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North London, 27 February 2010. Thousands march against the planned closure of Whittington Hospital A&E

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DEEPEST CUTS FOR DECADES

Labour Chancellor Alistair Darling, interviewed by the BBC a day after delivering his Budget on 24 March, said that his public sector spending cuts will be 'deeper and tougher' than those imposed by Tory leader Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. He almost admitted as much when he said in his Budget speech: '... it is clear that the next spending settlement from 2011 onwards will be very tough – the toughest for decades'. None of the 'very tough' spending cuts to reduce the public sector deficit were detailed in the Budget. This was, after all, an election Budget, and he needed to keep the opposition at bay and Labour's potential supporters on side. DAVID YAFFE reports.

This was Darling's third and possibly last Budget as Chancellor. In it he had to reconcile a number of increasingly contradictory requirements. First, he needed to contain and rapidly turn around Britain's explosive increase in public sector debt, both to retain the confidence of the City of London and those international investors expected to finance the debt, and to ensure the British economy remains a world centre for finance. Second, he had to try and prevent a double-dip recession – growth turning negative again. Finally, despite the massive and as yet unspecified cuts in state spending ahead, with the General Election barely six weeks

away, he had to keep onside a substantial section of the coalition which voted Labour back into office in 2005.¹

Slashing the debt

In the Queen's Speech in autumn 2009, the Labour government programme committed itself to a 'fiscal responsibility bill' which would bind the government to cut the public sector deficit year-on-year and halve it within four years. This would mean drastic cuts in public spending and significant tax increases. Labour however had, for obvious reasons, no serious intention of implementing or

detailing them until after the election. Darling defended his decision to wait until 2011 before tackling the deficit, arguing in his Budget speech that: 'cutting support now would take demand out of the economy, pull the rug from under our recovery, and delay our return to sustained growth'. This was a pointed attack on the Tories who had argued for immediate deficit reduction to retain the confidence of financial markets.

Darling said he would therefore stick with previous government plans to increase public spending by 2.2% for 2010-11. He was able to announce that the public sector deficit for 2009-10, at £167bn, would be £11bn lower than forecast in his pre-Budget report in December, due to higher corporate profits (extra corporation tax) and lower unemployment than expected (lower payout of benefits) and the return of the VAT rate from 15% to 17.5%. In addition the one-off 50% tax on bankers' bonuses above £25,000, announced in the pre-Budget report to discourage bonus payouts by banks, raised £1.3bn more than expected as bank after bank paid out much higher bonuses than in the previous year.

There will, however, be only a very small net increase in public spending

overall for 2010-11 of £1.4bn. This will finance the phasing in of the rise in petrol duty and the stamp duty relief to first time buyers for two years on homes worth up to £250,000. The latter is to be partly financed by an increase in stamp duty to 5% on homes above £1m to start in April 2011. A £2.5bn support package for businesses will be put together and finance found for 20,000 extra university science and maths places, and to get 16-24 year olds into work or training. On the whole a very neutral and unexciting Budget to satisfy the financial markets and some potential Labour supporters.

The public sector deficit is planned to fall from £167bn in 2009-10 to £89bn in 2013-14, from 11.8% to 5.2% of GDP – more than halved as a proportion of GDP over a four-year period. The debt will be £100bn lower by 2013-14 than was expected in the 2008 Budget. It is planned to fall to £74bn or 4.0% of GDP at the end of the forecast period in 2014-15. The overall national debt will increase from £777bn in 2009-10 to £1,400bn in 2014-15, that is from 58% to 75% of GDP. Even these amounts depend on very optimistic assumptions about the growth rate of the British economy – 1-1.5% in 2010, 3-3.5% in

2011 and 3.25-3.75% in the following years. If the economy grows at a slower rate, the spending cuts will have to be even greater.

Extra revenue will come from previously announced tax increases from the last Budget or the pre-Budget report. These include the 50% rate of tax on incomes above £150,000, the tapering down and withdrawal of personal allowances for those earning more than £100,000, the restriction of higher-rate pension tax relief for those earning more than £130,000 and the freezing of the inheritance tax nil rate band at £325,000 for four years. Personal allowances for all taxpayers have been frozen at the 2009-10 level. National insurance rates on employers and employees will rise by 1% from 2011-12. Together these amount to extra revenue of around £19bn.

In the pre-Budget report in December 2009 Darling announced that all public sector pay increases would be capped at 1% for two years from April 2011, a steep cut in pay rates with inflation at more than 3%. These cuts will bring savings in public sector pay and pensions of £4.4bn by 2012-13. In mid-March he announced a further freeze from April for 120,000 highly-paid government employees.

continued on page 3

US healthcare 'reform' one sick joke

STEVE PALMER, US CORRESPONDENT

With much ballyhoo, the Democrats have passed the 'healthcare reform' bill. In reality, the new Act has almost nothing to do with healthcare and everything to do with helping the insurance companies, the pharmaceutical industry and private hospitals bleed US workers dry. More than six months ago *Business Week* magazine told its readers: 'much more of the battle than most people realise is already over. The likely victors are insurance giants such as UnitedHealth Group, Aetna, and WellPoint. The carriers have succeeded in redefining the terms of the reform debate to such a degree that no matter what specifics emerge in the voluminous bill...the insurance industry will emerge more profitable...insurance CEOs ought to be smiling.'

Simon Stevens, who advised Blair to butcher the NHS, has been hard at work for UnitedHealth, which ran a 50-person operation to twist the law in its favour by 'advising' and 'assisting' law-makers. Hundreds of other companies engaged in similar activities. Altogether, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, almost \$700m was spent last year on lobbying by 1,700 healthcare companies and special interest groups.

The result is a health insurance bill: true healthcare reform still remains to be done. Every person will be forced to purchase health insurance – the only product which all con-

sumers are forced to buy. This will bring the insurance companies hundreds of billions of dollars. Despite this, the Act exempts the insurance industry from anti-monopoly laws.

Only the very poorest (those with an income under \$14,404 for individ-



President Obama signing the health bill

uals or \$29,327 for a family of four) will have some kind of insurance from the state. Most people who don't get healthcare from an employer, whether or not they are employed, will have to pay substantial sums – thousands of dollars a year, although the poorer ones will receive a partial subsidy. Anyone who earns between \$14,404 and \$43,320 (individuals) or between

\$29,327 and \$88,200 (family of four) will receive some degree of government subsidy, but still have to buy health insurance, which will cost between \$2,637 and \$7,911 (for individuals) and \$7,108 to \$21,325 for a family of four, depending on age. Any adult without health insurance will be fined \$690 or 2.5% of their income. The only exclusion from this compulsory coverage will be undocumented workers, who presumably are supposed to rot in agony if they get ill. How racist!

The pharmaceutical industry will be exempt for 12 years from competition from generic versions of drugs. The Act prohibits the government from negotiating prices and from permitting the importation of drugs. This forces up the cost of medications, whose US prices are far higher than on the world market.

The crucial step which bought the final votes necessary to pass the Bill was an unprincipled compromise to exclude abortion from coverage. This attack on women's reproductive rights was enshrined in a new executive order signed by President Obama.

The catalogue of disgraceful outrages embodied in this criminal Act goes on and on. When people realise what a lie they have been sold, pressure will mount again for REAL healthcare reform – free and universal healthcare for all. Until then, the US healthcare industry will continue to inflict pain on those who are forced to use its services. ■

Haiti: independence not dependence



US troops in Haiti

TREVOR RAYNE

Haiti has gone from the headlines but its people are still in great need. The Haitian government estimates the death toll of the 12 January earthquake at 230,000 people. Three million Haitians, a third of the population, have been severely affected by the earthquake and over 1.1 million Haitians are homeless, living in refugee camps. Two million people need food aid. Diarrhoea and urinary infections are rife, as is malnutrition. Heavy rains came in mid-March, threatening dengue fever and malaria.

US forces invaded Haiti in 1914, 1915-34, 1994, 2004 and 2010. By February there were 22,000 US military personnel stationed in or just off Haiti. Port-au-Prince airport flight logs show that when the US military took over military arrivals were given priority over medical ones. On 24 February the US closed its last field hospital in Haiti and in early March the US Navy's hospital ship *The Comfort* sailed back to Baltimore. US troops were reduced to 8,000 by mid-March although the airport remained under US control.

While the US wound down its medical commitment to Haiti, Cuba increased its support. By 26 February, 1,429 Cuban-trained medical personnel were in Haiti. Among them were 637 graduates of Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine, including 400 Haitians. Within six weeks they had treated 95,000 Haitians and performed 4,500 operations. Cuban doctors had been in Haiti for ten years before the earthquake and will stay for as long as they are needed. Cuban President Raul Castro said that Haiti does not need a 'fleeting and sudden gesture of "charity"...[it] requires and deserves a major international effort for its reconstruction'. This internationalism is so far from the capitalists' mentality and they see it as such a threat that they censor news of it from reaching the world. US CNN television described a Cuban doctor working in a hospital, where all the doctors are Cuban, as a Spaniard.

The role of aid

The US government's USAID has been prohibited from donating to the Haitian state; instead it goes to US government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This is part of a deliberate strategy to ensure Haiti's dependence on US imperialism

– the US ruling class does not want another Cuba as a neighbour. Of \$379 million in US aid offered to Haiti after the earthquake, 42% goes on disaster assistance, 33% to the US military, 9% on food, 9% on food transport, less than 1% to the Haitian government and 0.5% to the Dominican Republic.

Cuba, Brazil, Venezuela and ALBA deal with the Haitian government directly. Ecuador's President Correa said it was essential to strengthen the Haitian government as the only constitutional and recognised authority through which aid can be channelled. 'There cannot be any mini-republics or interventionism within Haiti.'

US President Obama appointed former presidents Bill Clinton and George W Bush as co-chairs of the US government fundraising campaign. Clinton and Bush visited Haiti on 21 March. Accompanied by Haiti's President Rene Preval, they toured a refugee camp surrounded by security agents, UN soldiers and Haitian police. 100 supporters of former President Aristide protested outside the national palace, burning tyres and a US flag, chanting 'Return Aristide! Down with Preval! Down with Bush!' Aristide was deposed by the Bush government in 2004 flying him into exile, where he remains. His Lavalas party is banned from standing in elections.

Clinton offered the prospect of investment in the garment industry, saying 'we can create 100,000 jobs in short order' and duty free access to the US. China dominates US clothing imports. The intention is to undercut Chinese wages with cheap Haitian labour. On 31 March New York hosts a donors' conference to set up a Recovery Commission. Haiti's government says it needs \$11.5 billion for reconstruction. The Commission will allocate votes deciding the use of aid on the basis of contributions: \$100 million buys a voting seat and creditors who give \$200 million get voting rights. US and European imperialists expect to decide what to do with the aid. However, Venezuela has cancelled \$200 million of Haiti's debt so it will also have a say.

One day the Haitian people will decide on their own future and they will do so with the help of Cuba, Venezuela and the ALBA countries. Haitians continue to demonstrate at the failure of aid to reach them. They marched on the US-held airport only to be confronted by club-wielding police. We urge you to donate to the Cuban medical relief effort at <http://www.medicc.org> ■

American dream turns into nightmare

STEVE PALMER

As the stock market rises higher and higher in value, as the media commentators chortle about 'the recovery' and the billionaire blood-sucking leeches of Wall Street gulp down multi-million dollar bonuses, another America groans under the burden of the continuing economic crisis. For them, the majority, life is turning into a nightmare – one which is going to get worse.

Rich and poor

The gap between rich and poor is widening. In 2009 there were 1.41 million personal bankruptcy filings, up 32% from 2008 and 100% from 2007. Median credit card debt is 15% of a household's annual income. Foreclosure filings are running at 300,000 per month. One in eight people in the US are now on Food Stamps. Recent tax data showed that between 1992 and 2007 for the 400 top income families, pre-tax income grew by 476% to a median of \$345 million, while median household income rose by just 13.2% – to \$50,233. A recent New York homeless count showed the number living on the streets had grown by 34% in a year. Unemployment remains high.

The urban crisis

This crisis has hit states and local governments hard, and hardest in Detroit, pointing in the direction that many other cities are sliding towards. 35% of its municipal area is uninhabited, with barren streets of once good but now dilapidated houses standing empty or serving as crack dens. 33,500 houses are empty and 91,000 residential lots are vacant. Half the population left

over the last half-century as the car industry ran down, reflecting the general decline in US manufacturing. At almost 30%, Detroit's official unemployment rate is more than double what it was at the beginning of 2008, but the city administration believes it is far higher, around 50%. One third of Detroit's inhabitants are estimated to live below the poverty line.

The state of the city has grown so bad that the Mayor plans to bulldoze a quarter of Detroit – 90 square kilometres, about a third of the size of inner London – replacing 10,000 houses, buildings and empty lots with fields and farmland. Already community groups are taking things into their own hands: 'Blight Busters' has pulled down 200 houses and crack dens, replacing them with community gardens growing free, fresh vegetables. Destroying a city in order to save it has been tried elsewhere, but never on such a scale.

Debt storm

Further problems lie ahead. Although some economic statistics give the impression that the US economy may be beginning to get less bad, if not actually improving, it looks like 2010 is going to be the lull before the storm. A new wave of debt default and destruction is building.

In the residential mortgage market, \$300 billion of 'Option ARMs' (adjustable rate mortgages) begin to reset this year at increasing rates, peaking in 2011, creating a new crisis. Nearly half of these loans were made in California.

In the commercial market, some \$1.4 trillion of mortgages are expected to expire between now and 2014. The loans were taken in the expectation that they could simply be 'rolled over' – renewed. But commer-

cial property prices have fallen by 40% since 2007 and nearly half these mortgages are 'underwater' – worth more than the property they were borrowed against. Hundreds of billions of dollars could soon be lost.

In the corporate world, \$700 billion of 'junk bonds' – risky, high-yield debt – starts to fall due in 2012: \$155 billion in 2012, \$212 billion in 2013, \$338 billion in 2014. The loans were taken during the boom by private equity companies and similar outfits to pay for mergers and leveraged buy-outs before the crisis struck. At the same time \$1.2 trillion of investment-grade corporate debt will be falling due, \$526 billion in 2012.

A small bubble is about to pop in the 'muni-junk' bond market – high risk municipal debt dependent on state and local government finances. Yet tax revenues have fallen for four consecutive quarters and investors may lose interest income, the entire principal, or be forced to sell at steep discounts. States slip deeper into debt as they run budget deficits and their pension funds fall behind.

It is no surprise then that the FDIC, which insures bank deposits, reported 252 banks on its 'problem list' rising to 702 by the end of 2009 and the FDIC ended the year with its 'rescue' fund \$20.9 billion in the hole.

To cap the list of coming disasters, there is the huge Federal debt which will need some \$2 trillion of borrowing in 2012, potentially squeezing out some of these risky borrowers who are trying to roll over debt.

With continuing suffering from the financial crisis, the decline of the cities and the looming second wave of the financial crisis, the 'American dream' is turning into a living nightmare. ■

Deepest cuts in decades

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Darling had also said in the pre-Budget report that he would demand annual 'efficiency savings' of £11bn from his spending departments through 'reforms' without damaging frontline services. After the Budget speech details were given out. The Department of Health, for example, was down to find £4.35bn of savings and that of Children, Schools and Families £1.1bn by 2012-13. Such savings are not credible in departments whose budgets are supposed to be protected by the government after 2011. In addition, these departments are also burdened with Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project costs, which have to be paid back whatever the circumstances. PFI project costs throughout the public sector now total some £210bn and annual payments to cover the capital costs and service of the projects will be paid out over the next 25 years and will peak at just over £10bn a year in 2017. 'Efficiency savings' from such departments will be severely limited. Savings also will be found, said Darling, by reducing the number of civil servants working in London by a third and relocating them elsewhere. While he was delivering his Budget, civil servants on national strike over redundancy pay mounted picket lines outside parliament.

All these measures together will reduce the deficit by a little over £24bn at best. So after the election real and dramatic cuts in public spending will begin. The Institute of Fiscal Studies confirmed that once the unavoidable costs of debt interest and

social security have been taken into account, Labour's plans will see cuts greater than those imposed by Thatcher in the 1980s, when unemployment reached more than 3 million. These cuts are around 10% in real terms over the three years from April 2011. The Labour government has said that it will protect the budgets of health, children, schools and families, the police and overseas development. If that is the case other departments will face devastating real cuts of between 18 and 24% (*Financial Times* 25 March 2010). In reality all the major public services will be under attack.

Still banking on the City

During the financial crisis the losses of financial institutions were socialised and transferred to government balance sheets. The results of this and the fiscal stimulus – tax cuts, higher government spending etc – necessary to lift the major capitalist economies out of recession, have been some of the highest public sector deficits in peace time. Financial services dominate the economy of Britain.²

Despite paying lip service to curbing the speculative activities of the banks, the ruling class in Britain has not done anything of consequence. So Darling could say in all seriousness in his Budget speech that: 'There should be no return to business as usual for the banks. But we also must remember that their success is vital not only for the global economy but for Britain's future.' He went on to remind us that London is the world's leading finan-

cial centre and across the country the sector supports over a million jobs. He continued: 'A healthy, strong financial services industry is essential for our long-term prosperity.' The Labour government has no intention of regulating the speculative activities of the banks.

Bank profits are rapidly rising. Massive bonuses are still being distributed to bankers as the unexpected windfall from the tax on bankers' bonuses above £25,000 so clearly demonstrated. Barclays made record profits of £11.6bn last year. Pre-tax profits at BarCap, its investment bank, rose 90% to £2.5bn. It apparently was showing restraint in paying its 23,000 investment bankers 38% of its revenues, some £4.5bn in total, including a £2.3bn bonus pool. RBS, 84% owned by the state, made a loss of £3.6bn. Yet more than a hundred of its top bankers were awarded bonuses of at least £1m last year. Its investment banking arm made profits of £8.3bn and it said a bonus pool of £1.3bn was the least it could get away with. RBS paid an average salary and bonuses to its investment bankers of £173,000 last year compared with an average of £191,000 for BarCap.

In his Budget speech Darling made great play in setting the state supported banks, RBS and Lloyds Banking Group, a £94bn target for lending to business. Both banks failed to meet their net lending targets last year, in fact lending a negative £41bn, with repayments higher than lending. This year, although the targets are higher, they are gross targets and the banks

should have little difficulty in achieving them.

The Labour government will not take any measures that would undermine the City of London as the engine of British imperialist interests throughout the world. Nor will the other ruling class parties. Whoever wins the election, it will be the vast majority of working people who will be made to pay for the crisis of capitalism. With the British opportunist left calling for a vote for the Labour Party, a new movement will have to be built. Class politics will only be restored in this country by militant forces coming on to the streets, involving millions of working people, young and old, in work and unemployed, determined to resist the destruction of public services by whichever ruling class party wins the General Election. ■

● **public sector cuts will be worse than Thatcher's**

● **the national debt will almost double to £1,400bn in 2014-15 – 75% of GDP**

● **RBS made a loss of £3.6bn but more than 100 of its top bankers got bonuses of at least £1 million**

● **PFI projects now total £210bn and annual repayments will reach £10bn a year by 2017**

1 For a discussion of how Darling dealt with this in his second budget see 'Years and years of austerity ahead' in FRFI 209 June/July 2009.

2 See 'Banks on a roll as Britain staggers out of recession' in FRFI 213 February/March 2010, and earlier articles in FRFI 194 and FRFI 210 on the parasitic character of British capitalism. All available on our website: www.revolutionarycommunist.org.

Greece Economy on the brink of collapse

On 11 March, over 60,000 demonstrators in Athens marched in protest against the crippling austerity measures imposed by the social democratic PASOK government. Along with the demonstration in the capital, there were at least 68 other protests around the country, many breaking out into clashes with the police. Coinciding with the protests was a 24-hour general strike, the second that week, which brought the country to a standstill. The only public transport working was the rail system that operated for a few hours to allow workers to take part in the demonstrations. News broadcasts were also suspended as crucial media workers walked off the job. Strikers and protesters banged drums and chanted slogans such as 'no sacrifice for plutocracy' and 'real jobs, higher pay'. People draped banners from apartment buildings reading: 'No more sacrifices, war against war' (*The Guardian* 11 March). The Greek people have made it clear that they will not quietly submit to this onslaught by the ruling class.

The Greek government is attempting to clear the country's 300bn euro (£259bn) debt through savage cuts to public services. Pressure to implement such cuts has come from the EU, headed by Germany and France. During February and March this year, Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou attended several meetings with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy to discuss the possibility of an EU bailout for Greece. Sarkozy highlighted the importance of supporting the Greek government: 'If we created the euro, we cannot let a country fall that is in the euro zone. Otherwise, there was no point in creating the

euro...we must support Greece because they are making an effort, or else there will be no more euro.'

On 25 March France and Germany reached a deal on a bail-out loan which would consist mainly of European money but also money from the IMF. To date the Greek government has resisted borrowing, fearful that to do so would worsen Greece's already tattered credit rating and cause further political instability for the government. Germany in particular has been keen to strengthen the role of the European Central Bank as a means to directly intervene within a country's economy. Merkel, opting for this open neo-liberal model, made it clear that if

Greece does not take the money, it will have to be cold and clinical in its implementation of austerity measures. There has been a high degree of German chauvinism in relation to Greece, expressed most crudely in the suggestion in the German press that Greece sell off some of its islands and the Acropolis to help finance its debt! At least, unlike British imperialism, they offered to pay.

Debt everywhere

Greece cannot be allowed to default on its debt because to do so could set a precedent in Europe, undermining both the euro and the European imperialist project (see FRFI 213). Greece has been highlighted in the media for its economic irresponsibility but its situation is not so very different from that of many other European countries. For example, though Greece's deficit stands at 13%, Ireland stands at 11.5%, Spain 11.4%, Portugal 9.3% – all well above the euro zone's target of 3%. As for Britain, its public deficit is heading towards 13% in 2010. So why are Greece's problems gaining so much attention? Firstly, Greece had a history of defaulting on sovereign debt before joining Europe, a history that European imperialism does not wish to see repeated. Secondly the Greek people have a history of protesting against austerity measures, a history that is being repeated now.



Speculators create reality

Trade is soaring in one of the most speculative forms of derivatives; credit default swaps (CDS), which played a key role in driving Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers and American International Group (AIG) into bankruptcy. A CDS is an insurance-type contract that permits banks and hedge funds to place bets on whether or not a company, or even a country, will default on its debts. The unregulated nature of CDS trading is such that speculators have an incentive to push companies or countries toward bankruptcy. According to one analyst, 'It's like buying fire insurance on your neighbour's house – you create an incentive to burn down the house.'

Smelling blood in the air, banks and hedge funds have rounded on Greece like vultures around a decaying corpse. Financial institutions have essentially 'bet' on worsening economic woes for Greece, including the possibility that the country will default on its debt. The effect of such activities is to further aggravate Greece's crisis – so much so that the cost of insuring Greece's debt has more than doubled in a year from \$35bn to \$85bn. This has infuriated

Papandreou, who has attempted to ban the speculative actions of hedge funds in Greece and called on the US to 'crack down on speculators' during a meeting with President Obama on 9 March. Merkel also complained that hedge funds should 'not be allowed to speculate against states'.

Greece's debt is also a big problem for the tentative British economic recovery, as Britain 'owns a fifth of Greek bonds; if Greece defaults, the write-offs will impact on our banking system as severely as any other in Europe' (Will Hutton, *The Observer* 14 February 2010).

Demonstrations continue

The meddling and pressure imposed by imperialist countries will not stop strikes and demonstrations in the coming weeks and months as the Greek people continue to revolt. What is essential for the development of a movement is for the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the main unions to clearly split from Papandreou's PASOK government and in turn to ally themselves to the radicalised and angry youth who have organised huge demonstrations in recent years. Andrew Alexander

Venezuela: the battle for workers' control

Over a decade has passed since the Bolivarian Revolution swept to power in Venezuela under the leadership of Hugo Chavez. Five years later, Chavez announced that they were building socialism for the 21st century. However, while millions were pulled out of poverty by the government's social 'missions' and employment creation, and marginalisation was reversed by the integration of the poor into national politics, the majority of the means of production remained in private hands and Venezuela's dependency on oil exports, particularly to the US, continued. This contradictory situation raised questions – about the extent to which it was possible to build a parallel economy; state ownership, or socialised production, alongside capitalist industry and financial institutions – and about the limits to the revolutionary or socialist character of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela, without serious inroads being made to capitalist social relations and bourgeois political institutions. Under the leadership of Chavez and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), set up in 2008, the Bolivarian Revolution has begun to tackle those contradictions by extending state ownership and socialised production. SAM MCGILL reports from Venezuela.

This process is vital if they are to establish a rational economy, controlled by a national plan, less vulnerable to internal opposition and the dictates of international capital and protected from fluctuations in the international markets.

This is a dynamic and complex process which faces many challenges, not just from the official opposition, but also from opportunists and class opponents within the state sector and government institutions – pro-imperialist and petit-bourgeois managers and politicians. The recent period has seen battles over the nationalisation of industries and for the democratisation of their operation through increased workers' control.

A new model for a better quality of life

'We can't sing victory yet, but we should ensure the people know about these major advances and the creation of a new model that will generate a better quality of life and more opportunities for all.' Hugo Chavez (2010)

With these words President Chavez inaugurated the second 'Bicentennial Supermarket' in Zulia State in March 2010. The first was opened in Lara State in February. These new supermarkets are part of the publicly-owned Corporation of Socialist Markets (COMERSO) network, expanded with the recent purchase of 80% of the French owned CADA chain of 35 centres with over 5,000 workers. The latter supermarket was stocking food beyond its sell-by date, abusing its workers and, by marking up prices, contributing to speculation following the realignment of Venezuela's national currency, the Bolivar, in January.

COMERSO recently opened six new stores offering subsidised food, sound equipment, computers, furniture, clothing, domestic goods and more, all produced in countries that are member states of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and sold below both unregulated market prices and prices fixed by the state. COMERSO promotes consumption of domestically produced foodstuffs in a drive to reduce imports. For example, the state-owned Venezuela Agrarian Corporation will supply dairy products to the COMERSO stores.

Venezuela has been making progress in reducing its heavy dependence on food imports. In 2009, its National Seed Plan produced six million kilos of seeds and the newly-established Marisela Corporation has begun planting rice and raising livestock on land expropriated from large private estates in Apure State. With the assistance of Vietnamese agronomists, within four years the government expects to have cultivated 50,000 hectares of expropriated land to produce rice which will be sold for 50% cheaper than other grains, and will be

free from agro-chemicals. In addition to production goals, Chavez has emphasised the importance of raising the consciousness of workers in expropriated and nationalised plants and enterprises: 'Each store should be a school. Workshops, debates and discussions should be incorporated into our new work model.' This is essential to prepare workers for the decentralisation of control and participation in management and is part of an ongoing effort in various heavy industry plants and factories expropriated over the last five years.

The battle for workers' control

On 7 May 2009, Venezuela's National Assembly passed a law giving the state control over a range of activities connected to the oil industry and previously run by multinationals. The next day the government expropriated 300 boats, 30 barges, 39 terminals and docks, five dams and 13 workshops on Lake Maracaibo where there are large crude oil reserves. Later that month, the government withdrew a contract for running a gas compression plant in Mongas State from the US company Wilpro Energy services. Using the same law, it then nationalised the Consigna steel-making complex (jointly owned by Japan's Kobe Steel and Argentina's Techint), the Tavsia steel tube plant and the joint BHP-Billiton/Sivensa company's subsidiaries, Orinoco Iron and the Venprecar iron briquette manufacturers, and Matesi iron briquette producer in Monagas State. Workers had been pressing for the nationalisations.

These efforts to place control over production into the hands of the state and the workers are part of the Socialist Guyana Plan, which aims to reorient industries towards manufacturing products for domestic consumption, rather than for raw material exports, thus converting energy-intensive processes such as liquid steel production into less energy-intensive manufacturing (James Suggett, *Venezuela Analysis*, 9 January 2010). The Socialist Guyana Plan was drafted in May 2009, by working groups of over 2,000 trade union representatives, and will result in increased worker control of management and retraining. During a 'Socialist Transformation Workshop' attended by 400 workers, Chavez, quoting Che Guevara, insisted that: 'Every factory must be a school to educate, to produce not only briquettes, steel and aluminum, but also, above all, the new man and woman, the new society, the socialist society.'

The recent appropriations add to other industries previously nationalised – SIDOR, Bauxilum, Carbonora, Venalum and ALCASA – and run under the Venezuelan Corporation of Guyana (CVG). The results of these nationalisations have been mixed. CVG Venalum has maintained high levels of aluminium production with increasing lev-

els of workers' control. However, SIDOR and ALCASA have been fraught with internal problems caused by inadequate and obstructive management leading to crises of production. Although Chavez and workers and revolutionaries in the left wing of the PSUV repeatedly call for active workers' control, the conservative wing within both the Party and management of many of these state companies block this. In ALCASA, an aluminium manufacturer, which has always been a state company, the worker co-management that was developed in 2004 through workers' struggle and radical leadership, crumbled in 2007 as the workers became disillusioned. The old management remained intact or ensured that their business contacts and friends replaced them, actively obstructing the



President Chavez opens one of the new supermarkets

development of workers' control.

In the case of SIDOR, a steel and iron producer nationalised in 2008, the management has been opposing the mandatory electricity regulations introduced to deal with the acute drought in Venezuela since September 2009. Electricity consumption has increased more than 40% in a decade, reflecting a growth in economic activity particularly in the last five years, but 72% of Venezuela's electricity is generated from the Guri dam, which saw alarming water level falls as a result of the drought. In addition to distributing millions of energy saving light-bulbs and investing in 30 new thermoelectric and hydroelectric facilities nationwide, the Ministry for Electricity instructed heavy industries to reduce energy consumption by up to 500 megawatts and to focus on domestic goods production, instead of materials for export, which involve energy-intensive processes. SIDOR's management, however, is doing the

opposite. The Workers' Control Collective and workers organised in the Revolutionary Front of Steelworkers inside SIDOR protested and held strikes throughout 2009, as have workers in the other CVG industries listed above, who have opposed the closure of plants, the reduction in production and corrupt management, and are demanding assurances that they will be paid.

Other nationalisations have been more successful. For example, at La Gaviota sardine plant in Cumana, which was nationalised on 1 May 2009, production has been high and continuous (previously three days a week), orientated to the domestic market (previously for export only), workers receive fixed salaries and benefits in kind and are actively taking control of the management of the plant.

Workers' struggles win collective contracts

Another promising achievement is the 'collective workers' contract' with the new electricity corporation CORPOELEC, signed in December 2009 after 18 months of workers' struggle, including marches, protests and demands for the management to resign. CORPOELEC was formed in 2007 after the electricity sector was nationalised and 14 private companies were merged into a single enterprise. However, much of the previous management remained with disparities in pay and working conditions left over from the private firms. The collective workers' contract provides for equal pay, benefits and work-

tract follows the oil workers' collective contract agreed in the national Petroleum Corporation of Venezuela (PDVSA) in January 2009. There are divisions between various trade unions in the oil industry but in October 2009 the PSUV won a majority in the United Federation of Venezuelan Oil Workers (FUTPV) elections, giving it more leverage within PDVSA. A recent US Geological Survey report estimated Venezuela's reserves at over 500 billion barrels of petroleum, which could guarantee extraction for another 200 years, so the PDVSA will remain a driving force in the transition to socialism.

Bicentenary Bank paves the way

Venezuela's financial sector is looking positive following the incorporation of four expropriated banks into the state bank BANFOANDES to form the new Bicentenary Bank, holding 20% of bank deposits in the country. Together with the Bank of Venezuela (nationalised in 2007), the state now controls 20-25% of the banking system. The Bicentenary Bank is administering a new fund which has 3bn Bolivars to invest in food production, coffee, metals, textiles, chemicals, domestic and industrial goods and for building homes. The priorities are import substitution projects and those to diversify exports. The Venezuelan government reports \$35bn in international currency reserves, finishing 2009 with a 30bn Bolivar budget surplus, approximately 15% of total state spending – thus exposing the lie of Chavez's opponents who claim that he is bleeding the country dry with investments in social missions.

Worker occupations and state interventions in private companies pave the way for future expropriations and nationalisations. For example, in early March a sugar mill found to be hoarding 4,000 tonnes of sugar, contributing to a nationwide sugar shortage, was taken under state control for 90 days, after which a decision will be made about its future. As a result of mill workers' and community council inspections, another sugar mill has since been implicated and temporarily occupied by the government. Two coffee processing plants were occupied in August 2009 after the Agriculture Ministry obtained evidence of hoarding, speculation and smuggling to Colombia. One of them was nationalised in November 2009.

Elections for the National Assembly take place on 26 September 2010. In the run up to those, these expropriations and nationalisations are vital to secure public support, advancing the revolutionary process and reducing vulnerability to its enemies' machinations. The outcome of this battle is uncertain. For Chavez, the revolutionaries in the PSUV and the workers fighting for participatory control, it is clear that state-owned companies 'that remain within the framework of state capitalism' have to be managed by their workers in order to become 'socialist'. However, each step taken to weaken the political and economic power of international and domestic capital brings confrontations with the enemy within the Bolivarian process: pro-imperialist and petty bourgeois managers working to obstruct production in order to 'prove' that nationalisation is a mistake and the corrupt mayors, governors and right-wing social democratic tendencies within the Chavista alliance. If the revolution is to progress, the Bolivarian workers, activists and radical youth need to uncover and undermine these attempts to destabilise the Bolivarian process. ■

Socialism is good for the environment

The World Wide Fund for Nature *Living Planet Report 2006* pointed to Cuba as the only nation in the world to have achieved sustainable development, which it described as having a United Nations human development index score of 0.8 or more, with a measure of human demand on the biosphere of 1.8 global hectares per person or less. That Cuba is able to achieve sustainable development is because it is socialist. State ownership and central planning, along with a grassroots system of participatory democracy, facilitate a rational allocation of resources for the benefit of the population's collective interests. That Cuba stands alone in this achievement supports Marx's contention that socialism is needed to overcome human alienation from nature under capitalism. DAVID HETFIELD reports.

Achieving sustainable development is not just a case of using organic farming and renewable energy; it is dependent on the productive and social system. Marx showed that labour and nature are the sources of wealth and that under capitalism both nature and the worker are exploited in the interests of capital accumulation. In capitalist production, nature is seen as a free gift to capital. Driven by the profit motive, the capitalist is only interested in the unlimited expansion of capital. Natural resources like land, water, raw materials and hydrocarbons are only of interest to the capitalists in so far as they can be turned into profit. It is the logic of the system of capitalist production, not specific policy decisions which makes capitalism unsustainable. Marx observed, in Britain, both a loss in soil fertility and workers living in overcrowded polluted cities, with precarious livelihoods. Today we see catastrophic global warming and fuel shortages, with the mass of humanity living in permanent underdevelopment, whilst a small majority live unsustainable consumerist lifestyles.

Cuban socialism demonstrates that countries can recover from over-exploitation and underdevelopment, and that societies can be organised without the profit motive and obscene inequalities, but with human welfare and environmental sustainability at the core of their development. Between 1900 and 1959, as a semi-colony of the US, Cuba's forest and plant cover was reduced from 52% to 14% as land was concentrated in the hands of a few private domestic and foreign companies. In 1959, in the first year of the Cuban Revolution, the first reforestation programme was implemented. In the first decades of the Revolution, with trade and cooperation with the socialist bloc, Cuba largely continued with monoculture farming, in sugar and tobacco, relying on large-scale machinery, oil supplies, petroleum-based pesticides and fertilisers supplied from the Soviet Union. Whilst the favourable terms of trade allowed Cuba to develop a relatively high level of industrialisation and continually improve its healthcare and education, it relied on the socialist bloc for 80% of its trade and 57% of its food. With the fall of the socialist bloc between 1989 and 1991, all this disappeared, leaving critical scarcities in fuel, food, agricultural inputs, materials, medicines, machinery, and spare parts. Along with the US tightening the blockade, this caused GDP to shrink 35% by 1993. Cuba had to turn to its own resources to survive.

Cuba entered its 'Special Period' of economic crisis. Economic reforms were introduced including concessions to the 'free market', however, free universal welfare provision, state planning and the predominance of state

property were maintained. Tourism was encouraged to generate hard currency for necessary imports, but with measures to reduce its environmental impact. Where workplaces were closed, workers were offered alternative jobs or retraining on their former income.

Even at the start of the Special Period, rather than just being concerned with production, Cuba demonstrated its commitment to the environment at the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (see Castro's speech 'Tomorrow will be too late', <http://embacu.cubaminrex.cu/Default.aspx?tabid=2959>). That year Cuba amended its constitution to recognise the importance of 'sustainable and social development to make human life more rational and to ensure the survival, well-being and security of present and future generations', stating 'it is the duty of citizens to contribute to the protection of the waters, atmosphere and conservation of the soil, flora, fauna and nature's rich potential'.

Agriculture and food production

As a result of the economic crisis, average calorie intake fell by 40%. In capitalist countries, food shortages cause price hikes ensuring hunger hits the poorest sections of society. However, in Cuba, the basic 'ration' (food quota) secured some food for everyone. Nonetheless, it was essential to increase food production. Some large state farms were transformed into co-operatives, where large machinery was replaced by human and animal labour. To encourage greater efficiency and productivity, co-operative workers and small farmers were allowed to sell surplus food after meeting their state quotas. In cities, unused plots of land were turned into urban farms (organopónicos) and gardens, increasing food production, providing employment for 30,000 people in Havana alone, reducing transport costs of food, and allowing a more efficient recycling of nutrients. In Havana, these now supply 100% of the city's fruit and vegetables and are supplemented by urban patios, which number 60,000 in Havana. Idle land is being distributed in usufruct (rent-free, short-term loan) to those who want to produce organic food. Average daily calorie intake has returned to its 1980s levels.

State-run biotechnology and agricultural institutions develop organic methods like crop-rotating, the use of biofertiliser, such as compost, and the use of vermicomposting (worm farms) to replace chemical fertilisers, and replacing synthetic pesticides with unique biopesticides and the specialised use of pests to combat crop-attacking pests. They develop perma-

culture methods, interplanting complementary crops, making it easier to avoid pests and maintain soil fertility. They have developed pasture techniques to increase milk productivity and help recycle nutrients. These specialists work closely with the farmers, learning from each other and overcoming the artificial gap between manual and mental labour. Cuban agronomists have taught agroecological farming methods to farmers in Haiti and across Central and South America. By 2003, the Agriculture Ministry had reduced diesel fuel use by 50%, and chemical fertiliser and synthetic pesticide use by over 90% from 1989.

Energy efficiency

The Revolution had raised access to electricity from 56% to 96% of the population, but inefficient equipment and lack of fuel led to frequent blackouts. 2006 was nominated the year of energy, when Fidel Castro said 'We are not waiting for fuel to fall from the sky, because we have discovered, fortunately, something much more important: energy conservation, which is like finding a great oil deposit.'

Efficiency in electricity generation was made by installing hundreds of small distributed generators, which are more efficient than large power stations and cause smaller transmission losses. 40% of Cuba's electricity now comes from these generators, causing less disruption from mechanical breakdowns and natural disasters. Electricity is also generated from natural gas produced as a by-product of Cuba's offshore oil industry, with the aim of producing 20% of the country's electricity this way. In 2004 and 2005 there were over 400 days of large-scale blackouts greater than 100 megawatts that lasted over an hour; in 2006 there were three days and in 2007 none. Within two years of the Energy Revolution, the country consumed 34% less kerosene, 37% less liquefied petroleum gas and saved 872,000 tons of oil in energy saving measures.

As part of the Energy Revolution, thousands of social workers, most of them teenagers, visited every household in Cuba, distributing ten million energy saving light bulbs to a population of 11 million people, discussing energy conservation and noting which electrical appliances were in use. All incandescent light bulbs were replaced within six months. Over six million rice cookers and pressure cookers replaced kerosene and gas cookers. Energy efficient appliances were sold at low prices with long-term payment facilities. This included two million refrigerators, one million fans, 182,000 air conditioners and 260,000 water pumps. To encourage efficient use, the electricity subsidy was reduced for high use. In 2007/8 aver-



Organic farming in Pinar del Río, Cuba

age per capita consumption was less than a tenth of US usage.

In electricity generation, Cuba uses a variety of renewables:

- Biomass, mainly from waste products of sugar cane, but also using rice, coconut husk, forest debris and coffee waste.
- Hydroelectric, which is small in scale and largely used for local needs.
- Biogas, produced from the decomposition of organic waste, which is used for domestic cooking and electricity generation, and leaves useful by-products such as fertiliser and food for fish and poultry.
- Solar energy, both solar thermal for heating water and using photo-voltaic cells to generate electricity, particularly in rural areas where it supplies homes, medical clinics and schools with electricity. Cuba now manufactures solar heaters and is expanding another plant that produces solar panels.
- Wind farms have been established in Ciego de Avila, Holguin and Isla de la Juventud, designed to be dismantled at short notice in case of hurricanes.

Cuban social workers have also distributed over two million energy efficient light bulbs in Haiti. Cuban technicians and scientists have installed solar panels and advised on energy efficiency in Venezuela, Bolivia, Honduras, South Africa, Mali, Nigeria and Lesotho. They have been invited by the Chilean government to teach people how to make biogas digesters and to Peru to make solar driers for industrial timber factories, as well as helping to build small hydroelectric stations in Ecuador.

Cuba is one of the most vocal critics of biofuel production to power cars. Fidel Castro condemned as immoral the use of land for biofuel exports, not food, where people lack food security, and the destruction of forests to 'feed the insatiable demand for fuels needed by a civilisation based on their irrational use. The only result possible is an increase in the cost of food and thus, the worsening of the social situation in the South countries' (April 2007). In 2007-2008 food prices rose by 83%, a suppressed World Bank report stated that price increases of 75% were caused by biofuel production replacing food production. One-

quarter of all the maize and other grain crops grown in the US is used for biofuel production. EU companies have taken millions of acres of land out of food production in Africa, Central America and Asia to grow biofuels for transport.

Co-operation for the environment and development

The Centre of Investigation in Structures and Materials (CIDEM) research institute at Cuba's Santa Clara University develops eco-materials for use in small scale localised production of housing. It has developed lime pozzolana cement, which generates approximately half the amount of CO₂ emissions of normal cement production, as well as light but strong micro-concrete roofing tiles; low-energy fired clay bricks using bio-waste products as fuel; and laminated bamboo sheeting. The researchers go into the communities to train people, then the local people and government organise production.

Wildlife and biodiversity are also protected in Cuba. In 2006 *National Geographic* magazine stated Cuba's environment is 'largely pristine'; land is set aside for protection. Cuba's coastal areas and mangroves are an important refuge for hundreds of species of fish and marine animals, many of which have been wiped out elsewhere in the Caribbean. Recently, Cuba responded to the UN Climate Change Conference call for 140 billion trees to be planted worldwide, by mobilising mass organisations including the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and the Federation of Cuban Women, so that now forest cover has risen to 24.3%.

Cuba's internationalist solidarity and its building of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) with Venezuela, joined by Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Honduras (under Zelaya), Ecuador, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda, with its policy of humanitarian, economic and social cooperation through non-market, non-profit-based exchanges show the only sustainable and workable basis to deal with the effects of climate change. Socialism is good for the environment. ■

Policing the crisis

A year ago, on 1 and 2 April 2009, world leaders at the G20 Summit in London congratulated themselves on solving the world's financial and developmental crisis with a deal involving \$1.1 trillion (£681bn).

'We start from the belief that prosperity is indivisible; that growth, to be sustained, has to be shared; and that our global plan for recovery must have at its heart the needs and jobs of hard-working families, not just in developed countries but in emerging markets and the poorest countries of the world too; and must reflect the interests, not just of today's population, but of future generations too.'

Fine words, however, butter no parsnips. These particular fine words have been long since forgotten and the world's poor have not prospered one jot as the imperialist nations have battled to sustain and improve their own economies and the financial security of their respective ruling classes in the face of severe capitalist crisis and at the expense of the working class and oppressed.

A year ago, outside the conference, thousands of G20 opponents in London demonstrated to show that the claims made by these super-rich politicians were fraudulent. The demonstrators were smacked and clubbed to the ground by well-trained, armed riot police with dogs, following a detailed plan hatched months in advance by British police. The overall police operation, called Operation Glencoe (which might have given a clue to their frame of mind) entailed corralling ('kettling') the demonstrators in a tight space at the Bank of England from 12.30pm to 7pm without access to facilities like toilets or fresh water. No one was allowed to leave, as is clear from one demonstrator's testimony: 'My final outrage is for the police officers watching a young girl having an asthma attack and yet [they] still refused, even her, the right to leave. It was absolutely disgraceful.' One man, Ian Tomlinson, who was not even part of the demonstration, died as a result of the police tactics.

On the day of the demonstrations, police claimed that they had faced a violent mob, had responded with only necessary force and had no involvement with Ian Tomlinson at all. Indeed, police press statements included the claim that demonstrators had thrown missiles at the kindly police officers



G20 demonstration at the Bank of England

who were trying to secure medical aid for the stricken man. In the days following the demonstrations, reports and photographs flooded in showing exactly how brutal the police tactics had been. In particular, film footage taken by a passing American was sent to *The Guardian* clearly showing that Tomlinson was clubbed from behind by a Territorial Support Group (TSG) riot officer whose face was masked by a balaclava and whose badge number was missing. In response to the film footage, a senior officer investigating Tomlinson's death on behalf of the City of London police, suggested that the officer may well have been a demonstrator dressed up as a policeman acting as a provocateur. Tomlinson's 'crime' had been to try to pass through the 'kettle' on the way home from his job.

The police handling of Ian Tomlinson's death was a crude attempt at cover up.* His family were told that Tomlinson had died of a heart attack, refused access to his body and warned not to speak to the press. The first postmortem made no mention of in-

juries found on his body, the blood in his stomach or a dog bite on his leg. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) were reluctant to investigate. Meanwhile the gutter press concentrated on vilifying the demonstrators.

It was only after the video footage of the attack on Tomlinson was revealed, that public furore followed as it became clear from the photos, films and reports from demonstrators and public at the events, that the police tactics had been brutally violent and the TSG officer who clubbed Ian

Tomlinson had not been alone in disguising his identity. A second postmortem revealed that Tomlinson had died from internal bleeding.

The police were immediately on the defensive. In response to all this 'bad' publicity, Sir Paul Stephenson, Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, ordered a top-level review of riot policing and admitted his concerns over the 'clearly disturbing' images. The officer who struck Tomlinson, once identified, was suspended from duty on full pay. The IPCC promised to investigate more than 90 complaints about police violence, as well as Tomlinson's death.

One year after G20, there have been several reports into the policing of the G20 demonstrations: a report from the Met, two parliamentary inquiries and an official review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), and the latest from the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) itself. All have made just glancing references to Tomlinson's death, claiming they cannot prejudice the IPCC investigation.

The Tomlinson family believe some accounting is necessary for the way they were deliberately misled about the circumstances, but this has not been forthcoming.

All of the inquiries have been, to some degree, critical of police tactics and conduct. In particular the HMIC report, published in November 2009, criticised the Met Police's interpretation of public order legislation. From the Met's point of view the protests had been unlawful and this was what they prepared for. The HMIC report, on the other hand, pointed out the legal force of article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects the right to peaceful assembly. The police should not have treated the demonstrations as unlawful simply because they were spontaneous or obstructed the highway. So threatened by the contents of the HMIC report was the Met, that they employed their own solicitors to challenge the report, delaying the publication of its interim findings. Their challenge was unsuccessful. All the inquiries have pointed out the illegality of police hiding their badge numbers and their identities; some criticised 'kettling' and some placed the blame on lack of public order training. The HMIC report even went so far as to criticise the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance on public order policing as 'out of date'.

The HMIC report was welcomed across the board. 'Shaping the future of public order policing', said ACPO. 'A huge leap forward' said Climate Camp. Among the proposals were:

- The Home Secretary should issue a national code of practice to ensure all 44 police forces deal with protest in the same way. The report found a wide variation in equipment and tactics used, as well as divergences in their interpretation of the law.
- The government should introduce a set of 'overarching principles' to guide police on the use of force.
- The routine use of forward intelligence teams (FIT) who film, photograph and follow protesters, and store their information on databases should be reviewed.
- Public order training should be overhauled, with a 'new emphasis on schooling the 22,500 officers trained for protests in communication and diplomacy rather than riot scenarios'.
- ACPO should be made more accountable.

In case anyone is impressed by this plethora of reporting and inquiring; surprised by the failure of 'national

codes of conduct', 'overarching principles' or 'new emphases' to appear; or thinks that the British police are about to change their role with regard to political protest, several other facts should be remembered.

• Since G20, no police officer has been reprimanded or disciplined for failure to wear a police identity badge, despite promises that this would happen.

• Following a police conference to review strategy in December 2009, the police have confirmed that they will continue to use 'kettling', despite doubts about its legality.

• The violence used against demonstrators was not due to lack of training. The police squads acted in exactly the way they had been trained to act and their behaviour is intended to frighten demonstrators. Indeed the MPA inquirers who attended a public order training session described their shock at the violence.

• ACPO continues to receive a £9 million grant from the government to fund 'three domestic extremism units' to gather intelligence on political activists, or what they call 'domestic extremists'. FIT surveillance teams continue with their spying activities.

• The immediate response to 'citizen journalism' which exposed the police conduct at G20 was a proposal to 'embed' journalists within police riot squads so that the police version of events is the one reported.

• The supposedly independent IPCC is still 'investigating' without any conclusions. Ian Tomlinson is set to join a long list of people killed by the British police without redress.

There is a connection between the G20 heads of state conference and the treatment of the demonstrators on 1 and 2 April 2009 that cannot be wished away. In order to deal with the global capitalist crisis, the ruling class has to attack the living standards of the working class, both in the advanced capitalist countries, and in the poor and oppressed nations in order to restore their profits and super-profits. Political dissent has to be crushed. That is why all the inquiries and reviews will not alter the nature of policing in Britain. The battle will go on.

Jane Bennett

* Readers will remember that similar deliberate lies were told in the wake of the killings of the Gibraltar Three, Harry Stanley and Jean Charles de Menezes. See FRFI 207, 'Licence to Kill', February/March 2009.

Defend the right to protest! Defend the Gaza demonstrators!

The British state has moved to marginalise those who want to resist imperialism in this country, and especially to criminalise those who take a militant stance against Zionism. In the course of 2009, 119 mostly young and predominantly Muslim people were arrested in connection with the demonstrations outside the London Israeli embassy in December 2008 and January 2009 against Israel's murderous attack on the people of Gaza. 78 of them were charged; by late March around 30 had received prison sentences and court cases continue.

At least 1,400 people died in Israel's Operation 'Cast Lead', 5,500 were injured and tens of thousands left homeless. There was worldwide outrage and thousands took to the streets to voice their opposition and disgust. London was the scene of militant and

angry daily demonstrations around the Israeli Embassy.

The British police retaliated brutally, 'kettling' and batoning demonstrators. Since then dozens of protestors have been arrested. Most of the arrests took place six months after the demonstrations, following dawn raids during which the police handcuffed entire families and confiscated electronic material.

Most of those arrested were 16-20 years old, but some were just 15, and the youngest 12. The vast majority have been charged with violent disorder, which can carry a prison sentence of up to five years. At court almost all of the defendants were required to surrender their passports and, despite the fact that they are overwhelmingly British citizens, all were served with immigration notices which stated that they could be deported depending on the outcome of criminal proceedings.



Demonstration in London against the onslaught on Gaza, January 2009

Judge Denniss, who is presiding over the vast majority of the cases, has made it clear that he is deliberately using harsh sentences as a deterrent to

others in the future. These are political sentences; they are intended to criminalise protest and they are specifically aimed at the Muslim community in an

attempt to frighten people away from public protests.

Two women, aged 18 and 19, were sentenced to 15 months imprisonment. One was subsequently released following an appeal against the length of her sentence. A Palestinian man, who days before had seen images in the press of the dead bodies of two of his cousins in Gaza, has been gaoled for two years for violent disorder. A humanities student, who is the father of a five-month old baby also received two years. A dental student who threw a plastic bottle in the direction of the Israeli embassy has received a 12-month sentence. So far all those imprisoned have accepted legal advice to plead guilty. The trials of those maintaining not guilty pleas have recently begun. On 24 March the case against Jake Smith was dropped, when it became apparent that the police had selectively edited video footage.

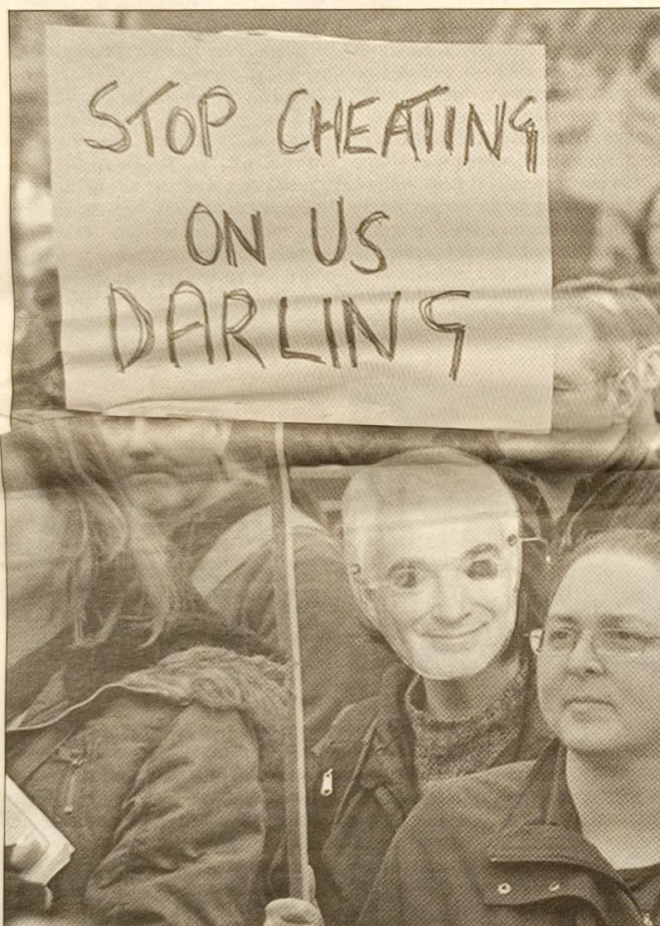
As the trials continue, more and more young anti-imperialists are going to be sent to prison. FRFI is participating in the campaign to defend and support all those facing the racist vengeance of the British state.

For more details, see <http://gaza.demosupport.org.uk>

Itisham Haque

General election *general fraud*

As the general election approaches, the opportunist left is urging us to vote for the Labour Party, claiming that it is still a working class party, or that it is still somehow better than the Tories, or that we need to vote for it to keep out the BNP. The position of **Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!** is quite clear: the Labour Party is, and always has been, an imperialist party, absolutely committed to the defence of British capitalism's world-wide interests. To support it in the general election would be to vote for more war, racism and repression, and for further attacks on the living standards of the working class.



Civil servants on strike outside Parliament on budget day

Contributions by: Anthony Bairstow, Jane Bennett, Hannah Caller, Robert Clough, Susan Davidson, Nicki Jameson, Mark Moncada, Trevor Rayne and Cat Wiener

Today's economic crisis is a crisis of the imperialist system as a whole. The ruling class can only solve it at the expense of the working class. The depth of the crisis is such that the British banking system would have collapsed on Friday 10 October 2008 if the Labour government had not intervened with its rescue plan, which, with the Bank of England, involves a total commitment of £1.04 trillion. In relation to public sector finances, the net amount added to the overall public sector debt at the end of 2009 was £130bn. Now there is to be a reckoning for this: with a public deficit estimated to reach 11.8% of GDP this year, and net public debt to rise from 38% of GDP in 2007 to 75% in 2014, savage cuts in public spending are required: 8% of GDP over the next eight years. This is the context in which the general election will take place.

The proposed cuts will cost hundreds of thousands of jobs and decimate essential services for the working class. Already tens of thousands of local authority jobs are under threat in the new financial year. Although the main bourgeois parties – Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats – are absolutely committed to these cuts, none of them will say where they will fall or how deep they will be, as to do so would cost them the votes of sections of the middle class that also depend on these jobs and services. The general election will be about little more than presentation. It will be a complete fraud, and, whatever its outcome, the working class will be made to pay for the crisis.

Just when socialists should be denouncing this swindle, yet again the opportunist left is giving it credibility by participating in it, whether as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the Respect Party or the Communist Party of Britain (CPB). Even worse, all of them are urging a

vote for Labour in the 600 or so constituencies they are not able to contest themselves, despite the fact that millions of workers will abstain out of disgust at Labour's record. Hence:

- *Socialist Worker* (13 February 2010) reported that the SWP's National Committee has agreed to 'vote Labour against the Tories where there is no serious left of Labour candidate'.
- TUSC recognises 'that there will be Labour and non-Labour candidates who agree with our policies, who share our socialist aspirations and who will be supported by left and labour movement organisations participating in our coalition'.
- The Respect Party at its November 2009 conference agreed that 'The election of a Tory government would be a further setback for those who want to see a fairer Britain ... Where there are good Labour MPs who deserve this support, we will back them'.
- The CPB says it 'will also support some other left-wing candidates standing against new Labour types while stressing its overall preference for a Labour victory over the Tories'.

We should be absolutely clear, a vote for Labour is:

- a vote for British imperialism and the City of London;
- a vote for more wars;
- a vote for state racism: attacks on asylum seekers and immigrants, racist policing and racist prisons;
- a vote for attacks on human rights, civil liberties and the right to protest;
- a vote for more privatisation of the NHS and education and for savage cuts in public spending.

It does not matter what subterfuge the opportunist left use to justify this. At exactly the time when they should be exposing the Labour Party, they are serving up the illusion that it is still a working class party and that it is still somehow better than the Tories. These so-called socialists will never

break from Labour no matter what crimes it commits.

The Labour government's record over the last 13 years has been one of unceasing war, racism and oppression. Yet there has been no serious opposition. Through their ties with the Labour Party, the opportunist left and the trade unions have together prevented a movement from emerging. The movement against war in Iraq was killed off as the leadership of the Stop the War Coalition sought an alliance with respectable bourgeois politicians and drove away radical new forces and anyone who wanted to fight back. The trade union leaders, concerned to protect their assets and investments, have refused to fight the anti-trade union laws and have time after time sold out working class struggles in favour of supporting the government. The so-called socialist candidates in this general election represent nothing – no serious struggle, no new movement, no real opposition to Labour. Drawn from the petit bourgeoisie, they do not want to see beyond their privileged position in society. They are the forces of the past, a barrier to the development of anything progressive.

Whatever the outcome of the election, the ruling class will have to step up its offensive on the working class. The resulting economic and social conditions will inevitably lead to working class resistance. The opportunist left are the biggest obstacle to creating a new movement out of this opposition as they try to prevent it from going beyond the bounds set by the Labour Party and the trade union leadership. To be a socialist today, to help create a new movement out of the resistance, means irrevocably breaking with Labour and shattering the stifling grip of opportunism. The first step is to expose the general election for what it is: a general fraud. ●

British trade unions *no stomach for a fight*

With unemployment approaching 2.5 million for the first time in more than ten years, there are few signs of serious trade union resistance. They have refused to fight the Tory anti-trade union laws that Labour kept on the statute books and remain committed to supporting the Labour Party, accounting for about 75% of its funding.

Trade unions continue to form larger and larger monopolies: the combined membership of the two largest TUC-affiliates – Unite and Unison – stands at 3.3 million, over half of TUC membership. These institutions have immense wealth: in 2008, the ten largest TUC-affiliated unions had an annual income of £600m and gross assets in shares and property worth

£614m (up over £100m since 2005). Their leadership continues to be paid extravagantly: 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. They have no intention of jeop-

ardising such wealth or position.

The opportunist left say the trade unions represent the mass of the working class. In fact they continue to organise preferentially amongst a narrow section of the working class, mainly better-off workers in the public sector. By the end of 2007:

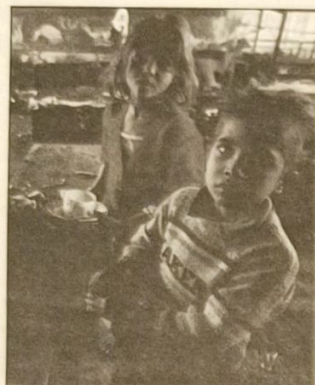
- 58.6% of trade unionists worked in the public sector compared to 27.2% of all employees.
- More than half of trade unionists, 52.7%, were either managers, professionals or associate professionals (41.9% for all employees).
- 45.7% of trade unionists had a degree or other higher education qualification compared to 33.9% of all employees.

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.

The number of days lost through industrial action in 2009, at 437,000, is the third lowest figure since records began over 120 years ago; the average has been 600,000 since 1997.

Trade unions are no longer fighting organisations of the working class and they will remain that way until they break with Labour. ●

● No vote for imperialist war



Palestinian children in the ruins of Gaza. The Labour government continues to support the Zionist war

Britain is an imperialist power and will never hesitate to go to war to defend its interests. The British state has been almost permanently at war since 1945, with 1968 the only year since the end of the Second World War when no British military personnel were killed on active service. In representing a section of the working class whose privileged position depends on the defence of British imperialist interests, Labour has proved as warmongering a party as the Tories.

In 1997 then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook proclaimed 'an ethical foreign policy'; five years later the RAF had dropped more bombs than in the previous 18 years of Tory rule. Iraq, former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan had been bombed, British soldiers were deployed in:

- Congo (1997-98)
- Yugoslavia (1999 onwards)
- East Timor (1999-2000)
- Sierra Leone (2000/2003)
- Afghanistan (2001 onwards)
- Iraq (2003 onwards)
- Cote d'Ivoire (2004)
- the North of Ireland (throughout)

As Cook put it, 'nowhere in the world is so far away that it is not relevant to our security interests'.

After the Soviet Union and socialist bloc collapsed between 1989 and 1991, the US made a bid for global hegemony, seeking to expand its sphere of influence into former socialist countries, Central Asia, the Balkans and the Caucasus, while ensuring the Middle East and its oil was under

US control. British imperialism has allied itself with US military strength to protect its worldwide assets and to elevate its influence relative to those of its German, French and Japanese counterparts.

Yugoslavia

Labour government ministers have been the most belligerent of the imperialists. Prime Minister Blair said of bombing former Yugoslavia in 1999: 'We will redouble and intensify our campaign. We will carry on pounding day after day.' Not for nothing Noam Chomsky described Britain as 'the US attack dog'. The Labour government was the first to propose a ground invasion of Serbia and turning Kosovo into a protectorate. Clare Short, then Secretary of State for International Development, described anyone who opposed the war on Yugoslavia as 'fascist sympathisers'.

Afghanistan

When NATO troops invaded Afghanistan the British contingent was the largest. Between October 2001 and April 2002 over 22,000 bombs and missiles were dropped on Afghanistan. Aid agencies estimated at least 8,000 civilians killed and a further 20,000 dead from starvation and cold at the time. Clare 'Bomber' Short opposed any break in the bombardment to allow in humanitarian supplies. In July 2009, Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth said there were 'compelling reasons' for Britain's war in Afghanistan adding that: 'It goes to

the heart of this country's national security and to the core of our national interests ... The entire region in which Afghanistan sits is of vital strategic importance to the United Kingdom.' There are now 9,500 British military personnel in Afghanistan. By mid-March 2010, the death toll for British forces in Afghanistan was 275.

Iraq

The US and British governments secretly agreed to attack Iraq in 2001. The Labour government connived in promoting the myth of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that could hit British targets in 45 minutes. In March 2002, Labour Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon said, 'I am absolutely confident, in the right conditions, we would be willing to use nuclear weapons.' Prior to the March 2003 attack on Iraq the Labour government succeeded in pulling part of the EU away from French and German government opposition to the war, easing the way for the US-led assault. Then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said that Iraq was in breach of existing UN resolutions and that no further resolutions were necessary for the war to be started.

By the end of 2009 the total cost of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars to the British government was £20.5 billion. The human cost for the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, meanwhile, is appalling: the United Nations estimates over 5,000 Afghanistan civilians killed in the three years to 2010. Iraq's dead since the invasion number approximately one million.

Palestine

Labour has given continual support to the Zionists' barbaric occupation of Palestine:

- In the days that followed the start of the Intifada on 28 September 2000 Britain, along with the US, abstained when the UN General Council condemned the Zionists' excessive use of force.
- In February 2002, during the massacre at Jenin, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said: 'It is necessary to understand why Israelis have been reluctant to demand their government's serious engagement in peace negotiations while on their own streets they are continually subjected to appalling terrorism.'
- In July 2006 Labour offered tacit support to the Israeli blitzkrieg on Lebanon, supporting the US in blocking calls for a ceasefire at both the G8 summit in Russia and the UN Security Council.
- At the beginning of 2009 as Israel launched its savage onslaught on Gaza, Britain once again blocked attempts in the UN to call for an immediate ceasefire.

This is the warmongering Labour Party that declares civilisation from atop a mountain of corpses. Those who argue that 'good Labour MPs' can change anything should consider the facts: just 13 voted against the war on former Yugoslavia; 11 voted against attacking Afghanistan and 11 voted for an inquiry into the war on Iraq. A vote for Labour in any shape or form is a vote for relentless war in the service of the ruling class. ●

A vote for Labour is a vote for the City of London

In Britain ruling class parties, whether Labour, Conservative or Lib Dem, have to sustain Britain's financial sector and the City of London's vast international interests and connections to ensure the British economy remains a 'world centre of finance'. Half of the world's top 100 banks, 46% of asset managers and 46% of top insurers have a presence in Britain. 80% of Europe's £440bn hedge fund assets and around 60% of its private equity firms are in Britain. The assets of UK banks are five times Britain's GDP. Britain's foreign assets are also around five times Britain's GDP and 60% of those assets in 2008 (£4,261bn or nearly three times the GDP) are loans and deposits abroad by UK banks, a gigantic usury capital extracting wealth parasitically from the rest of the world. The City is the financial arm of British imperialism and has always been at the heart of the British state.

The Labour Party was elected to office in 1997 as the preferred party of the ruling class, and promptly set about showing why. Within days, the government had handed control of the Bank of England to the City of London. Lord Sainsbury became science minister, Lord Simon from BP advised on trade policies and Martin Taylor, Chief Executive of Barclays Bank, advised on tax and benefits, David Edwards from NatWest was appointed Director of Ofst, Sir Colin Marshall of British Airways became head of the task force on saving

energy in industry and Sir Peter Davis of Prudential advised on 'Welfare to Work'. The chair of Shell advised on the environment, arms manufacturers Rolls Royce, Vickers and BAE Systems all had staff at the Ministry of Defence. BP inserted staff into the British embassy in Washington and the Foreign Office's Middle East desk. It was government by the ruling class for the ruling class: there was never a question of the working class, not even Labour's trade union allies, getting a look-in.

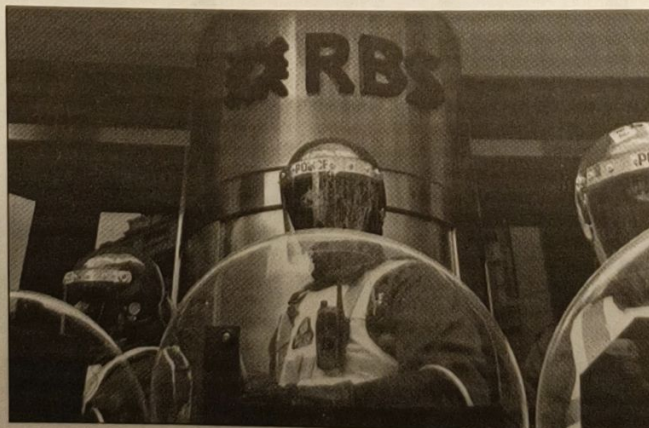
Nothing changed when it came to dealing with the present crisis. The City expected the government to socialise the debts of the banks and financial institutions, and it did so. The City expected its representatives to be directly involved in deciding government policy, and they were. Brown set up the National Economic Council (NEC) in which former investment banker Baroness Videra, now Minister for Economic Competitiveness, plays a leading role alongside the Minister for the City, Lord Myners, who served on the board of GLG Partners, one of the largest hedge funds in the world. Advising the NEC are 17 'business ambassadors', including the chairs of Barclays, Lloyds TSB, Standard Chartered and the London Stock Exchange.

During October and November 2008 the government spent £61.6bn saving the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and HBOS. The following year, one month before announcing

losses of £24.1bn, the largest loss in British corporate history, RBS chief executive Sir Fred Goodwin took early retirement with a £12.3m pension. This March, the deputy chief executive, Gordon Pell, retired on £13.6m. Bob Diamond, head of Barclays investment wing, is being paid £6m as part of an 'incentive scheme' and was given an additional £27m in 2009 for selling his shares in the bank's asset management arm. Labour hasn't the slightest intention of seriously challenging this state of affairs: the City has made it clear that without these bonuses, pension schemes, or golden hellos and good-byes, it would not be possible to sustain its position as the world's leading financial centre. ●



Fred Goodwin, RBS Chief Executive retired with a £12.3m pension



Labour sleaze:

While the opportunist left peddles the illusion that the Labour Party has some connection with the working class, Labour MPs have at every opportunity shown otherwise. Throughout the last 13 years, while relentlessly persecuting the working class, they have shared the same avaricious lifestyles as the rich they so admire, taking favours from millionaires, milking their expenses and lining up lucrative jobs for themselves. Their greed has exposed Parliament for what it is: a cabal of those on the make and the take, a den of corruption, of greased palms, fraud and deceit, and a stepping stone to even greater fortunes.

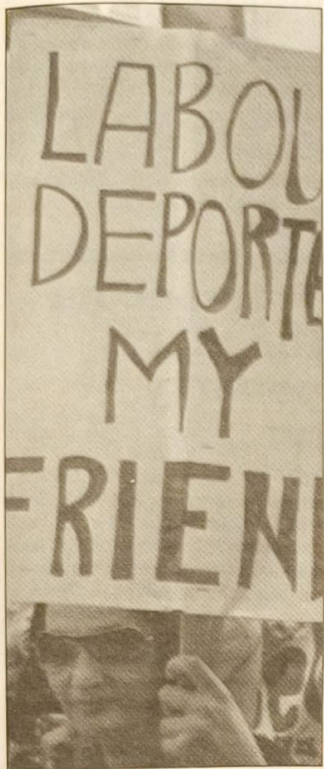
While regularly denouncing the 'benefit fraud' of the poor, Labour MPs have maximised their income through the parliamentary expenses system which could give them over £150,000 per annum on top of their £64,000 salaries. Many made fraudulent claims for a second home allowance of £24,000 per annum, including:

- Home Secretary Jacqui Smith (while she was living with her sister);
- Employment Minister Tony McNulty (for his parents' home);
- Hazel Blears (for three different properties in a single year).

A succession of Labour ministers has had to resign for doing favours for themselves and others:

- Multi-millionaire Labour MP Geoffrey Robinson resigned in 1998 after making an undeclared loan to Labour

● No vote for racists



There are those on the so-called left who argue that a vote for Labour is vital to keep the fascist BNP out. But it is a Labour government that is using the police to harass black people and Muslims, that is driving asylum seekers to destitution, incarcerating and deporting them. It is under Labour that black and Asian workers suffer far higher rates of unemployment and poverty than the white working class, poorer housing and worse educational outcomes.

The BNP demands the deportation of illegal immigrants and 'foreign criminals', financial incentives for immigrants to return to their country of origin and the rejection of the applications of asylum seekers who have passed through safe countries to get to Britain. The Labour government has made all of these demands law. In 2008 Immigration Minister Phil Woolas boasted the government was deporting one person every eight minutes.

Draconian immigration laws, accompanied by increasingly strident racism and hostility, are used to control asylum seekers, who are the victims of Britain's imperialist wars and plunder, and regulate the supply of cheap migrant labour, encouraging temporary immigration when needed and expelling it when no longer

required by capitalism.

When Labour came to office its job was to modify immigration policy to meet the immediate needs of British capital, restructuring the workforce to make it more flexible and – because more European – more white, a move that conveniently panders to the most racist sections of the electorate.

Racist immigration laws

Key parts of the agricultural and food processing industries depend on immigrant workers from the European Union who work in conditions of near servitude and are paid at poverty levels. As apprenticeships have dried up, so a shortage of skills has developed in certain trades, especially construction. Hundreds of thousands of East European workers have filled these as well as less skilled jobs. When there was a shortage of nurses and doctors to meet the requirements of the 2000 NHS Plan, Labour switched on the tap to allow in thousands of doctors from India and nurses and social workers from South Africa and Zimbabwe. The reserve army of labour has become international with the great advantage that the British economy has not born the cost of training the skilled immigrant labour it has imported – a particular expression of parasitism.

Until 2008 there was a variety of routes through which immigrant labour could gain access to jobs in Britain. Now the government has replaced this with a single points-based system for non-EU migrants which rates all immigrants according to their age, qualifications and skills and experience, and directs them to specific sectors of the British economy. Workers from the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe are managed through the Workers' Registration Scheme; although generally highly educated, such workers are overwhelmingly (80%) employed in unskilled jobs. For the first year they have limited rights to benefits; if they are from Bulgaria and Romania their right to work is also limited.

Racist asylum policy

The Labour government has become ever more repressive and brutal towards those migrants, overwhelmingly black, fleeing the devastation created by imperialist war. Labour has:

- fought to prevent asylum seekers from coming to Britain in the first place, and expelled those who do make it as quickly as possible;
- constantly increased the powers of immigration officers to arrest, detain, search and seize property, whilst re-

ducing rights to legal advice or appeal;

- made it illegal (since 2002) for asylum seekers to work and then kept them in destitution, withdrawing benefits from those who do not lodge their asylum claims on arrival;
- denied failed asylum seekers the right to any support unless they agree to 'voluntary return'. It was estimated that 283,500 failed asylum seekers were living homeless in Britain in 2008.
- expanded Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) and Short Term Holding Facilities so that they had 3,105 places in April 2009;
- detained hundreds of children in IRCs, sometimes for months on end, in breach of international treaties on children's rights;
- implemented the New Asylum Model, a 'fast-track' system which gives asylum seekers 11 days to make their case.

In March 2009, then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith stated: '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.' The BNP could hardly express it better. ●

'In March 2002, Labour Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon said, 'I am absolutely confident, in the right conditions, we would be willing to use nuclear weapons'.

●●●●● cabs for hire



Trade and Industry Secretary Peter Mandelson for his luxury London home. Mandelson also resigned.

- Mandelson then resigned a second time in 1999 after trying to hide his role in helping the millionaire Hinduja brothers to gain British passports.

- In 2005, the vindictively self-righteous David Blunkett had to leave the government twice for lying and deception.

- Shahid Malik (Justice Minister) and Jacqui Smith had to resign in 2009 after their fraudulent expenses claims were revealed.

The Labour government has been more than happy to dish out favours to its supporters. Both Lord Gavron and Lord Drayson donated £500,000 when they got their peerages. Labour donors Dr Chris Evans, David Brown of Motorola and Ronald Cohen of Apax Partners were all knighted. Vice-President of the Formula One Association Bernie Ecclestone donated £1m to the Labour Party at the beginning of 1997. A few months later, Formula One motor racing was the one sport exempt from a bill banning tobacco advertising and sponsorship in sport.

In 2006 Tony Blair, backed by Jack Straw, now Justice Minister, forced the Serious Fraud Office to drop criminal investigations into BAE's bribes to prominent Saudis when it won the £43bn Al Yamamah weapons deal with Saudi Arabia. In February 2010 the company was found guilty of false

accounting in this and other deals with the Czech Republic, Tanzania and Romania, but not of bribery. The fine of £285m was a small slap on the wrist for being found out.

In return, Labour MPs, and especially former ministers, have expected rewards for service rendered to big business. David Blunkett received £150,000 'other remuneration' in 2007; Charles Clark £50,000 from three directorships. Among 11 other former Labour ministers finding lucrative jobs in the private sector at the beginning of 2008 were former Health Secretaries Patricia Hewitt (£25-30,000 per year from Boots) and Alan Milburn (£30,000 per year from Lloyd'spharmacy Healthcare). Former minister Stephen Byers described himself on Channel 4 Dispatches as a 'cab for hire' – for up to £5,000 a day; Hewitt and former Defence Minister Hoon pitched their stalls more modestly at £3,000 a day – roughly what someone on JSA would get in a year.

Top of the list is Tony Blair: since resigning as Prime Minister in July 2007 he has made £20m. He controls 14 different companies and foundations as well as serving as an adviser to JPMorgan Bank and Zurich Financial. In March it was revealed that he had kept secret a deal advising UI Energy Corporation, which was given oil drilling rights in Iraq, as well as a £1m deal advising the Kuwaiti royal family.

Some working class party! ●

No vote for state terror No vote for repressive laws!

The main parties are united in promising more policing, more repression and more surveillance. This is no accident. The power of the capitalist state, as Engels pointed out, 'consists not merely of bodies of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds...'. In periods of crisis, organised force becomes a vital necessity for the ruling class to deal with working class resistance.

Labour's 13 years in government have shown it to be an avid promoter of these 'material adjuncts'. It has created a staggering 4,200 new criminal offences since 1997. Under the blanket of 'national security' and its spurious 'war on terror', Labour has attacked civil liberties, terrorised communities, colluded with torture and allowed state agents to get away, quite literally, with murder.

Terrorising communities

The purpose of anti-terrorist laws has always been to attack supporters of national liberation struggles. The original Prevention of Terrorism Act, introduced by the Labour government in 1974, targeted supporters of the struggle for Irish self-determination and the whole Irish community in Britain.

With the new Terrorism Act (TA), introduced by Labour in 2000, the government massively widened the scope of what is defined as 'terrorism' and banned membership or support for a long list of political and religious organisations from around the world. This was followed by the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) 2001, Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, Terrorism Act 2006 and Counter-Terrorism Act 2008. With the exception of some of the proscriptions of 'terrorist' organisations under the 2000 Act, these laws have all targeted Muslims. The 2006 Act created a long list of new criminal offences, including encouraging terrorism, dis-

seminating terrorist publications, making terrorist threats relating to devices, materials or facilities and trespassing on nuclear sites. The Bill originally contained a further specific offence of 'glorifying terrorism'; this was later made part of the provisions of the 'encouragement' section. In 2005, Labour failed in its plans to increase the maximum period of pre-charge police detention from 14 to 90 days – but it was extended to 28 days. A further attempt in the Counter-Terrorism Bill to increase the period to 42 days also failed. These catch-all laws set out to terrorise and criminalise, in particular, the Muslim community.

No vote for war criminals and murderers

Alongside this domestic legislation, Labour also introduced a policy of collusion with torture and illegal rendition. Rendition – the extrajudicial kidnapping and transfer of detainees to a shadowy network of CIA-run or approved 'dark prisons' across the world – is illegal. Collusion with such an operation is also illegal. Torture contravenes international treaties including the Geneva Conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and British domestic legislation. Collusion with torture constitutes a war crime.

Yet in 2002 a new official policy on torture was drawn up by senior government lawyers and security service chiefs and sanctioned at the highest levels of government. As Tony Blair put it, 'the rules of the game have changed'. The new guidance stated that, while agents must not be seen to condone torture, if detainees 'are not within our custody or control, the law does not require you to intervene'. Thus terrorism suspects were 'outsourced' to countries such as Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to be tortured on behalf of the British security services and convicted on testimony extracted through

torture. In March 2009, the United Nations found that Britain:

- co-operated with the US rendition programme to places where detainees were likely to be tortured;
- sent British intelligence officers to interview detainees being held incommunicado and tortured in Pakistan;
- sent interrogators to Guantanamo Bay.

Labour has also proved its willingness to murder. In 2005 Jean Charles de Menezes became another innocent victim in a long line of murders committed by the British state. In April 2009 Ian Tomlinson died after being attacked by police at the G20 demonstration in London. His death highlighted the lengths to which police are now willing to go to intimidate anyone who dares to protest. Press photographers, environmental campaigners, young demonstrators opposed to Zionist murder in Gaza, have all been attacked. These are warning shots fired across the bows of any future opposition to government repression.

Preparation for martial law

In 2004 the government passed the Civil Contingencies Act. Like the TA and ATCSA, this purports to be a response to 'serious threats to the nation', be they man-made or natural. It gives the government unprecedented power in 'an emergency' to prevent people from leaving or entering any area, to deploy troops, ban gatherings, requisition property and disregard existing legislation. Local and regional authorities are required to draw up detailed plans to be implemented by regional 'resilience bodies' made up of Regional Co-ordinators, Regional Military Commanders, police Chief Constables and local council Regional Controllers. They will have complete power in the regions they oversee. In February 2010, Labour published proposals that would see the British Army patrolling city streets. This is a blueprint for martial law. ●

War on the working class

The daily harassment of working class people, particularly black and ethnic groups and the young, is being stepped up. Labour has given permission for drones (unmanned aerial vehicles) to spy on civilians. With 4.2 million CCTV cameras in operation, Britain is the most surveilled society in the world.

Using powers under section 60 of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, the Metropolitan Police

force has vastly increased stops and searches aimed at harassing black youth. These powers, introduced to deal with 'football hooligans' and 'gang fights', have replaced the infamous 'sus' laws and allow police to stop and search without grounds for suspicion in designated areas. In 2008-09 the number increased to 80,000, from 4,400 in 2003-04. Additional stop and search powers, again without grounds for suspicion, can be used

under the Terrorism Act 2000. Under section 44, 200,444 people were stopped in the year ending September 2009. How far these powers are a vehicle for harassment is revealed by the arrest rate of 0.5% and the fact that black and minority ethnic people are much more likely to be stopped.

Anti-social behaviour

In 1998, the Labour government introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

(ASBOs). These orders forbid people from doing certain things or going to certain places. The prosecuting authority only has to show on the balance of probabilities that the conduct is anti-social, and once the order is imposed, breaching it becomes a criminal offence carrying a possible five years' imprisonment. By 2007 there were nearly 15,000 ASBOs in England and Wales.

In 2003 Labour widened the attack

with the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (ASBA) creating new powers to issue injunctions and 'parenting orders', close premises, designate 'problem' tenants for eviction and set up dispersal zones, whereby any group of two or more people can be compelled to leave or face arrest. ASBA also amended the Public Order Act so that the police can impose conditions on any 'static demonstration' of two or more people. •



Vote Labour to lock up the poor

More repressive policing and laws mean more people go to prison. During 18 years of Conservative government to 1997, the prison population of England and Wales rose from 42,364 to 60,131. Since 1997 it has risen to 84,073. Britain has more life sentenced prisoners than Germany, France, Russia and Turkey put together. Having already added electronic tagging, minimum sentences, the two-strikes life sentence, ASBOs, control orders and indefinite detention for 'foreign terrorists' to the pre-existing regime, in 2003 the government overhauled the entire sentencing structure and created a system where open-ended sentences are the norm for all violent or sex offences.

All this needs new prisons. Within a week of Labour's election in 1997, Home Secretary Jack Straw announced that all new prisons would be privately built and run. Under Labour, punishment has become big business with Serco, G4S, GEO and other corporations competing to run prisons, immigration removal centres, court services, electronic monitoring, prison transport and a plethora of other 'services'. Current plans are to create a

further 20,000 privately-run prison places by 2014 in a programme costing up to £4.5bn. •

Vote Labour for more inequality

Inequality has increased during the years of the Labour government. Significant economic growth until 2008 could not re-create the conditions of the post-war boom when it was possible to guarantee the relatively privileged conditions of higher paid workers and the middle class while sustaining adequate living standards for the working class.

Between 1996/97 and 2007/08, the income share of the poorest 20% fell from 5.9% to 5.3% whilst that for the richest 20% rose from 43.2% to 45.6%. The ratio of the income share of the richest to the poorest 20% rose from 7.3:1 to 8.7:1. A report, *The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2007/08*, concluded that 'the large increase in inequality which took place in the second half of the 1980s has not been reversed'. A recent London School of Economics report shows that households in the top 10% have a total wealth 100 times those in the bottom 10%, with households in

the top 1% each possessing a minimum wealth of £2.6m. •

Labour cuts benefits

On coming into office in 1997 Labour proceeded with the draconian Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime, and over the years has continued to tighten eligibility for the miserly income it provides. Today's JSA has fallen by 25% against average earnings since 1997, and now stands at 10.5% of average earnings, half of what unemployment benefit was on average from its introduction in 1912 until 1979 when the Tories tied it to inflation.

Income support levels for those who are not working have fallen under Labour. For single people over 24 without children, they fell from 65% of the poverty line in 1997/98 to only 50% in 2008/09; for couples without children they fell from 60% to 46%; for couples with children, income support levels remained 20% below the poverty line. Labour has punished such people as the 'undeserving poor'. Over half a million suffer fraud investigations each year to ensure they get no more than the pittance they are due, while the recent Welfare Act demands that virtually everyone claiming benefits will have to do forced labour. •

Vote Labour for more poverty

The number of people living in poverty (defined as below 60% of median household income after housing costs) in 1979 was 7.9 million; by 1997, it had risen to 14 million. After 12 years of Labour, however, it was still 13.5 million and growing under the impact of the financial crisis. Pensioners fared better: 29.1% were living in poverty in 1996/97; this fell to 17.6% in 2004/05 but is now rising and stood at 19% in 2007/08.

Although the proportion of children living in poverty fell from 34.1% in 1996/97 to 28.4% in 2004/05, it then started to rise, and by 2007/08 had reached 31%. In 2007/08 there were 4.0 million children living in poverty (2.1 million in 1979 and 4.3 million in 1997), of whom nearly half lived in persistent poverty (below the poverty line in three out of four successive years). Labour failed to meet its initial target – reducing child poverty by 25% by 2004/05, and its second target as well – halving child poverty by 2010. As increases in state expenditure on child-related tax credits and benefits tailed off from 2004, the proportion living in poverty began to rise again. •

A vote for Labour means health and education privatisation

The state provision of health and education has become a barrier to capitalism's desperate search for new sources of profit. Why? Because health workers and teachers in a nationalised system do not produce profit – they can only do so under a privatised system. That is why Labour has continued the privatisation of state assets such as council housing and services, and especially health and education. Inevitably the working class gets poorer provision.

Labour is bad for your health

Labour used the NHS Plan in 2000 and the associated increase in NHS spending to extend private sector involvement. It forged ahead with PFI contracts, where private companies build new hospitals which the NHS leases back. Currently, PFI is funding over 100 new hospitals worth £10.9bn. The cost to the NHS by 2048 will be an enormous £62.6bn.

From 2002, Labour started to recreate the internal market through Payment by Results whereby Primary Care Trusts commission services from hospitals and pay them according to how much work they do. This requires an army of accountants, managers and management consultants. There was a 133% increase in the number of senior managers from 2001/2 to 2005/06 and

a further 91% increase since; more than double the 35% increase in the numbers of doctors and nurses.

Labour has handed private companies lucrative contracts for clinical services. First were the Independent Sector Treatment Centres that carry out the simplest procedures leaving the NHS with the most complex cases, wasting £220m. Now Labour plans to privatise services worth some £15bn a year provided by 400,000 community health professionals (district nurses, speech therapists, health visitors, etc) and 200,000 support workers. Labour is also pushing the creation of hundreds of polyclinics run by the private sector, and wants to sell hospital sites worth over £20bn and lease them back.

The resultant obsession with targets has killed patients. In Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust in Kent, 269 people died from *c-difficile* infection; there were hundreds of deaths on filthy wards at Basildon and Thurrock University NHS Hospitals Foundation Trust, and an enquiry into Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust revealed 1,200 excess deaths over three years and that patients had been treated with appalling contempt.

Inevitably there was no reduction in health inequality: people living in the poorest areas will die on average seven years earlier than those in the

richest areas. Labour also failed in a commitment to reduce infant mortality for the poorest from 13% above the national average to 12% over a 13-year period. In fact the gap has widened: in 2004-06 infant mortality among manual workers was 5.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, 17% higher than the national average of 4.8 per 1,000.

Education for sale

'Education, education, education', Labour's slogan for the 1997 general election, was the call of a market stall trader. Whatever could be marketised, has been: school cleaning, dinners, pay roll services, insurance, building maintenance, teacher training, examinations, skills training, playing fields, transport, sports facilities, special needs. Where it has not been able to outsource educational provision, the government is now prepared to give away schools to anyone 'accredited'.

The extra money that Labour has provided for education has gone into the pockets of charities, churches, city businesses, high wages for managers, inspectors and cronies in hundreds of quangos. In 1997, Labour promised to reduce infant class sizes to below 30; today over 22,000 classes still have more than 31 pupils. Average class size in British primary schools is the fourth worst in the OECD group of 30

developed nations. More pupils are being taught by non-qualified staff as the number of poorly-paid teaching assistants has increased by 200% over the last ten years compared to a 10% increase in qualified teachers. No wonder Britain was ranked 17th out of the 21 most advanced nations on educational attainment in 2009.

Educational inequality remains. By the age of 11, students receiving free school meals (FSM – an inadequate measurement that excludes the majority of the low paid) are twice as likely to miss basic literacy and numeracy standards. Just over 6% of FSM pupils take A levels, compared to about 40% overall and in 2008 a mere 176 (about 0.5%) of these students received three A grades. Today as ever, parental income remains the most significant contributor to educational success.

Alongside this, Labour strengthened the grip of centralised directives on educational institutions. Children's records of achievement follow them throughout school life. Incidents of bad attitude to school and any action that fails to conform to state standards are permanently recorded.

In 2007, the United Nations international children's organisation ranked Britain's young people at the bottom of the well-being league table of all developed countries.

Vote Labour for more council house sales

In 1997 Labour planned to sell 250,000 council houses a year. As a result of its policy not to build new council housing, it is estimated that by 2011 there will be five million people on local authority waiting lists and, according to the National Housing Federation, households on the waiting list in some areas would have to wait 280 years for a home.

One in seven children grows up in poor housing. Labour broke its 2004 promise to update the 1935 overcrowding standard. In 2010 more than a million children live in overcrowded homes, while the number of households in overcrowded accommodation has risen to more than 650,000, the highest level for over 14 years. Despite the desperate housing crisis for working class people, Labour built only 375 council houses in 2009. Housing association rents are £8.96 a week higher than for equivalent council houses, and more working class people are forced into substandard private rented accommodation.

More than half of social housing tenants have an annual income of less than £10,000, and 55% are unemployed. In February 2008, Housing Minister Caroline Flint suggested that unemployed people in council housing could risk losing their homes if they don't prove that they are looking for work. Later, Labour proposed that continued council tenancy should depend on continual means testing. The principle is the same: Labour wants to means test council house tenancies and so maintain its drive to abolish council housing completely. •

Afghanistan – new imperialist onslaught

In the region of Marjah, the target for Operation Moshtarak, 26,000 people had to flee their homes according to the UN; houses and irrigation ditches were destroyed, farmers arrested and homes and schools occupied by US forces. 15,000 US, British and Afghan troops were deployed against an estimated 1,000 anti-occupation fighters. The use of such overwhelming force was intended to terrorise the Afghan people and divide them from the anti-occupation forces. Most of the anti-occupation forces simply withdrew. As one of their leaders told the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*, 'We are men from the villages, we know the area, we can hide our guns in the village and we can use them again when we have the opportunity.' A US military adviser was soon admitting, 'The Taliban are re-organising. The capability they lost two weeks ago is coming back.'

Throughout the operation, the capitalist media led us to believe that Marjah was an important Taliban stronghold with a population of 80,000. In fact, Marjah is little more than a scattering of farming villages. Two US military academics disparagingly described it as a 'nearly worthless postage stamp of real estate that has tied down about half of the combat power of the international coalition'. The media deception was intentional: to make an increasingly sceptical western audience believe that major battles could still be won and so delay the drawdown of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). As General McChrystal said, 'This is all a war of perceptions': a phrase taken directly from General Petraeus's US handbook on counter-insurgency operations, where he emphasises the importance of 'establishing the counter-insurgency narrative' and conducting it 'continuously using the news media'.

Puppet governors

The imperialists claim their strategy is to clear areas of anti-occupation forces and then hold the ground by gaining the trust of local people through reconstruction projects and by establishing strong local governance. US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry has admitted, however, that no 'trained and honest' Afghan authority exists at any level and that it 'would take years to build'. The occupying powers intend to drop in puppet governors and teams of US and British diplomats; what McChrystal calls 'government in a box'. First results were not promising. In Shawal, near Marjah, people proved reluctant to accept US aid. After two weeks, no community leader had come forward to reveal where bombs were planted or to offer hospitality to the Afghan army.

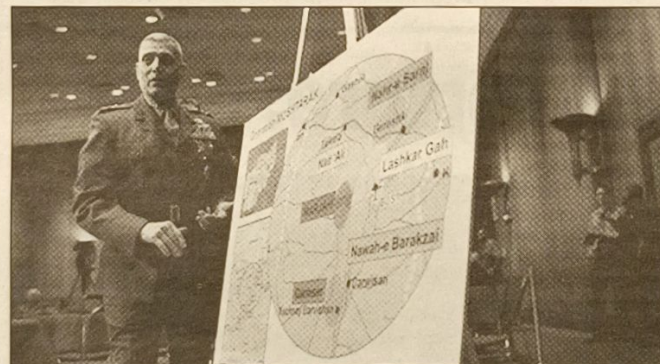
Haji Shamsullah explained, 'The British and you have the guns, the Taliban have the guns, we are just the people whose lands you are using to do your fighting. We hear fine words now, but will you be here in the future to protect us when the Taliban come back to punish us for co-operating with you? Or will you do what you have done in the past, come here, say fine words and then just leave?' Captain Duke Reim, US commander in Pashmul said that 95% of the population are Taliban or help the Taliban, while the local governor admitted, 'People here are on the side of the insurgency and have no trust in the government.' When Afghan President Karzai visited Marjah after the attack, local leader Haji Abdul Aziz told the *New York Times*, 'The warlords who ruled us for the past eight years, those people whose hands are red with the people's blood,

In February, when the occupying forces launched their latest onslaught in Afghanistan, US commander General McChrystal claimed that his priority was to avoid civilian casualties. Within two days of the start of Operation Moshtarak, 12 civilians (including six children) were killed by NATO missiles in the Nad-e-ali district. A week later, 27 civilians were killed when their minibuses were hit by an airstrike in Uruzgan. JIM CRAVEN reports.

those people who killed hundreds – they are still ruling over the nation.'

The man chosen as new puppet governor for the district, Haji Abdul Zahir, lived in Germany for many years. On his first visit to Marjah, he stayed for just two hours and never strayed more than 100 yards from his plane. President Karzai's preferred choice for the job was Abdul Rahman Jan, former chief of the district police, a force described as 'so corrupt and ruthless – their trademark was summary executions – that many residents welcomed the Taliban as a more humane alternative'. Haji Abdul Jabar, another puppet governor already installed in Arghandab, the 'gateway' to Kandahar, told the *Financial Times*, 'I don't trust the local people, so I don't go out much. They may try to shoot me.'

US special envoy Richard Holbrooke has admitted that, in the long-term, the imperialist forces 'can't occupy every piece of terrain, so the real key is building and transferring control to Afghan security forces', which he describes as 'an extremely difficult part of a (daunting) process'. The Afghan people do not trust the police or the army. Canadian military chaplains have accused Afghan soldiers of raping young boys. They were told by ISAF commanders 'not to interfere in incidents in which Afghan forces were having sex with children' and that, despite being against Afghan law, it 'should be seen as a cultural issue'.



US Marine Corps Lieutenant General John Paxton briefing US senators on Operation Moshtarak, targeting Marjah region, where 26,000 people had to flee their homes

Problems mount

99 ISAF personnel were killed in January and February; by far the worst winter months of the war for occupation forces. A National Audit Office report said there was 'a very real risk of increased casualties' and hospitals might have to displace civilians for military patients. An international conference in London in January agreed to establish a \$650 million slush fund to try and buy off some of the anti-occupation fighters. But Major-General Michael Flynn, senior US intelligence officer in Afghanistan, said that the insurgency was 'increasingly effective' and could 'sustain itself indefinitely' and that the Taliban had 'shadow governors' in 33 out of the 34 provinces. Support for the war among many NATO members remains weak. The Dutch government collapsed in February over the question of support

for the war, and its 2,000 troops will now be withdrawn. 3,000 Canadians are also due to leave later this year.

In February, a joint US/Pakistan operation in Karachi captured the Afghan Taliban's second in command, Abdul Ghani Baradar. Commentators speculated that the arrest marked a new era of co-operation. The Pakistani military, however, refused to hand over Baradar and six other Taliban leaders and denied the CIA access to them. A request for extradition to Afghanistan was blocked by the Punjab high court. Many in the Pakistani ruling class regard the Taliban as allies and Afghanistan as a strategic rear-guard against aggression by India. Baradar has previously negotiated with Karzai. The Pakistani military will want to use him as a conduit for further talks to put pressure on the US for an early negotiated settlement that is in its favour and against what it regards as Indian interference in Afghanistan. Pakistan has also refused US demands to immediately launch a new wave of attacks on Taliban strongholds in the border region.

More carnage planned for Kandahar

The imperialists cannot win. They will eventually have to negotiate with the anti-occupation forces. Unofficial talks have been going on for several years. President Karzai is trying to enlist the support of Saudi Arabia to arrange

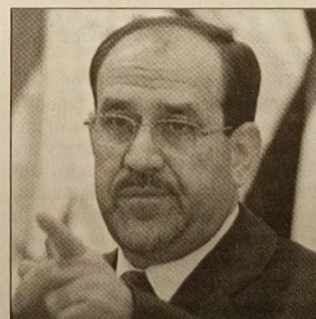
Iraq: elections serve occupation



Iraqi Vice President Dr Tariq Hashimi and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Washington, February 2010

The Iraqi parliamentary elections at the beginning of March demonstrated how the imperialist occupation has 'enshrined sectarianism'. The strategy of dividing opposition along sectarian lines and then tying factions into a 'legitimate' electoral process is a well-tried imperialist tactic for emasculating national liberation movements: most recently in the so-called power sharing process in the Irish Six Counties. In Iraq, the imperialists armed the Shia militias for their battle against Sunni insurgents, and then paid and armed the defeated Sunnis when they had to seek the protection of the occupying forces. The imperialists then attacked the main Shia anti-occupation force, Moqtada Al Sadr's Mehdi Army, which was eventually persuaded to lay down its arms following secret talks between Iran and the US. All the groups stood in the election but parties and voting predominantly reflected the sectarian divisions. A Sunni in Ararat, quoted in *The Independent*, said 'I want to vote for a secular party, but everything now is divided along religious lines.' A Shia worker in Najaf said 'Democracy in Iraq is chaotic. Everyone lies.'

Before the election, the Shia dominated government of Nouri Al Maliki banned 500, mainly Sunni, candidates from standing. This number was later reduced to 145, but several hundred former officers and provincial officials were refused the right to stand for election. Among those banned was Saleh Al Mutlaq, leader of the second largest Sunni group and part of the Iraqiya coalition led by Iyad Allawi. Since the devastated Iraqi economy relies mainly on state oil revenues and half the population has to rely on state food rations, the government parties, particularly Al Maliki's State of Law coalition, were able to buy votes with government patronage.



Nouri al-Maliki

No solutions for Iraqi people

The overall turnout for the election was 62%, well down on the 75% turnout in the 2005 election, despite the fact that nearly all Sunnis boycotted that election. By 18 March, with 80% of votes counted, Al Maliki's and Allawi's coalitions were running neck and neck. However, no party will gain a clear majority and it will take several weeks to form a new coalition government. The US will interfere in negotiations in order to weaken the pro-Iranian parties and strengthen Allawi's position. Allawi is a former US agent and oil executive and was appointed by them as first interim prime minister.

Although the Kurds predominantly voted for Kurdish parties, Iraqiya took half the votes in the disputed city of Kirkuk. The Kurdish regional government hopes to make it the capital of an autonomous region, a proposition opposed by the Iraqi national government and by Turkey, which oppresses a Kurdish national liberation movement in Turkey and has threatened to invade Kurdish Iraq. 40% of Iraqi oil reserves lie within the Kirkuk region. Kirkuk could become the focus of renewed violence.

In February, US commander General Odierno said that there were still 96,000 troops in Iraq. Although these troops are not supposed to be involved in combat roles, they are acting as 'advisers', embedded in the Iraqi security forces, selecting targets and directing operations backed by US air support. The Iraqi Defence Minister Abdul Qader Jassin said in March that the armed forces modernisation programme would not be completed until 2020. The US/Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement allows for a 'long-term relationship in economic, diplomatic, cultural and security fields'. Tens of thousands of US troops will occupy their three main bases and their huge embassy, long after the so-called withdrawal is complete.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi people continue to suffer the consequences of imperialist occupation. In Fallujah, a large number of children have been born with deformed limbs and developmental problems. The situation is so bad that women in the city are advised not to get pregnant. Fallujah was the victim of a massive bombardment and massacre by US forces in 2004. The worst of the birth defects are in the working class Al Julian district, scene of the most intense fighting.

Jim Craven

Israel: Zionists out of control

BOB SHEPHERD

On 9 March, the Zionists announced plans to build 1,600 new homes in Ramat Shlomo, an ultra-orthodox settlement in East Jerusalem. The declaration amounted to a very public humiliation for US Vice President Joe Biden, who was on a visit to Israel at the time. Later, at an Israeli Cabinet meeting on 21 March, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu arrogantly declared: 'Our policy on Jerusalem is the same policy followed by all Israeli governments in the last 42 years, and it has not changed... As far as we are concerned, building in Jerusalem is the same as building in Tel Aviv.'

His timing was deliberate: it was just before he was due to fly to the US to address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) – the leading Zionist lobby group in the US – and afterwards to meet President Obama.

The purpose of Biden's visit was to help solidify the agreement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to restart the peace process through proximity talks with Israel. Proximity talks are not face-to-face but are conducted through an intermediary. Abbas had agreed to this step even though Israel had not made any formal commitment to halt settlement construction in East Jerusalem, his supposed pre-condition.

The Ramat Shlomo settlement plan is one of the biggest in East Jerusalem in recent years and the proposals include a new trunk road and many public facilities, ones which will of course be denied to Palestinians. Biden reflected his humiliation at the announcement when he said at the end of his trip: 'I condemn the decision of the government of Israel to advance planning for new housing units.'

The Zionist state has laid down a challenge to US imperialism's attempts to curb the open provocations of Israeli



Palestinian school girls demonstrate in Gaza city, 16 March 2010

settlement expansion and its hopes both of restarting peace talks between Abbas and Netanyahu, and of rehabilitating US imperialism's image in the Middle East and the wider Islamic world. However, the US will find it hard to rein in the racist arrogance of the Zionists who believe they have an absolute right to build anywhere in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

On 15 March US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stepped up the pressure on the Zionists when she demanded to know whether the settlement announcement was a 'bureaucratic mistake, or a deliberate act, carried out for political reasons.' The following day, Chief of US military forces in Central Asia General Petraeus, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, cited 'insufficient progress' in resolving the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict as a significant impediment to achieving US goals in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Iran, and as encouraging 'anti-American sentiment.'

Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* highlighted the scale of the proposed expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem, reporting that the Israeli government has plans for a total of 50,000

new housing units in East Jerusalem in the coming years. Further pressure on Israel to curb its settlement activity in the city came on 19 March when the Quartet of Middle East mediators – Russia, US, EU and UN – called on 'the government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001; and to refrain from demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem'. The statement also called for the end of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by 2012. This is clearly pie in the sky but it does put Israel under increased pressure to allow some forms of talks to take place with Abbas.

Clinton spelled out the US's position on the need to curb settlement expansion and to re-engage with Abbas and his pro-imperialist cronies when she addressed the AIPAC conference on 22 March. While emphasising the 'rock solid' nature of the US's commitment to Israel's security, she called for an end to settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 'the status quo is unsustainable... new construction in East Jerusalem or the West Bank under-

mines mutual trust and endangers the proximity talks that are the first step toward the full negotiations that both sides want and need'. She put this in the context of normalising Israel's relationship with its Arab neighbours: 'The way forward is clear: two states for two peoples living side by side in peace and security, with peace between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon, and normal relations between Israel and all the Arab states.'

When Netanyahu met with President Obama on 23 March, he was subjected to a series of diplomatic slights. There was no joint photo opportunity, no joint statement; at one point Obama left Netanyahu to stew whilst he dined with his family. Later, *Haaretz* said, 'The Prime Minister leaves America disgraced, isolated and altogether weaker than when he came... Instead of a reception as a guest of honour, Netanyahu was treated as a problem child, an army private ordered to do laps around the base for slipping up at roll call.'

This diplomatic pressure could be overtaken by the upsurge of resistance of Palestinian youth in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On 16 March thousands of Palestinians responded to Hamas's call for a Day of Rage against the settlement expansion in East Jerusalem and the inauguration

of a new synagogue built near the Al Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem. Over 100 Palestinians were injured in the demonstrations but the protests continued across the West Bank in the days that followed. Israeli repression has also continued. On 20 March, Israeli settlers from Bracha attacked the village of Iraq Burin, just south of Nablus. When villagers came out of their homes to defend themselves and their village, two Palestinian youths, 15 and 17, were shot and killed by the Israeli military. On 21 March, two more young Palestinians aged 17 were shot and killed in the Nablus area after being detained by Israeli troops.

The US realises that it needs to be seen to be able to restrain the forces of Israeli fascism if it wishes to pursue its wider strategy in the Middle East. Abbas and the Palestinian Authority are eager to play the US game and have now indicated that a Zionist commitment to freeze settlement building in East Jerusalem for three years would be enough for them to agree to start the proximity talks. However Netanyahu remains defiant about the settlement construction and it will take more than diplomatic slights from the US to rein in the Zionist monster.

Solidarity with the Palestinian resistance! Boycott Israeli goods! ■

Labour expels Mossad agent

On 23 March, Britain expelled an Israeli official who was in charge of Mossad operations at its London embassy. The action was in response to the use that Israeli agents made of 12 cloned British passports when they assassinated Hamas leader Mahmoud Al Mabhouh in a Dubai hotel on 19 January. Up to 27 Israeli agents had been involved in the operation, using forged passports from Ireland, France and Australia as well.

Labour Foreign Minister Miliband said that Britain had no prior knowledge of the murder, and declared that the use by Israel of British passports was 'intolerable'. As well as expelling the Israeli diplomat, Miliband handed his Israeli counterpart, Avigdor Lieberman, a letter seeking assurances that Israel would never again 'misuse' British passports. In 1986 Israel had

been found to have used forged British passports and had given an undertaking then not to do so again. Like a lot of Israeli assurances, it was clearly not worth the paper it was written on. Miliband's diplomatic rebuke came at the same time as Netanyahu was being told by US President Obama to stop the settlement construction in East Jerusalem. However, Israel's mass selling *Yediot Aharonot* daily said that Israel had got off lightly, given that the agent can be replaced within six weeks. The paper concluded: 'Whoever used forged British passports knew that he might have to pay the price. And the price set by the British yesterday was a clearance sale price.'

Break all diplomatic links with Israel!

Bob Shepherd

British collusion with torture: the cover-up continues

CAT WIENER

In February this year, the British government suffered a major defeat over its attempts to cover up British security services' collusion in the torture of terrorist suspects. Despite a year-long battle by Foreign Secretary David Miliband to prevent the publication of secret evidence in the case of Binyam Mohamed, the three most senior Court of Appeal judges in the country decided that the reasons for publishing were 'compelling' because they concerned the involvement of British agents in 'the abhorrent practice of torture'.

This followed a US court finding in November 2009 that 'the [US] government does not challenge or deny the accuracy of Binyam Mohamed's story of brutal treatment'. That brutal treatment included being held by the US in Pakistan before being illegally rendered first to a CIA 'dark prison' in Afghanistan, then to Morocco, where his genitals were slashed with a scalpel, while M15 fed questions, via CIA officers, to his torturers. Finally he was sent to Guantanamo Bay.

In their ruling, the judges found that M15 did not respect human rights, had not renounced participation in coercive interrogation techniques, had deliberately misled the Intelligence Services Committee (ISC) that was supposed to oversee its operations and operated a 'culture of suppression' in relation to government ministers and the court. The behaviour of M15 agent 'Witness B', who had previously given evidence about his interrogation of Binyam Mohamed in Pakistan while the latter was being tortured at the CIA's behest, was not that of a rogue individual but, rather, 'characteristic of the service as a whole'.

The Director General of M15, Jonathan Evans, reacted furiously, accusing the courts and media of providing propaganda to the enemy and denying that M15 ever colluded with torture. Home Secretary Alan Johnson rejected the torture accusations as 'a ludicrous lie' and Gordon Brown intoned the government mantra: 'We do not torture and we do not ask others to do so on our behalf'. All, of course, were lying. This is why the



Binyam Mohamed

government refuses to make public the guidance issued to the security services in 2002, which undermined the absolute prohibition on any kind of collusion with or even acquiescence to the use of torture. Under the new rules, agents were informed that if detainees 'are not within our custody or control, the law does not require you to intervene' to prevent torture. This was the green light to outsource torture. The case of Binyam Mohamed is only the tip of the iceberg.

What it has done, however, in the words of his lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith, is open 'the Pandora's box of immoral decisions made at the highest level of government'; as he has argued, responsibility for this criminal policy goes 'all the way to Number 10'.

Former British ambassador Craig Murray raised concerns about CIA torture in Uzbekistan between 2002 and 2004 only to be told: 'It is not illegal for us to obtain intelligence gained

by torture, provided that we did not do the torture ourselves.' He continued: 'I was told that it had been decided that as a matter of War on Terror policy we should now obtain intelligence from torture, following discussion between Jack Straw and [MI6 chief] Richard Dearlove... In conclusion, I can testify that beyond any doubt the British government has for at least six years had a considered but secret policy of co-operation with torture abroad. This policy was cleared by government legal advisers and approved by Jack Straw as Secretary of State.' It was also cleared by then Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Now the Labour government is continuing the cover-up. Six former Guantanamo detainees – Binyam Mohamed, Bisher Al Rawi, Jamil El Banna, Richard Belmar, Omar Deghayes and Martin Mubanga – are suing the British ministers and security services for complicity in their detention, torture and ill-treatment. In a move criticised by lawyers as 'incompatible with basic concepts of civil law', the government is demanding that the case be heard in secret, with the six men represented by 'special advocates' who have been vetted and appointed by the court, and who will be able to see the government's secret evidence but not discuss it with their clients. The fight to expose the government's complicity with torture and illegal rendition must continue. Bring Labour war criminals to justice. ■

Unpicking the Zionist myth

The invention of the Jewish people, Shlomo Sand, translated from the Hebrew by Yael Lotan, Verso 2009, 332pp, £18.99. ISBN 978-1-84467-422-0

'I could not have gone on living in Israel without writing this book. I don't think books can change the world – but when the world begins to change, it searches for different books'

Shlomo Sand, 2008

The world is indeed changing. Since the recognition of an Israeli state by the United Nations in 1947 and the extension of its borders in 1967 by war and occupation, Zionism* has demanded and received unconditional support from the US and Europe and silence on its record of oppression of the Palestinian people. Today this collusion is breaking down and the Zionist state of Israel can no longer claim that the exceptional tragedy of the European Holocaust puts it beyond reason and responsibility for its actions. Israel is being ever more exposed as a racist, apartheid state with a record of war crimes and crimes against humanity

Politics and archaeology

At the heart of this excellent book is the thesis that there is no such thing as 'the Jewish people'. Sand comprehensively unpicks the dominant Zionist narrative, what he calls the 'mythistory', by reviewing a mass of historical research, including archaeological finds that were buried, neglected or banished by the Zionists. He describes how in the 1950s and 1960s Zionist archaeologists deliberately configured excavations and discoveries to match the heritage story of the Old Testament. So, for example, Moshe Dayan, Israeli Chief of Staff, minister of defence and amateur archaeologist, collected ancient artefacts, 'some of them stolen', and systematically destroyed 'ancient mosques, even from the eleventh century', in order to construct a past that matched the biblical text (p113). With carefully referenced evidence, Sand contends that these Zionist investigators knew that the celebrated biblical kingdoms of David and Solomon were relatively small settlements inflated by the foundation myths of the early historical period. Most significantly, he says there is no substantial evidence of a forced exile by the Romans of Jewish people in the first century after the fall of the Second Temple. On the contrary, all investigation supports the view that the majority of the population remained in Judea and Canaan as a conquered people, and lived on through the centuries as peasant farmers. They were converted, willingly or otherwise, to add to the growing numbers of Christians and Muslims, under the powers of the Byzantine and Caliphate Empires.

Khazars and Judaism

The Jewish religion also continued to grow and spread, particularly in the

area between the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountains then known as Khazaria. Judaism was as active and as proselytising a religion as the other two monotheisms, converting many kings and tribal chiefs who in turn imposed their chosen religion on their subjects. Furthermore, a range of different ethnicities and peoples embraced and adapted the Jewish religion into a variety of sects. Records indicate the existence from the fifth century of a great Khazar Empire on the steppes of Asia, ruled by Jewish monarchs who conquered, enslaved

Arthur Koestler versus Zionist mythistory

The history Sand introduces to the reader is neither original nor new, but one that is authenticated by a historical record that has been deliberately buried. Arthur Koestler, born in Hungary in 1905, was a close supporter of the Zionist right-wing leader Vladimir Jabotinsky in his youth. He joined the Communist Party in Berlin in 1931 and worked undercover for the Comintern in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. He resigned from the Communist Party in 1938 in disgust with Stalin. His popular anti-communist book, *Darkness at Noon*, was published in 1940 to great acclaim. In 1976 Koestler published *The Thirteenth Tribe*:



Between the 5th and 13th centuries the Khazar Empire was ruled by Jewish monarchs

and expanded their domain for hundreds of years. The torrential Mongolian invasion led by Genghis Khan in the early thirteenth century swept aside the Khazar kingdom, along with neighbouring societies. This invasion from the east depopulated the steppe lands which perished with the destruction of the ancient irrigation systems that had supported agrarian food cultivation and settlements. A small Khazar community was all that remained and it survives today in the foothills of the mountains of the Caucasus. Khazarians retreated into the western Ukraine, Polish and Lithuanian territories. There, they formed the majority of what came to be known as Ashkenazi Jews, and settled in eastern Europe as a population quite dislocated from the Semitic tribes of the Old Testament.

the Khazar Empire and its heritage, drawing on the earlier research and collecting together the evidence for the Khazar Empire. Koestler's study concludes that:

'The large majority of surviving Jews in the world is in eastern Europe – and thus mainly of Khazar origin. If so, this would mean that their ancestors came not from the Jordan but from the Volga, not from Canaan but from the Caucasus, once believed to be the cradle of the Aryan race; and that genetically they are more closely related to the Hun, Uigur and Magyar tribes than to the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' (cited p239)

The Thirteenth Tribe is focused on the origins of the Ashkenazi, or European, Jews and does not extend to the history of the Sephardic Jewish communities of Spain and Portugal or

the Judaised people of Ethiopia and North Africa. Koestler was puzzled by the hostile reception to his book because he remained a Zionist and supported the State of Israel, which he regarded as 'based on international law' and not on 'the hypothetical origins of the Jewish people, nor on the mythological covenant of Abraham with God' (p239). When the book appeared, Israel's ambassador to Britain described it as 'an anti-Semitic action financed by the Palestinians' (p240).

Historiography

Sand's book has much to offer, even to those uninterested in Old Testament stories or who are past caring whether the displacement of the Palestinians is carried out by Zionists of Semitic or other tribal origins. It is a book about history and historical truth in general and readers will find their critical faculties sharpened and understanding deepened by this study. History down the ages informs us not just about the past but also about the historian. Sand says, quoting the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce that 'any history is first of all a product of the time of its writing'. Historians, as people, as scholars, as professionals, as members of educational establishments or as record keepers, present their work from a contemporary and ideological standpoint. This evaluation of history is known as 'historiography' and leads to close examination of the sources, theories, methods of research and writing of historians. Sand subjects the 'Zionist historiography of the Jewish past' (p19), to a rigorous examination of the values it promotes and the truths that it ignores or buries.

The rise of the nation state

Departments of Jewish History in Israel and universities around the world promote an ethno-national history of Judaism that derives from 19th century Zionism. This was the period when other 'nationalisms' arose as expressions of the needs of capitalism or 'modern industrial societies' as Sand says (p36). In an interesting review of the rise of modern nationalism, Sand describes the emergence of new nations from the collapsing empires and disintegrating peasant communities as coming from above. Ruling powers employed deliberate, ideological practices, rituals and ceremonies designed to foster an inclusive national identity. Historians justified the new power elites by writing, or re-writing, histories of a national past, reviving and inventing distant figures to serve the present need.

Modern nationalisms, however, are characterised by their inclusiveness. It was their purpose, as it largely remains today, to create a national territory in which all citizens are members of the community, that is, of the state. Modern institutions cut across earlier identities replacing old emotional and historical ties with different structures and beliefs for the new urban and industrial masses. Even the rise of fascism in Italy under Benito Mussolini in the early 20th century continued the inclusive political nationalism of Italy's independence heroes, Mazzini and Garibaldi, whose vision of a united Italy swept from the Sicilian South to the Alpine north in the 19th century. It was only in 1938 that Italian fascism added on an ethno-biological antagonism to its population of Jewish and Croatian origin (Sand p59).

Some emerging nationalisms, however, continued to cultivate ancient tribal ethnocentric myths about blood ties and the original 'race people', as

the core. Political leaders called upon these reactionary myths to dominate the national mood in times of political upsurge and pressure. The rulers of Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia resisted the modernising call for a national identity on the political basis of citizenship. Bismarck's consolidation of the German Federation into a new Germany utilised the 'mythistory' of a 'people-race' originating in the distant past to configure a modern military state that had to reconcile Catholics and Protestants, Prussians and Slavs, as well as Jews, within its new national borders. Above all, the state had to stamp its authority on the hopes of a new bourgeois class who demanded emancipation from the relics of feudal control. The wave of revolutions in 1848 led by liberals and radicals in Germany were defeated by violent suppression. Marx, Engels and others in the fledgling socialist movement were imprisoned, persecuted and expelled.

Zionism and heredity

The temporary defeat of class politics in Germany and central Europe ushered in a period of reaction in which the ruling class resorted to a reinvigorated racial nationalism, speaking of 'blood and soil'. Zionist intellectuals likewise moved the ground of debate to racial lines. The new biological science of heredity was used to promote ethno-biological nationalism. The large Yiddish-speaking communities of east and central Europe became not only the victims of anti-Jewish pogroms, but also the object of contempt from the young Zionist movement. The rich, diverse cultural histories of the people of 'Yiddishland' (p247) were enclosed in the pseudo-scientific terms of the 'blood ties that exist in the Israelite family' (p259). The founders of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau, Martin Buber and others, spoke about the national identity inherent in man's 'blood'. In the words of Vladimir Jabotinsky:

'It is physically impossible for a Jew descended from several generations of pure, unmixed Jewish blood to adopt the mental state of a German or a Frenchman, just as it is impossible for a Negro to cease to be a Negro' (p261).

This unapologetic appeal to blood and genetics was, and remains today, the foundation for the existence of the Zionist state of Israel. Indeed, the search for coherent blood lines continues, with efforts to use new DNA investigations to establish a genetic cohesion in the population of Israel. These have failed, of course.

Israel – the ethnic state

Building on his historical review of the emergence of nationalism, Sand concludes that the Zionist state is a nation built on the old 'mythistory' people/race model. The state does not act in the interests of all its citizens, and is not accountable to non-Jewish minorities. The Israeli state offers more protection and rights to every Jew in the world under the Law of the Right of Return than it does to Palestinians who are born from the generations that live there. While there are multi-party elections, political platforms are severely limited by a constitution based on blood ties to Judaism. Non-Jews cannot own land, cannot serve in the armed forces and cannot marry a Jew, and there is no civil marriage or burial in Israel. Sand concludes that there is no chance of peace in the future until the mythic race history of the Jewish people is discarded, along with anti-Semitism, in the dustbin of history. A highly recommended read.

Claudia Miller

* The term Zionism is used throughout to signify the belief that the land of Israel is the promised land of God's Chosen People, the Jewish people. Page numbers refer to Sand's book.

POA: a history of repression

The Everlasting Staircase: A history of the Prison Officers' Association 1939-2009, David Evans with Sheila Cohen, Pluto Press in association with the Prison Officers Association, 2009, £20

The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Leon Trotsky *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*, 1932

In August 2007 the Prison Officers' Association (POA) staged a one-day national strike in defiance of laws outlawing industrial action by prison officers. This and subsequent wildcat actions were eagerly seized on by the selection of British left groups which had long been courting the POA and generally applauding the 'struggles' of 'workers in uniform', including the police. Foremost among the cheerleaders is the Socialist Party (SP) and in September 2009 POA General Secretary Brian Caton announced his defection to the SP from the Labour Party. Caton is now a prominent speaker for SP-backed electoral groupings the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

The Everlasting Staircase is written for the express purpose of positioning the POA in the leadership of 'militant' trade unionism in Britain in the face of mounting public sector cuts and privatisation. Its authors are Caton's predecessor as General Secretary and an academic specialising in trade union history. It was commissioned by the POA itself and does not purport to be impartial.

FRFI has been among the few voices on the British left consistently to point out that it is nonsense to simply view police and prison officers as 'workers in uniform'. Engels and Lenin* explained the creation of 'special bodies of armed men', such as police and prison officers, as an intrinsic part of the apparatus constructed alongside the division of society into antagonistic classes. Trotsky agreed, although many of his followers today do not, clinging instead to examples of armies and police that have gone over to the side of revolutionary movements. While it is true that in a revolutionary situation this would be both necessary and inevitable, Britain today is so far removed from such a situation as to render these examples entirely irrelevant.

'A union which has given true leadership to the whole working class movement'

The Everlasting Staircase chronicles the POA's development from 1865, when the Prisons Act officially defined the role of prison warden, through the years of pre-union staff associations and underground organisation to its official formation in 1939 and right up to the 2008 TUC conference, where Brian Caton spoke emotively in support of low-paid public sector workers and against anti-trade union laws, exhorting the supine TUC to strike against the government's 'unacceptable pay restraint on public sector

pay'. The book ends quoting him:

'The POA will continue its campaign and fight to get the whole of the Labour Movement to straighten their spines and stand up for new laws that take away the restrictions on strike and industrial action.'

'Our simple message to other unions is "Don't think that your members cannot deliver on strike action - they can."

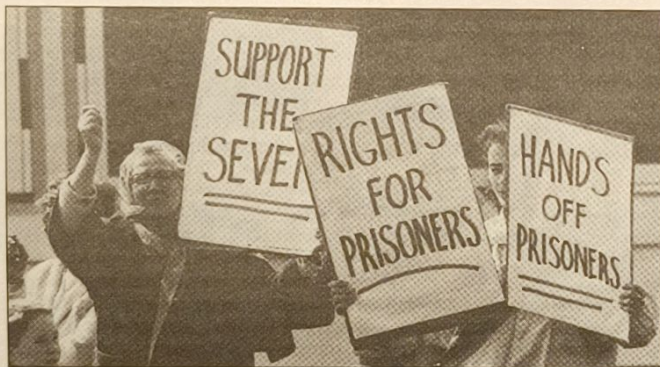
'Please recognise that if you don't ask them - they never will.'

'CHOOSE FREEDOM - BREAK BAD LAWS' (p249).

In the eyes of the book's authors, this call to arms demonstrates that 'the POA stands proud today as a union which has given true leadership to the whole working class movement.'

Trade union history

Read on its own terms, the account is of some historical interest. The problems of prison staff in relation to pay, staffing levels, housing and prospects of promotion are documented, as are the machinations of successive governments to prevent industrial action by prison staff. Initially prison officers were treated in the same way as the police and banned from forming



Supporters of the Strangeways protesters demonstrate outside the prison, April 1990

trade unions; however in the early 20th century an underground prison officers' union was gradually formed and made links with militant trade unionists in the civil service. Eventually, the POA was created, with the government of the day concluding that treating prison officers as civil servants was a preferable way of dealing with them.

The book takes us through the period of Thatcher's attack on the unions (including an account of the POA taking court action against the Tory Party following a party political broadcast which gave the erroneous impression that it had supported a motion put to the TUC by Arthur Scargill! - p106), to the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which made it illegal for prison officers to strike. The Labour Party promised to overturn this if elected, just as it promised to end prison privatisation. It reneged on both. The POA then signed a 'voluntary no strike agreement' in return for pay claims being dealt with by a succession of unsatisfactory review board mechanisms. Why exactly

the 'militant' POA signed this agreement at all is a matter for speculation; however relations between the union and the Prison Service became rockier and ultimately broke down completely, resulting in the strike action of 2007.

The other side of the story

This is all very well, but even during its pre-history while the union was being formed in secret, the POA's 'militancy' was couched entirely in terms which depended on depicting prisoners as wild and dangerous and liable at any moment to get uncontrollably 'out of hand' (p51).

This potential violence of prisoners is the POA's main leverage and it plays on and exaggerates the threat at every opportunity. This has led it to oppose any reform of the system or relaxation of the strictest rules. Well before the introduction of the current dispersal system or close supervision centres, the POA 'had been agitating for years

in favour of the segregation of trouble-makers in a small prison on their own' (p62). In Scotland prison officers went on strike against the closure of the barbaric Inverness cages (p94). In relation to the north of Ireland we read of the 'solidarity' shown in the 1970s by prison officers from England, Scotland and Wales, who volunteered to be transferred to help staff internment (pp97-99). In the late 1970s and 1980s the POA campaigned for more weaponry and riot training, resulting in the introduction of the infamous MUFTI squads which were deployed to attack protesting prisoners (p130).

The POA opposed the abolition of the death penalty on the basis that convicted murderers serving life sentences would be difficult to manage and it would lead to an increase in the murder of prison officers. The second certainly did not transpire - outside the north of Ireland only one British prison officer was killed by a prisoner in the whole of the 20th century, while many prisoners have been killed by staff.

POA supporters point out that it has long opposed 'slopping out' and over-

crowding. This is true. Although debatable in whose interests this opposition was mounted, the POA opposed slopping out from the early 1980s (p127) and in the early 1990s took direct action to ensure that no more prisoners were crammed into overcrowded, insanitary prisons by simply locking the gates and not letting any more in (p173). What happened to those locked out is not explored, but the likelihood is that they were detained in even more unsuitable conditions in police stations. The POA does not argue for fewer people to be sent to prison, but for more staff to police those who are there and more spaces in which to detain them.

The book is revealing in relation to the contradiction posed for the POA by prison reform. While the union has consistently opposed any prison regime not strictly based on punishment and containment, whenever any moves are made towards the introduction of more activities, the union also argues for its members to be the ones staffing them, claiming that their daily contact with prisoners gives them an understanding not shared by the "new breed" of liberal-minded governor grades, most of whom were fast-tracked university graduates with little experience of working on the landings of a prison' (Caton, p198).

Prisoners' struggles for their rights

David Evans was POA General Secretary from 1982 to 2000. This period includes the miners' strike and the biggest spate of prison uprisings ever to shake the British prison system. You would hardly know this from the book though, as although a picture of the wrecked Strangeways prison features in the illustrations, the events of 1990 are mentioned only in passing. Likewise, although there is considerable material about prisons in the north of Ireland, and in particular about prison officer casualties of the war, there is hardly any mention of the hunger strikes or protests, other than a quote from the 1979 May Report to the effect that 'The most stressful present custodial work undoubtedly involves the staff responsible for the three H blocks in The Maze prison which house the non-conforming prisoners...the nature of these inmates' protests is bizarre in the extreme and the filth associated with it abhorrent and degrading' (p99).

For prisoners and their supporters, *The Everlasting Staircase* - ironically titled in reference to the treadmills prisoners were once forced to walk endlessly - reads like a text from a parallel universe. We see a system of mass incarceration of men, women and children, who are overwhelmingly poor and working class and disproportionately black or minority ethnic, and whose oppression in prison sometimes drives them to band together and fight back. But this piece contains no analysis of who is actually in prison and the authors appear to see all prisoners as little more than wild animals, who can be kept reasonably docile if not given

too much freedom, and to view any protest action as inexplicable and frightening. For example, the conscious political prison protests of the 1970s organised by PROP (Preservation of the Rights of Prisoners) are described as part of 'turbulent years, when Britain...was swept by a... wave of strike action' in which 'prisoners themselves caught the protest "bug"'. A POA official complains: 'Governors, with no inkling of what to do, met with prisoner deputations who gained in importance, thereby undermining the authority of staff' (p83).

Similarly, for us the name of the POA is synonymous with thuggery and bullying and the stories of violence by prison staff are legion. But Evans and Cohen's account is virtually silent on such accusations, with even POA members' well-documented mistreatment of imprisoned fellow trade unionists glossed over and the disgraceful conduct towards the Shrewsbury Two in 1973 put down as some kind of misunderstanding (p83).

In 1998, horrific details of staff brutality at Wormwood Scrubs prison in London emerged, resulting eventually in a series of criminal prosecutions and civil claims for compensation. This is not mentioned anywhere in this account. At the time Evans publicly refuted any wrongdoing by any POA member, to the extent that he told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme that 'In all my years that I have been in the prison service I've never known a single occasion where prison officers have interfered with mail.' Hundreds of thousands of complaints submitted by British prisoners and hours of court time attest to the ludicrousness of this statement.

POA - policing class-divided society for the ruling class

We do not subscribe to the view that trade union organisation is by definition progressive. There are countless examples of reactionary trade union activity: the strike by loyalist workers in the north of Ireland against power-sharing with Irish nationalists in 1974; the pro-capitalist Solidarnosc in Poland in the 1980s; the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela which supported the US-backed coup in 2002. The fact that the POA is strident and well organised in its own interests is not sufficient to make it progressive.

The Everlasting Staircase sets out to make the case for the POA against those who would say it is not a 'real' trade union and, further, to put forward its credentials as a leading force in a resurgence of trade union militancy. However, it succeeds only in underlining that the role of prison staff in capitalist society is to police the working class and oppressed on behalf of the ruling class. The authors aim to show us a vanguard of class warriors, but succeed in showing us a bunch of chauvinist thugs.

Nicki Jameson

* See Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and Lenin, *State and Revolution*

20th anniversary of Strangeways prison uprising Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance

by Nicki Jameson and Eric Allison
Published 1995 ISBN 0 905400 18 6

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FRFI ROUND UP

Fight imperialism! Defend socialism!



Ihtisham Haque (left) and Hicham Yezza (right) speaking in Newcastle, 20 March

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For reasons of space the letters for this issue have been held over. The letters page will return in the next issue of FRFI

Over the last two months, international responses to the devastating earthquake in Haiti have starkly demonstrated the two alternatives that face humanity – barbarism or socialism. On the one hand the US has sent in thousands of troops, using the disaster to further tighten its imperialist grip over the country; and, on the other, Cuba and other Latin American countries have sent thousands of medical personnel and supplies to join the hundreds of Cuban doctors already delivering free services in Haiti's poorest areas.

On 24 March, London FRFI supporters joined a lively picket of the US embassy organised by the *Haiti First! Haiti Now!* campaign. We have held film showings and meetings around Britain to publicise the situation in Haiti and the actions of the imperialists. We are calling for real solidarity and the withdrawal of all foreign military forces, and, at our meetings and events, are collecting donations for the Cuban medical team in Haiti.

Defend asylum seekers! Fight Labour Party racism!

From 5 February to 19 March asylum-seeking women detained in Yarl's Wood immigration prison staged a protest hunger strike (see page 16). FRFI supporters around the country have initiated and joined solidarity actions to highlight this struggle.

In Newcastle on 27 February FRFI participated in the 'Speak out against Racism' event organised by Tyneside Community Action for Refugees. Street theatre, involving a cage and placards, was used to attract attention from people passing by. A lot of people stopped to help collect petition signatures and listen to speeches, including accounts from some of the women on hunger strike via mobile phone.

In Manchester on 3 March, FRFI supporters and local refugees organised a similar event in Piccadilly Gardens, speaking out against the appalling treatment of refugees in Yarl's Wood and in Britain in general. Participants included a representative of the Lall family who have fled homophobic oppression and now face deportation to Trinidad and Tobago.

In London FRFI supporters have joined with other groups to demonstrate outside Holloway prison, following the moving of five of the Yarl's Wood women to criminal prisons.

In Glasgow the barbarity of the asylum system was starkly demonstrated on 7 March by the tragic deaths of three Russian immigrants, who had jumped from the tower block in Red Road in which they had been housed. FRFI comrades joined the vigil on 9 March organised at the flats, where over 200 people, including asylum seekers, local residents and activists came together to remember them and condemn the Home Office's punitive immigration policies, and on 13 March, participated in a demonstration of around 1,000 people, from Red Road to Glasgow city centre, demanding freedom and justice for asylum seekers.

Organising against racist 'defence leagues'

Wherever we have local members, FRFI actively supports the mobilisations against the racist English and Scottish 'Defence Leagues'. On 20 February, FRFI supporters joined the protest organised by Edinburgh Anti-Fascist Alliance (EAFA) against the Scottish Defence League (SDL). The SDL was successfully trapped in pubs and prevented from open mobilisation. State-sponsored campaign Scotland United organised a separate rally away from the conflict and

tried unsuccessfully to divert EAFA protesters away from confronting the SDL. FRFI has been active in exposing the repeated attempts of Scotland United and Unite Against Fascism (UAF) to weaken the movement in this way.

On 20 March Manchester FRFI comrades were in Bolton where the English Defence League (EDL) had mobilised for a national event. The futility of the UAF strategy of appealing to the state to ban the racist EDL from marching was clearly demonstrated when, far from doing this, the police attacked the UAF protest, arresting 55 demonstrators, including three prominent UAF leaders.

Imperialism out of the Middle East!

FRFI has repeatedly pointed to the link between racism in Britain and imperialism abroad. The vicious anti-Muslim reaction of the EDL and SDL is a reflection of the racism promoted by the Labour government to legitimise its wars of aggression in the Middle East, and its continuing support for the Zionist state of Israel. FRFI supporters are active on the streets, demanding the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Pickets of Marks & Spencer, Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel, continue weekly in London and Newcastle.

On 20 March FRFI hosted a public meeting in Newcastle under the heading 'Racism in Britain, Imperialism in Gaza: Globalise the Intifada!' The meeting heard from independent journalist and activist, Jody McIntyre, who had just returned from nine months in the West Bank and Gaza (<http://jodymcintyre.wordpress.com>) and Hicham Yezza, founder and editor of the magazine *Ceasefire* (www.ceasefiremagazine.co.uk), who was wrongly arrested under terror laws in 2008, cleared and immediately re-arrested under immigration laws, and finally won his freedom last year after five months' imprisonment. Anti-racist and Palestine support activist Ihtisham Haque spoke on behalf of FRFI. The meeting was a valuable opportunity to discuss the tasks facing us in building a movement against racism and imperialism in Britain today. Jody spoke about the sacrifices and determination he had seen in the Palestinian village of Bil'in, which is at the forefront of the campaign against the building of the 'apartheid wall'. He said that in Britain we could be doing much more and made a strong call for more direct non-violent tactics. Hicham said that the state depends on oppressed people relating to it as isolated individuals and argued for the importance of building political communities, solidarity and

organisation to fight back. Ihtisham reported on the belated but much needed organisation of a defence and support campaign for the young, mostly Muslim, people who have been criminalised for participating in the protests against the Zionist attack on Gaza in January 2009. They are now facing punitive charges which

judges have admitted are aimed at 'setting an example to their communities' (see page 16).

We must be clear. All state attacks on progressive forces must be met with collective solidarity. Arrested comrades must be defended and supported. Together we are stronger. Together we can win.

EVENTS

GLASGOW

Tuesdays 13 April and 18 May, 7.30pm
FRFI readers' group
Langside Halls, 1 Langside Avenue

Thursday 29 April, 7.30pm

Public meeting:

General election:

general fraud
Upstairs at the Junction Bar, next to Queen Street station

FRFI will be holding regular Rebel Cinema film showings and discussions at Glasgow University. Free entry. Non-students welcome.

Contact:
glasgow_frifi@yahoo.co.uk or 07779 785 529

EDINBURGH

Tuesday 27 April, 7.30pm

Public meeting:

General election:

general fraud
Tollcross Community Centre

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 10 April, 1pm
Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) General Meeting
St Thomas Church, opposite Haymarket Metro

Every Saturday, 3.30pm
Weekly meeting of TCAR
Big Lamp Youth Project, 297 Westgate Road

TCAR monthly general meetings
St Thomas Church, Haymarket
Contact:
tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk or 07989 879 310

Every Thursday, 5-7pm
Demonstration for Palestine – Boycott Marks & Spencer
Northumberland Street

Every Saturday, 11am-2pm
Street action in Newcastle
Call or email for details of this and other stalls around the region

Contact:
frfinortheast@googlemail.com or 07858 346 276

MANCHESTER

Tuesday 13 April, 7.30pm
FRFI Readers Group:
The General Election – No Vote for Labour, Don't Vote, Organise!
The Lass O' Gowrie, Charles Street (by the side of BBC)

Sunday 2 May
FRFI Forum: **General Election – General Fraud, Don't Vote, Organise!**
Contact: 07519 427 093

Saturday 22 May, 12 noon onwards
Rolling picket of banks and shops that profit from the suffering of the Palestinian people

Meet at Co-op Bank, Corporation Street, City Centre

LONDON

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

Tuesday 13 April, 7pm
Public meeting:
Whoever you vote for, the ruling class gets in!
The Compass, corner of Penton Street and Chapel Market, N1 (Nearest tube Angel)

Wednesday 28 April, 7pm
Public meeting:
Whoever you vote for, the ruling class gets in!
South London venue – contact us for details

Contact: londonfrfi@gmail.com or 020 7837 1688

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE EVENTS

LONDON

Sunday 11 April, 7pm
Film: **Salud** – followed by discussion of health care in Cuba
The Compass, corner of Penton Street and Chapel Market, N1 (Nearest tube Angel)

Sunday 2 May, 7pm
Film: **Cuba: Defending socialism, resisting imperialism**
Filmed by RATB during the 2009 brigade to Cuba

Contact: office@ratb.org.uk or 020 7837 1688

LIVERPOOL

Saturday 24 April, 2-5pm
Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution!
Public meeting with three activists from the United Socialist Party of Venezuela
El Rincon, Roscoe Street

MANCHESTER

Thursday 8 April, 7.30pm
Campaign meeting with film of Cuba's 'Bay of Pigs' victory over the US-backed invasion
The Vine, Kennedy Street, City Centre

Sunday 25 April, 1.30pm
Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution!
Public meeting with three activists from the United Socialist Party of Venezuela
Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street

Sunday 16 May, 2pm
Film: **Venezuela Bolivariana**
Cross Street Chapel



Manchester protest in support of asylum seekers, 3 March

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Close Yarl's Wood! Close Harmondsworth! CLOSE ALL IMMIGRATION PRISONS!

From 5 February to 19 March women asylum seekers at Yarl's Wood immigration prison staged a defiant hunger strike in protest against their detention and treatment.
NICKI JAMESON reports.

They withstood physical reprisals from the guards employed by Serco, the private security firm that runs Yarl's Wood on behalf of the UK Borders Agency (UKBA), the snatching and imprisoning in criminal gaols of some of their most vocal spokeswomen on the grounds they were the protest's 'ringleaders' and the summary deportation of some participants. UKBA lied to the press, claiming there was no hunger strike and that there has merely been a short-lived protest that was 'peacefully resolved'. As FRFI goes to press, the hunger strike has been suspended for three weeks to give the Home Office an opportunity to respond to the women's demands. If they are not met, the protest will resume.

On the day the hunger strike was suspended, lawyers acting for four of the women were granted permission by the High Court to bring a claim for judicial review of the government's detention policies on the grounds that



Yarl's Wood immigration detention centre

their treatment breaches three articles of the European Convention on Human Rights. In a separate legal action 11 women are suing for damages. Both cases relate to the women's detention

and treatment in general, with particular reference to the third day of the hunger strike, when 70 detainees (including women with medical conditions including HIV, asthma and sickle

cell anaemia) were locked into an airless corridor for eight hours, with no access to toilets or medical facilities. During this ordeal some of the women were subjected to racial abuse and one was beaten with a riot shield.

Fifty-five male detainees at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre at Heathrow also staged a protest hunger strike for approximately a week in March. Both Yarl's Wood and Harmondsworth have seen repeated protests in recent years. Yarl's Wood was gripped by massive protest and part of the centre burned down in February 2002, just months after it opened. A small group of those present were made scapegoats and subjected to a protracted legal process. After a four-month trial in 2003 two were found guilty of violent disorder and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Another two had already pleaded guilty to minor charges. The remainder were acquitted. Following a major uprising at Harmondsworth in November 2006, four detainees were similarly labelled 'ringleaders' and put on trial in January 2008. All were acquitted, and after much procrastination on the part of the state, two were deported and one released. Two years later, the final defendant has now been released from detention.

Along with a wide range of other organisations, FRFI has demonstrated in solidarity with the detainees at Harmondsworth and Yarl's Wood. We will continue to support all campaigns against Britain's racist laws and in support of prisoners who rise up against the brutal immigration detention system.

Police attack UAF demonstration against EDL in Bolton

BOB SHEPHERD

The state's response to the Unite Against Fascism (UAF) counter mobilisation to the English Defence League (EDL) event in Bolton on 20 March was a change in tactics from previous confrontations.

The police used a clear strategy of attempting to criminalise the UAF demonstrators and leaders, by using 'kettling', snatch-squads and dogs to attack and arrest people. From mid-morning they blocked entrances to Victoria Square, preventing many anti-racists from joining the demonstration. Over 50 people were arrested, with many suffering head wounds as police riot squads covered in body armour lashed out all around with extendable truncheons. UAF Joint Secretary Weyman Bennett was lifted by a snatch-squad from the speakers' area and arrested, apparently on suspicion of 'conspiracy to organise violent disorder'. He was later released on bail. Rheta Moran, a leading figure in Greater Manchester UAF, was also arrested and released on bail, with conditions which prevent her from attending any EDL or UAF gathering in the

country. While she was being held, the police entered her house and copied the data on her computer.

The UAF aim had been to mobilise nationally to swamp the EDL turnout. In the event the UAF mobilised between 1,000 and 1,500 and the EDL probably around 1,000. However, the strategy failed as the EDL succeeded in holding its rally, while the numbers mobilised by the UAF weren't enough to fill even the half of the square the police had allocated to it. As in Manchester in October 2009, Mosque leaders had attempted to prevent Asian youth from attending the protest; however a large group did manage to join the demonstration towards the end, adding some much needed militancy.

The events in Bolton demonstrate that the UAF leadership's tactic of calling on the state to ban the EDL and its events is both futile and counter-productive. However, as we have argued it would, the strategy failed. Instead of acting against the EDL, the police have in effect begun the process of criminalising and banning the UAF. Assistant Chief Constable Gary Shewan, who was in charge of police

operations, was open in his praise of the EDL: 'We have also seen groups of people, predominantly associated with the UAF, engaging in violent confrontation... I would also like to praise the efforts of the EDL stewards who worked with us in the face of some very ugly confrontations.'

This appears to have had no effect on the UAF line. After the police attack, Sabby Dhalu, the other UAF Joint Secretary, declared: 'The police's primary role is to ensure safety and public order. It is not in the public interest to allow EDL demonstrations to proceed. These so-called demonstrations should be banned', while a shocked Weyman Bennett told the BBC that his arrest was not 'a good sign for democracy', that the police are 'hostile to anti-racists' and that their 'neutrality needs to be questioned'. This position simply reinforces illusions in the state.

FRFI's position is clear: only an independent working class, anti-racist movement independent of the British Labour government and its police force will be able to successfully confront racist and fascist mobilisations on the streets.

Support migrant workers



Alberto Durango and protestors outside UBS office, London, 19 March

NICKI JAMESON

By now the cleaning companies that service London's banks, offices, universities and transport systems should have realised that their low-paid migrant workforce is not as much of a pushover as they might have hoped! Despite repeated attacks on working conditions, the imposition of anti-social shift patterns, refusal to pay the London Living Wage and the use of immigration snatch-squads to terrify the workers into submission, London's migrant workers continue to organise in defence of their rights. Leading the struggles are comrades such as Alberto Durango and Juan Carlos Piedra Benitez, both members of the Latin American Workers Association (LAWA).

Alberto is currently contesting his sacking (for the second time) on 4 February by cleaning company Lancaster, which took over the cleaning contract at Swiss bank UBS from another notorious firm, Mitie. There has been a series of militant demonstrations outside UBS's London office and 19 March saw international support with actions in London, Man-

chester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Zurich, Kiev and New York.

Juan Carlos was employed by Office and General, the outsourced cleaning contractor at University College London (UCL), for 11 months until September 2009, having been transferred there from the School of Oriental Studies (SOAS) after being called into a disciplinary meeting where he was warned about his trade union activities, including campaigning for the London Living Wage. Two days after being transferred to UCL he was told that he had been seen at SOAS protesting against an immigration raid on the cleaning staff there, and he was sacked. As with Alberto's case, LAWA and others have been staging regular demonstrations in support of Juan Carlos, in his case within the university grounds.

UBS is the world's second largest manager of private wealth assets; UCL is the fourth ranked university in the Times Higher Education rankings. LAWA is not afraid to take on these massive, rich and powerful institutions and deserves the support of all socialists and progressive people in its struggle in defence of low-paid migrant workers.

Police ignore racist attacks on asylum seekers

Manchester FRFI supporters spoke to two Kurdish refugees from Iran. Faraydun Abdullazada and Rahman Rasoulzada, who told us about a horrifying catalogue of racist attacks they have suffered and the total lack of response from the police.

July 2005 Faraydun was approached by 10 white people in Stoke-on-Trent city centre, asked 'What are you doing here?' and set upon as he tried to walk away. He was attacked with sticks and chased into a Chinese takeaway as the racists yelled, 'come on motherfucker' 'bastard terrorist' and so on. Faraydun called the police, who never came.

November 2007 The two men and their girlfriends were walking past a

petrol station in Blackley, north Manchester when they were set upon by a gang. Faraydun was left with a broken rib and black eyes and couldn't breathe properly for four weeks. The police came but refused to take a statement from the victims, arrest the perpetrators, who were still present, or look at CCTV evidence. They told Faraydun to 'shut up' when he tried to speak to them.

May 2009 Faraydun was attacked in a club in Manchester city centre, leaving him covered in blood. His phone was stolen as he called the police. An ambulance left the scene without treating him and the police did not take a statement or attempt to arrest the attacker. They said they

'couldn't get the CCTV' footage and took Faraydun not to hospital but to a deserted street nearby, where they told him 'bye-bye, go home'.

August 2009 Rahman was attacked in Northenden by two racists who broke his nose. The police were called, but neither attacker has been arrested. Eight months later, the police are 'still investigating'.

February 2010 Attacks continued as five youths, his neighbours, attacked Faraydun with sticks and a frying pan outside his flat. They often kick the door and throw bottles at the house.

The police have totally failed to respond to this blatant racist harassment.