sent there straight from court, the CSC and MCBS are now ready for the state to use whenever it chooses against any prisoners it deems problematic.

Those within the Prison Service's High Security Prisons Group who formulated the 'Managing Challenging Behaviour Strategy' are guilty of trying to institutionalise a system of repression that violates the basic human rights of prisoners. And all those who collude and participate in that system of repression, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, probation officers etc, are equally complicit.

John Bowden, HMP Glenochil

INSIDE NEWS

Free Hicham Yezza!

On 6 March Hicham Yezza was sentenced to a nine-month prison sentence after being convicted of 'securing avoidance of enforcement action via deceptive means'. Hicham, who is originally from Algeria, has lived in Nottingham for 13 years, first studying and then working at Nottingham University. He was a well-respected student activist and editor of the independent political magazine *Ceasefire*.

On 14 May 2008 Hicham and post-graduate research student Rizwaan Sabir were arrested at the university under anti-terrorism law. They were detained for six days, without charge, and interrogated, while their homes were searched, their property seized and their families questioned. All this because a 'colleague' had telephoned the police to report that

Hicham had an Al Qaeda training manual on his computer – which it transpired Rizwaan had downloaded from the US Department of Justice website and passed on to Hicham, who was helping him draft a PhD proposal on radical Islam.

On 20 May, after widespread protest, the two men were released. Hicham was immediately re-arrested under the Immigration Act and an order for a fast-tracked deportation issued with a flight scheduled for 1 June. Protests at the university and elsewhere, together with a legal challenge, averted this and after three weeks in various immigration prisons, Hicham was released.

The current conviction, which is essentially for not renewing a visa in time, is the state's revenge on Hicham for standing up to and exposing its all-pervading campaign to criminalise immigrants, especially Muslims, and to suppress freedom of expression and dissent. Between

his release in June 2008 and re-imprisonment in March 2009, Hicham spoke at meetings, seminars and conferences across the country. FRFI is proud to have shared a platform with him at the London School of Economics on 10 December and sends Hicham solidarity in his continued struggle.

You can write to Hicham Yezza (prison number XP9266) HMP Woodhill, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes, MK14 4DA.

Support prisoners of the war on terror!

Abdul Muhid was imprisoned for 'soliciting murder' following the demonstrations against Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, at which he distributed placards and shouted slogans. Since his imprisonment he has been compelled to seek segregation for his own protection after being repeatedly threatened and attacked. On one occasion his cell and all his possessions were set on fire. Like other Muslim

and black prisoners in Frankland he has been set up by racist prison staff who entice white prisoners into carrying out attacks and then turn a blind eye while they do so. Abdul has not seen his wife, young children or elderly parents for months. He has been prevented from attending jummah prayers, which are obligatory for a Muslim, for the past five months. Write to Abdul Muhid (TT6649), HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Braxide, Durham, DY1 5YD.

More prisons

On 5 February the Prison Service announced it would be building a new 1,000 place prison near Caernarfon in north Wales. Belmarsh East prison, being constructed next to the existing Belmarsh prison, is due to open in 2010, while a second prison (in addition to HMP Kenet, which opened in 2007) is due to be constructed on the site of the Maghull secure mental hospital near Liverpool. Scotland's sec-

ond privately built and run prison HMP Addiewell opened in December 2008, and another new prison is due to be constructed at Bishopbriggs in East Dunbartonshire. Two women's prisons in England, Drake Hall and Morton Hall, have been changed from open to closed facilities and there is endless building of new wings taking place in prisons around Britain. All this is set to massively increase prison numbers.

Meanwhile the locations for two out of three of the proposed Titan prisons remain shrouded in mystery. The government had announced that construction of the Titans will begin in 2010 and they will open from late 2012, but the only site which has been clearly earmarked is in Warrington, Lancashire, where a vociferous local campaign, Warrington Residents Against Prison Proposal (www.wrapp.org.uk), has sprung up against the government's plans.

FRFI ROUNDUP

Fighting racism Fighting Zionism

As the deepening recession begins to affect many working class people, FRFI comrades have been busy around the country organising street stalls and meetings about the economic crisis. On 27 March comrades in **London** formed a vibrant contingent on the march against the meeting of the G20 leaders. In **London** on 7 March FRFI LSE Society held a meeting entitled 'The crisis and resistance: from Palestine to Cuba', at which there was a high-level discussion linking together the economic crisis, imperialist aggression and resistance movements from around the world. Similar meetings were held in **Newcastle, Glasgow** and **Manchester** where the timely need for

building socialism and confronting the Labour Party was discussed.

As part of the campaign to boycott Israel, **Manchester** comrades have supported and taken part in the occupation of buildings at Manchester University by pro-Palestinian students. Despite the efforts of Zionist students and the intransigence of the university authorities, they forced the University of Manchester Students Union to pass a motion in support of the people of Gaza, which included a resolve to boycott Israel. FRFI has also supported occupations of universities in **Glasgow, Dundee, London** and **Newcastle** (see p10 for more details).

Tyneside Community Action for

Refugees (TCAR) held its fourth speak-out against racism on 21 March at Grey's Monument in Newcastle. These speak-outs give an open platform for anti-racists to talk about issues of racism, from immigration laws to police harassment, and to counter the racist lies of the mainstream press and the Labour government. In **Scotland** comrades protested against the racist immigration laws at Brand Street immigration reporting centre, Glasgow in support of the Congolese community who have been targeted for removal.

It's time for change. Look at our Events column and join us in action against the barbarity of the imperialist system!

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 7 April and 5 May 1-2pm
Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!
Demonstration at
Communications House
Old Street, EC1
Nearest tube Old Street

Tuesday 28 April 7-9.30pm
Eye witness report from Gaza - Dr Ghassan Abu-Sitta
London School of Economics,
Houghton Street, WC2
Nearest tube Holborn

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

For further details, call 020 7837 1688
or email londonfrfi@gmail.com

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 18 April 1pm
TCAR monthly general meeting
St Thomas Church, Haymarket

Saturday 2 May
TCAR contingent on May Day march
We want the right to work!
Newcastle, time and place tbc

Every Saturday 3pm
TCAR weekly meeting
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop, bottom
of Westgate Road.

For details call 07989 879 310 or email:
tynesidecarn@yahoo.co.uk

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

Every Saturday 11am-2pm
Street action in Newcastle
For details of other stalls around the
region call 07858 346 276 or email:
frfnortheast@googlemail.com

MANCHESTER

Sunday 17 May 2pm
FRFI Forum
The Percival Suite,
Cross Street Chapel
off Market Street

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

GLASGOW

Tuesday 7, 14 and 21 April 7pm
John MacLean: a revolutionary life
Educational meetings discussing the
Marxist revolutionary.
Livingstone Tower,
Strathclyde University.
Articles / reading material available
from Glasgow RCG/FRFI

Every Saturday 12-3pm
Street action in Glasgow City Centre

For details call 07779 785529 or email:
scotlandfrfi@yahoo.co.uk



RATB ROUNDUP

2009 is an important year for Cuba, marking 50 years of revolutionary progress in the face of non-stop hostility and economic warfare from US imperialism. The anniversary of the Cuban revolution is an opportunity to hold up Cuba's achievements as living proof that socialism works.

In **Newcastle** we celebrated 50 years of the revolution by holding a street event at which hundreds of people stopped to hear our speeches and to watch local bands play in front of a city centre monument that we had decorated in Cuban flags. There have been several film showings and discussions

in **London, Manchester, Liverpool** and **Glasgow** linked to different aspects of the Cuban revolution. Comrades have also been busy organising street events around the country, highlighting how a living and working example of socialism is showing an alternative to the crisis ridden capitalist system.

Rock around the Blockade activists continue to be out and about on stalls in the street ensuring that information about Cuba is as widely available as possible. There is also increased activity planned over the next six weeks in the run-up to the next brigade to Cuba. 20 brigadistas will be in Cuba for two weeks, in Havana and in Pinar del Rio. They will be

present for the May Day celebrations and will be reporting back at meetings up and down the country in May and June, see our Events list for details!

Statement issued by Rock around the Blockade, 27 March 2009

On 6 December 2008, two activists from London Rock around the Blockade (RATB) were thrown out of a conference on Latin America organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC). Their crime? Handing out fliers advertising an RATB rally in London on 17 January 2009 organised to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. RATB had requested a stall at the Latin America conference but CSC Director Rob Miller had personally refused. When he and fellow CSC Executive Committee member Natasha Hickman saw the RATB comrades publicising our event, they insisted that they leave immediately, threatened to call the police and summoned security officers to enforce their decision. Subsequently we published a statement on the RATB website which condemned this as an act of sectarianism.

This was not the first incident of its kind. Indeed, for a long time RATB has suspected the CSC of waging a campaign to undermine our activities, including, for instance, telling local CSC branches not to participate in or support RATB's 2008 Cubans Are Coming speaking tour with Che Guevara's deputy Orlando Borrego, Jesus Garcia and Yoselin Rufin. Now we have proof that this campaign exists.

The minutes of the 17 January meeting of the CSC Executive Committee (EC), which have been given to us, refer to the RATB website statement which they say, 'attacked CSC and CSC staff', and state:

'RATB sponsoring event in celebration of 50th anniversary of Cuban revolution - Officers had taken view that we draw our concerns to the [Cuban] Embassy about this group and request affiliates not to sponsor the event or participate and ask Justice for Colombia with whom CSC works to withdraw their endorsement. Officers also meeting with RMT on the matter. Ongoing correspondence/discussion with NUJ on this.' The RMT trade union had sponsored RATB's 2008 speaking tour and the 26th July celebration in 2008, and had also agreed to support our 50th anniversary rally in January 2009.

The CSC officers were confident that the CSC Executive Committee would endorse the sectarian conspiracy, and the minutes register no dissent. Fortunately, in the interests of solidarity with Cuba, the RATB event was a great success, despite RMT general secretary Bob Crow pulling out. Throughout the day more than 250 people came along to the Venezuelan Embassy's Bolivar Hall. The audience included many who had come direct from an action in Trafalgar Square in support of the people of Gaza. They were able to listen to representatives from the Cuban, Venezuelan and Bolivian embassies, NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear speaking on behalf of Justice for Colombia, a representative from MERU (the Movement of Ecuadorians in Britain), another from the Revolutionary Communist Group and speakers from Rock around the Blockade. For all the participants it was an event of the highest political level, a fitting tribute to the Cuban people on the 50th anniversary of their revolution.

For those who question why RATB does not work within the CSC, these minutes speak for themselves: CSC officers act as if they have exclusive rights to promote Cuba solidarity.

Unlike the CSC, RATB campaigns openly and democratically; we support all activities in solidarity with Cuba regardless of who calls them. We will continue to support CSC events when they are held, but we will also continue to campaign independently in support of Cuban socialism. The deepening crisis will force imperialism to intensify its efforts to subvert and destroy the Cuban revolution. RATB sees the lessons and example of Cuban socialism as vital for building a new working class movement in this country, and we will continue to build solidarity with Cuba regardless of the efforts of the officers of the CSC.

EVENTS

In April RATB brigadistas will be going to Cuba to find out more about the socialist system that exists there. There will be **eyewitness reports from Cuba** at the following meetings:

Thursday 14 May 7.30pm
Room G7, Dundee University Tower,
Perth Road, Dundee.

Tuesday 19 May 7pm
Alington House, North Bailey, Durham
(near Durham Cathedral and Castle)

Wednesday 20 May 7-9.30pm
London School of Economics, Houghton
Street, London WC2
Nearest tube Holborn

Sunday 24 May 1pm
Stage 2, Northumbria University
Students Union Building,
Sandyford Road, Newcastle

Wednesday 27 May 7pm
Royalty Pub, 88 Chester Rd,
Sunderland

Sunday 7 June 2pm-5pm
Jury's Inn Hotel, 80 Jamaica Street,
Glasgow

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

Following the publication of her book
**Che Guevara: The Economics of
Revolution**, Helen Yaffe will be
discussing the economic ideas of Che at
the following places:

Saturday 4 April 2pm
Stage 2, Northumbria University
Student's Union Building,
Sandyford Road, Newcastle

Tuesday 7 April 7.30-9pm
Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way,
London W1T 5DL
Nearest tubes Warren Street and
Goodge Street

Other RATB events include:

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 4 April 8pm
**Fundraising gig: bands
including Illegal Waste,
My Tulip, Urban Geisha.**
World Head Quarters,
Carlisle Square

DUNDEE

Thursday 16 April 7-9pm
Film: **Salud - documentary of Cuban
international health support in Latin
America and public meeting to send off
brigade to Cuba.**
Room G7, Dundee University Tower,
Perth Road.

MANCHESTER

Sunday 19 April 2pm
Film: **The Cuban Story** and discussion
The Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel,
Cross Street, Manchester City Centre.

Saturday 9 May 1-5pm (doors open at
12 noon) The Percival Suite
**Public meeting - Solidarity with
socialist Cuba, 50 years of
revolution!**
Speakers include Helen Yaffe, author of the
new groundbreaking book *Che Guevara -
economics of revolution*
Robert Clough, Revolutionary Communist
Group
Diana Raby, author of *Democracy and
Revolution: Latin America and socialism
today*
Also participants from the RATB solidarity
brigade to Cuba, just returned from May
Day in Havana!

Officers Group report

BR reported:
Issue from Minutes arising from Latin America Conference and activity of RATB (Rock Around the Blockade). RATB on their website attacked CSC and CSC staff over event at Latin America conference where in accordance with agreed procedure set out by the participating organisations RATB had been asked not to distribute their literature inside the Conference - they had objected and had to escorted from the premises by Congress House staff.
RATB sponsoring event in celebration of 50th Anniversary of Cuban revolution - Officers had taken view that we draw our concerns to the Embassy about this group and that request affiliates not to sponsor the event or participate and ask Justice for Colombia with whom CSC works to withdraw their endorsement. Officers also meeting with RMT on the matter. Ongoing correspondence/discussion with NUJ on this.
Contributions: RB, FD, MB, RM, LB, AG.
EC endorsed the actions of the Officers.
Latin America 2008
BR reported on extremely positive Latin America conference 6th December.

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name _____

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Tel _____

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More Marxism, please!

FRFI 207 is excellent! Bob Shepherd's report and analysis of the Gaza situation is up-to-date and in-depth, as is your coverage of the uprisings in Greece and France. Also David Yaffe's economic analysis is spot-on (even if I don't always understand it!). And Nicki Jameson's reports of Prisoners' Fightback are inspiring. What I would also welcome, however, is some regular space given to basic political education. Just some short columns on what Marx had to say about the current state of the capitalism meltdown, or what Lenin wrote about imperialism, etc. Surely linking the current political and economic situation to what was said by the founders of communism would encourage the building of a communist movement/party for today?

JON KEMPSTER
East London

No legitimacy for US-backed process in Iraq

I would like to commend Jim Craven for his article on Iraq. However, I have the following observations:

1) Nouri Al Maliki is the prime minister of the occupation government not the president as the article repeated several times.
2) The Paul Bremmer-designed political process based on sectarian and ethnic quotas is behind the sectarian strife in Iraq and it will ensure that Iraq remains divided in the long term. The whole of the occupation government operates from inside the US-controlled 'Green Zone'. Al Maliki himself lives there. It was at his house that Bush had his last press conference in Baghdad, where Muntathar Al Zaidy threw his shoes at Bush.

The internet is full of comical stories of 'important' officials being late for their official meetings because the dog that sniffs the officials before they enter parliament was taking his break. There are even stories of Iraqi prime ministers (Jaafari and Al Maliki) being assaulted by the US soldiers at the parliament check point.

So I am opposed in your article to any air of legitimising this occupation-produced political process, which is at the end of the day a violation of the Geneva Convention.

3) When the Sadr current joined the political process and turned his back on the Iraq National Foundation Congress, this was a massive blow to the anti-occupation forces in Iraq. Al Sadr had the opportunity to strengthen the Iraqi resistance and to emerge as a national leader, instead he chose to take his role in the political process as a Shia. There are many rumours that Al Sadr has his share of the oil smuggling.
4) When the sectarian strife was at its worst in 2007 and the Mehdi army was implicated in many of the sectarian crimes, Al Sadr's response was 'these were not committed by us, but by people masquerading as the Mehdi army', conceding that his militia is infiltrated. So why did he not suspend their activities? Al Sadr suspended the activities of the Mehdi Army when there were clashes between his forces and those of the Islamic Supreme Council over control and power in Kerbala.

There is on the internet a video clip of Al Sadr's right-hand man Hazim Al Aaraji calling on his followers to 'kill Wahabites and Baathies, do not wait for religious sanctions for such acts, I give a

carte blanche – go ahead and do it', nothing about the occupiers. Yes, there are many anti-occupation elements in the Sadrist current, but they, unfortunately, like their sectarian identity, and encourage idolising Al Sadr and blind faith in his leadership.

So the Mehdi army, instead of becoming an asset for the resistance, is now tainted by sectarianism and many heinous crimes because of the unwise leadership.
5) I am shocked by the praise you pile on the SOFA Agreement! You seem to think that the occupation government has managed to improve it. Really? How can we have an agreement when the two parties are not equal? Al Maliki's government will not last a day after the departure of all the US forces, they operate under the US protection. So what power has this sovereignty-lacking government over the US?

It is important for us to know the truth and learn the lessons. Al Sadr's alliance with Al Maliki has done him more harm than good. We in Women Solidarity for an Independent and Unified Iraq did not hesitate to protest whenever the Sadrists came under attack by the US forces.

TAHRIR SWIFT

Reply

Thank you for the letter and the points you raise. Al Maliki is indeed the Prime Minister of the occupation government and not the President. We agree entirely that the political process of elections and appointment of Green Zone stooges is imperialist-imposed and illegitimate. Tracing Al Sadr's trajectory since 2003, FRFI has only made favourable comment when he has opposed the occupation armies; we recognise that sectarianism is fostered by the imperialists and have repeatedly said so and provided evidence of this occupation strategy. Be assured that FRFI has no confidence in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) – we said that 'if this is enforced it will be a defeat for US imperialism' (FRFI 206). What the SOFA states, and what actually happens, we will report and analyse. However, it would be a mistake to believe that the US is all-powerful in Iraq; it needs allies and its position has been weakened. The Iraqi bourgeoisie has its own interests and they will seek to assert them, both using the US when they must and other imperialist and regional powers against the US when they can.

Trevor Rayne

Police harass students

Living in London we are often told that police are here to protect us, and that's what most senior teachers in my college will tell you when you ask why on our site there are so many police officers.

Last month some friends and I were watching some of the boys that attend our college play football on a pitch across the road. After they had finished we were all sitting down in the park, roughly 20 of us, when two Community Support officers walked into the park. On seeing us, one immediately took out his radio and called for back-up.

We weren't drinking, weren't smoking, just sitting in a park, so when we saw a van and two police cars pulling up at the gates we were all stunned. One boy jokily said 'Can I help you, officer?' and two big officers dragged him off his seat, kneed him to the ground and handcuffed him. When a small female student tried to grab one of them off the boy, a tall well-built officer punched her onto the floor and handcuffed her too. They were both arrested for assaulting the police!

The police continued to throw their weight around, searching anyone they didn't like the look of and eventually they got bored and probably went to find another group of teenagers to bully.

The brutal way in which they dealt with both the boy and the five-foot girl was unjustified and unnecessary; it disgusts me that they feel they can get away with treating innocent young people like this.

The college completely ignored the situation, sticking by the claims that the police are there to protect us.

We feel harassed and victimised – the one thing we don't feel is protected.

REBECCA
North London

Standing up for Che

A little time has passed since Jeff Sawtell's mean and completely inaccurate characterisation of Che Guevara as ultra leftist in his review of Part 2 of Soderbergh's film in the *Morning Star*, 19 February 2009, but still time enough for the poison which this view represents to be recognised and an effective antidote applied.

Firstly, it is Che's portrait which now hangs in the office of the President of Bolivia. Comrade Monje, General Secretary of the Bolivian Communist Party when Che was assassinated, is known only as a dubious figure, perhaps a traitor, who did all he could to undermine Che's heroic efforts to assist revolutionary struggle in that country. Masses of material exists

to disprove the reviewer's cruel suggestion that Che was unwelcome in Bolivia. If he can provide facts to back up this reactionary suggestion let us have a serious debate about this central issue.

On Che's side there is the fact that in June 1967 the Bolivian Miners Union had voted in the face of murderous repression to give a day's wages out of their below-subsistence pay and medical supplies to the guerrilla fighters of the South East. Che and his comrades had prepared for struggle in Bolivia for many years. The Revolution of 1952 was at that point the most advanced on the continent and had brought forth soviets and armed workers' militias. Che was in La Paz in 1953. As Manuel Pineiro pointed out at Havana University in 1998, in direct response to a

question as to why Che chose Bolivia: 'The 1964 coup triggered a rise in demonstrations, protests, strikes by the miners and repression against many leaders of the leftist and people's movements.'

Leading cadres from the Bolivian Communist Party, Young Communist League, student, union and youth organisations clandestinely supported the guerrillas and some of them actually joined – only to be threatened with expulsion by Monje.

Che and his comrades were aware of and forcefully rejected the criticism of this form of revolutionary struggle as separate from the masses: 'In debates on the subject, criticism is usually levelled at those who wish to wage a guerrilla war, on the grounds that they forget mass struggle; as if the two were

incompatible! We reject the concept this involves. A guerrilla war is a people's war, and it is a mass struggle. To attempt to conduct this type of war without the support of the populace is a prelude to inevitable disaster.' *Guerrilla warfare: a method*, 1963. The question has to be asked as to why, when popular interest in Che continues to rise and rightly so, the reviewer thinks he should get away with these cheap distortions and lies? I, like millions of others, would rather be wrong with Che Guevara and Fidel than right with Monje and Sawtell. *Venceremos!*

MICHAEL MCGREGOR
Dundee

This letter was originally sent to the *Morning Star*, but not printed.

Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution

Helen Yaffe Palgrave Macmillan, March 2009

Based on fascinating new archival research and interviews with his contemporaries and colleagues, this book records Guevara's contribution to industrial organisation, economic management and socialist political economy debates as a member of the Cuban government. It rescues the history of his work as President of the National Bank, head of the Department of Industrialisation and Minister of Industries from 1959-1965.

Guevara created the Budgetary Finance System, an economic management system unique to socialism and based on the productive and managerial techniques of US corporations. It was also consistent with his Marxist analysis and included policies to promote education and training, establish administrative controls, forge workers' participation in management, found science and technology institutes and raise consciousness whilst institutionalising psychology as a management tool. In addition, the book shows how Guevara was able to predict that capitalism would return to the Soviet Union.

'Using fascinating new sources, Yaffe gives us a detailed and knowledgeable picture of a different Che... a valuable contribution to our understanding of Guevara but also to debates on the Left.'

Tony Kapcia, Professor of Latin American History, University of Nottingham

'Yaffe has no full peers... an unparalleled stride to fill a gaping hole in the literature.' Frank Thompson, Lecturer in Economics, University of Michigan

'The passion of an activist and the erudition of an academic'
Enrico Tortolano, *Tribune*

'In future it will be impossible to conduct an intelligent discussion about Che Guevara... without having read Che Guevara – the Economics of Revolution. Run, do not walk, to get your hands on a copy of this book.'

Steve Palmer, US correspondent for *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*



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British police – racist as ever and with more power

Ten years ago, in February 1999, the report of the inquiry into the death of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 was published. The report, by Sir William Macpherson, criticised the police handling of the case as 'marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers'. Speaking to the BBC Politics Show in February 2009, Labour Justice Minister Jack Straw was of the opinion that, despite some remaining pockets of racism, on the whole the Metropolitan Police is no longer 'institutionally racist'. The experiences of black people today tell a different story. NICKI JAMESON reports.

Stop-and-search – licence to harass

When the Macpherson Report was published in 1999, black people were seven times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people. Ten years on the figure is the same. When asked about this, Straw responded that: 'It is for individual police forces, individual commanders, and above all individual police constables and sergeants, who have difficult decisions to make, to be able to stop people who they think there is a reason for stopping regardless of their ethnicity.'

There are three different laws currently permitting stop-and-search, with the vast majority of stops (about one million per year) taking place under the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (revised in 2003). These have to be carried out with 'reasonable grounds for suspicion'. No such grounds are needed, however, for the 45,000 annual stop-and-searches carried out under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994 or the 37,000 under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000. In addition, there are approximately two million occasions per year when the police use their power to stop members of the public to ask them to 'account' for themselves.

State repression – overt and insidious

These police powers to stop and question or search anyone whose individual appearance or behaviour they do not like are accompanied by other powers, which have been built up over the recent period to detain or disperse groups of people. These seemingly unchallengeable sanctions are being used with alarming frequency, with political demonstrators regularly corralled under Section 60 of the CJPOA, even though this is intended to deal with incidents with the potential for 'serious violence', and the dispersal powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 used virtually daily against groups of young people congregating with no criminal intent whatsoever.

In December 2008, the European Court ruled that Britain's policy of retaining the DNA of people who have been arrested and released without charge or acquitted was unlawful. The government is resisting taking any action to remove the records. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has estimated that the DNA of over 30% of all black males in Britain is held on the national DNA database, with black men approximately four times more likely to

have their DNA profile stored than white men. The BBC estimates that the figure is almost 40%, as opposed to 13% for Asians and 9% for white men. These figures are not reflected in conviction rates and once again underline that in a society increasingly mapped and monitored, those most targeted are black men.

The state is building up a massive repressive apparatus. This takes many forms, from the massive prison and immigration detention centre building programme currently underway (see page 13 and below) and the sanctioning of torture of 'suspected terrorists' (see page 6), to the far more insidious and gradual creation of a society in which police powers to stop, question, detain, film, disperse and phone-tap are not questioned. It is a pipe-dream to imagine that this type of policing, in which the civilian population is treated as a hostile enemy, will ever do anything other than reflect the class antagonism and racism of those who have ordered it.

Racism within police force

Britain's wealth and privilege derive from imperialist plunder. Racism in Britain is a reflection of this. Consequently, simply increasing the number of black people employed by the

police, Prison Service, immigration authorities and so on, cannot end racism. Nonetheless, severe and visible under-representation of ethnic minorities within the coercive services is a clear indicator that these bodies are so identified with racism and internally riven by it that either black people do not want to join them, or are being prevented from doing so, or both. A report published by the EHRC to coincide with the anniversary of the Macpherson Report details that in England and Wales today only 3.9% of the 140,500 police officers are from ethnic minorities, compared to 2% in 1999. The government's 'target' is 7%. Ethnic minority recruits to the police are far more likely to resign than white recruits, especially within the first six months.

In contrast to the low percentage of full 'sworn' police officers, 12% of the 13,400 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are from ethnic minorities. In March 2009 an employment tribunal brought by PCSO Asad Saeed heard detailed, corroborated accounts of racism at Belgravia police station, where senior staff turned a blind eye to racist language and bully-

ing, and black and white PCSOs were made to travel in separate vans.

Ten years on from the Lawrence Inquiry

So, aside from a less dismissive attitude by the police to the reporting of crimes which have a racist motive, there has been no 'progress' since the Macpherson Inquiry. The British police are as racist as ever. And, while there has been a massive state offensive against Asian communities under the guise of 'fighting terrorism' since 2001, the group most targeted for police harassment remains young black men.

As we wrote at the time of the publication of the report: 'The problem is that the Lawrence Inquiry, however well-meaning, cannot tackle police racism because it cannot identify the root cause – the British state. The British state is an imperialist state, maintaining its control over oppressed nations by political, economic and military means...The British police force is the frontline of the state's armoury of repression. It cannot be anything but racist.' (FRFI 148 April/May 1999) ■

Justice for sacked cleaners!

Sacked migrant cleaners are staging regular protests in the City of London. In April 2008 evening cleaners employed by Mitie Cleaning and Support Services to work in the Willis building near Liverpool Street won a battle to be paid the London Living Wage of £7.20 an hour. The management retaliated, first by changing shift patterns from evenings to overnight, and then by sacking five workers, Edwin Pazmino, Lucinda Villarreal, Domingas Dias, Etelvina Cristo and Cristina Sergio, who had been instrumental in the dispute.

Although the Mitie cleaners are members of Unite, and indeed were unionised through the union's participation in the Justice for Cleaners campaign, the union is not supporting their current action. Instead sup-

port has come from Latin American groups, anarchist and communist activists and other groups of cleaners, who have fought or are still fighting similar struggles.

Join the demonstration every Friday 1-2pm at 51 Lime Street London EC3M 7DQ (nearest tube Liverpool Street or Bank; Bus 25). If you can't make it to the demo, send a protest email on Fridays to tooclean@mitie.co.uk. You can also email the Union Regional Secretary: Steve.Hart@uniteunion.com asking the union to support its members.

Messages of support and requests for speakers can be emailed to williscleaners4justice@live.co.uk. Readers can also telephone Edwin on 07931 464 890 or Alberto 07803 634 319.

Labour government attacks migrants

'The message is clear – whether you're a visa overstayer, a foreign criminal or a failed asylum seeker, the UK Border Agency is determined to track you down and remove you from Britain.' Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, 18 March 2009

As Britain's capitalist crisis increases its hold, the Labour government is stepping up its offensive against migrants, with an array of measures targeting all foreigners, other than the very rich. Whereas 20 years ago 'genuine' asylum seekers were reluctantly allowed in but economic migrants kept out, and more recently asylum seekers were repulsed and cheap economic migrants welcomed in, now no-one is safe. In February 2009 the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) announced 'ten pledges for 2009', covering all aspects of this attack.

Pledge number one, to open a new immigration removal centre, Brook House, next to Gatwick airport, has already been achieved. Administrative detention of migrants is a mainstay of Labour government policy and immigration detention capacity has increased from just 250 spaces in 1993 to 3,038 spaces today, with more in the pipeline.

Brook House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) is the largest detention centre to be built in Britain yet, with a capacity for 426 detainees. The centre was developed as a joint venture between the British Airports Authority (BAA) and Morley Fund Management, an asset management company owned by Aviva insurance.



Demonstration at Yarl's Wood detention centre, 21 March 2009

It will be run by G4S, a global private security company and the largest in Britain. G4S already manages four detention centres and four prisons in Britain (as well as numerous detention centres and prisons in Australia and South Africa) together with 'secure training centres' where children are imprisoned, prisoner and detainee

transport operations and electronic monitoring schemes.

Other UKBA 'pledges' for 2009 include:

- Using the points based system to tighten controls on migration of skilled workers
- Charging migrants fees for entering the country

- Reducing from two years to one year the threshold for prison terms for EU citizens which will lead to automatic consideration for deportation.
- Introducing visa controls for people from Bolivia, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland and Venezuela
- Using facial recognition technology at major airports (it is already installed at Manchester airport)
- Issuing compulsory identity cards to foreign nationals.

Brook House is just the start of a massive programme of incarceration of asylum seekers and immigrants. UKBA plans by 2012 to increase its detention estate by 60%. Harmondsworth IRC is to be extended by 370 places and new IRCs are planned in Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire. The Bedfordshire site is next door to Yarl's Wood, which is notorious for its incarceration and mistreatment of vulnerable women who have fled rape, and for imprisoning entire families, including small children and babies. The Oxfordshire site, which will house 800 male migrants, is next to Bullingdon prison and was previously earmarked for an immigration 'Accommodation Centre'. The government subsequently decided against building this kind of centre where asy-

lum seekers would be forced to live but would not actually be imprisoned. A local group has been set up to campaign against the building of the centre (see www.cabirc.org.uk)

On 17 March Borders and Immigration Minister Phil Woolas spoke to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee about plans to build a joint Anglo-French detention centre in Calais to imprison migrants attempting to come through France to Britain.

The government is making no secret of its vicious determination to deter migrants and deport those already here. For asylum seekers, migrant workers and non-British prisoners the picture is grim. But the state is not going to have an easy ride and the history of expanding the immigration detention estate so far has also been an impressive history of resistance and struggle. Almost every detention centre has seen repeated uprisings, protests, hunger strikes, escapes and fires. Even as Jacqui Smith opened Brook House, detainees in neighbouring Tinsley House were going on hunger strike.

Nicki Jameson and
Annabelle Richardson