

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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Thousands across the USA demonstrated against war on Iraq

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IRAQ: HORIZONS BATHED IN BLOOD

Whenever it is launched the war will be brutal. Writing in *The Times* author John le Carré announced 'The United States of America has gone mad' (15 January 2003). At Christmas the Vatican offered prayers 'in the face of this horizon bathed in blood.' The US and British governments may be losing the propaganda war but they have no intention of losing the shooting war. They have amassed a vast army. Scare stories circulate through the media, injecting the fear needed to make the US and British people accept war. This is a war for global domination; Arab blood and young US and British lives are a necessary price for the rewards of victory. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

In FRFI 142 April/May 1998 we said, 'There can be no doubt that the contentions over oil, the Gulf, Middle East and Caspian regions will be resolved by force and that the USA must use violence, sooner rather than later, if its position as the dominant imperial power is not to be undermined.' With the collapse of the Soviet Union the US ruling class moved quickly to achieve global domination. The USA has now established military bases in former Soviet Republics from Georgia and Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan on the bor-

ders of China. The USA has expanded NATO eastwards to the Baltic and eastern Europe. US military power was decisive in subduing the Balkans. US and British control over the terrain and politics of the oil supply routes from the Middle East, Caspian Basin, Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe, Japan and China would place these economies at the mercy of the US ruling class at a time of worsening economic crisis for international capitalism with growing inter-imperialist rivalry. US strategy is to prevent the emergence of

any potential rival, be it the European Union, Japan, Russia or China.

Seizing the world's second largest oil reserves adds to the potential spoils of victory; the more so given the USA's increasing dependence on oil imports in a context of depleting world reserves. The Middle East has two thirds of the world's known reserves; 85% of the world's energy supplies come from fossil fuels. The US and British states calculate that their influence in the Middle East is diminishing and that Saudi Arabia, site of the world's biggest oil reserves, is becoming unstable and possibly hostile. US and British domination of Iraq would provide an alternative source of oil and a lesson in what can happen to Saudi Arabia, Iran or anywhere else. With its massive military superiority, greater than the next ten biggest military spenders combined, the US ruling class must demonstrate both the scale of its military power and its willingness to use it if it is to retain its hegemonic position in the world.

On 6 January 2003 Foreign

Secretary Jack Straw told a gathering of British ambassadors that it was Britain's strategic priority 'to bolster the security of British and global energy supplies'. For the British ruling class the alliance with the US military is necessary if Britain is to 'punch above its weight' in the world. Hence the British government's willingness to deploy troops on hazardous missions at the request of the USA. British capitalism has more overseas investments than any country apart from the USA. Two of the three biggest oil companies are British and Anglo-Dutch: BP and Shell. British militarism stems from the need to defend this in partnership with the USA. The British economy is more tied to the USA than any other European economy, 'US GDP remains close to \$10 trillion, making it by far the largest market in the world. It continues to be our largest export market. Two-way trade between the USA and UK is worth around £87 billion per year. The UK is the biggest foreign investor in the United States; and the USA is the biggest direct investor here.' Primo

Minister Tony Blair following 11 September 2001.

These are the real reasons for the war on Iraq, not the arguments about weapons of mass destruction, about tyrants and terrorists, freedom and democracy. It is the cold logic of imperialism, the logic of profits and power. The madness is in the system!

'Old Europe' objects

The French and German ruling classes have their own ambitions for the Middle East and for the former socialist countries and will not accept subordinate roles. France and Russia have significant investments in Iraqi oil (see FRFI 170 December 2002/January 2003). Historically Franco treats the Middle East as part of its 'sphere of influence'. French and German contention with the USA and Britain is being played out in the United Nations and over the UN inspectors in Iraq. When UN Security Resolution 1441 was passed unanimously on 8 November 2002 France, Russia and China immediately

continued on page 4

Welcome...

If in some smothering dreams you too
could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his
face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of
sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gurgling from the froth-
corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile incurable sores on innocent
tongues –
My friend, you would not tell with such
high zest
To children ardent for some desperate
glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

Wilfred Owen, 1917

* It is sweet and glorious to die for your
country.

As this issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* goes to press, the US and British are preparing to blitz Iraq. The Pentagon has announced its intention to bombard Iraq with 800 cruise missiles in two days to shatter the country 'physically, emotionally and psychologically'. That will be more than twice the number of missiles launched during the whole 1991 Gulf War. The inventor of this strategy, known as 'Shock and Awe', Harlan Ullman, boasted that: 'You have this simultaneous effect, rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes'.

The US and British governments made it clear from the outset that they were not prepared to negotiate nor compromise their warmongering, not for the United Nations, public opinion nor in the interests of world stability. The warmongers hardly need the weapons inspectors to discover what Saddam's regime has stockpiled. The 'sensitive pages' which the US edited out of Iraq's weapons declaration contained precise information about the military and biological armaments bought from 150 corporations in the imperialist countries themselves (see front page and page 4).

Only an international mass movement with a revolutionary character that threatens internal stability in the imperialist coun-



tries stands a chance of halting the warmongering of madman Bush and bulldog Blair (see page 5). This is because the war is driven by its own imperative: the internal logic of the capitalist system, frantically searching to maintain and expand its sources of profit. The US economy has been teetering on the brink of economic crisis for nearly two years. If the US does plummet into deep recession the consequences for the global economy will be devastating, and the rivalry and tensions between the major capitalist powers will escalate. The US is making an early and decisive bid now, to ensure its own economic interests dominate, not just in the Middle East, but throughout the world (see pages 8/9). Control of the Gulf's oil is an important part of the US imperialist campaign, and explains a large part of Britain's involvement. Two of the world's top three oil companies are British; Shell and BP. The Labour imperialists, led by warmonger Blair are prepared to use the military alliance with the US to enable Britain to punch above its weight in the world relative to France and Germany.

John Pilger wrote recently, 'To call Blair a mere "poodle" is to allow him distance from the killing of innocent Iraqi men, women and children for which he will share responsibility'. Opposition to the war on Iraq is growing in Britain. But however many turn out for the national demonstration on 15 February, the opposition in this country will be unable to stop Britain's part in the war unless it challenges the Labour Party, not just Blair. The Labour Party

is the party in government in Britain.

One year ago the Labour Party was waging war on Afghanistan. Today it is war on Iraq. It is also terrorising asylum seekers and stirring up racism (see page 16), punishing the working class (see this page and page 3) and pampering big business. Anyone still a member of the Labour Party who values social justice must rip up their membership card. Simple. No more excuses! Then we stand a chance of building a genuine, democratic and grassroots movement in Britain which places the demands of the working class at the fore, not the whinging of reformists and the social democrats. Despite the increasingly reactionary, authoritarian and racist character of Labour, British trade unions are happy to bankroll the Party. They have just proposed a £40 million deal to cover a third of the Labour Party's running costs till 2005 (see page 3).

Working class interests have come to the fore in the struggle in Venezuela, where Chavez is being driven to extend the Bolivarian revolution against the interests of US capital and its Latin American lackeys (see page 11). Class is also important in Palestine where the Intifada continues to rage in resistance to the brutal Zionist regime under re-elected fascist Ariel Sharon (see page 6). In this issue of FRFI we continue the analysis of the class alliances necessary for national liberation in Palestine (see page 7).

Use this issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* as a weapon of resistance. Knowledge is power when it is used as the basis of collective action. Pass FRFI on to others, discuss the articles, sell it on the streets and in your workplace. The time to act is now... As Fidel Castro said: 'Tomorrow will be too late for what should have been done a long time ago'!

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Labour: a party fit for imperialism

Robert Clough, pp192

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News

Education notes

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Labour Education Minister Charles Clarke's announcement that by 2005-2006 the present form of the National Curriculum will be scrapped represents a fundamental change to the state education system. Schools will no longer have a statutory obligation to provide teaching in more than three subjects after the age of 14 (science, maths and English), plus sex education and religion modules.

The National Curriculum (NC) for England and Wales was imposed with the Thatcher/Baker Education Act of 1992. Teachers and educationalists naively welcomed the Act, believing that for all pupils to have access to the same range of subjects at the same standard was both democratic and fair. In reality, however, schools were never given the resources to carry out the Act's legal obligations.

Initially there were ten subjects in the NC and the result

was a huge and unwieldy mass. The Tories emergency fixer, Ron Dearing, slimmed the curriculum to six 'core' subjects and four options. This was still a burden to most schools because of under-funding, teacher turnover and class size. Very quickly, testing, standards and targets were bolted to the syllabus. The curriculum has been reduced to bullet points, set answers and exam passing. Today infant class teachers must tick 117 competencies for each five-year old. What happens with such information is not clear.

Mrs Thatcher wins in the end

Margaret Thatcher always wanted only three compulsory subjects in the national curriculum – maths, English and science – and now she gets her way with Labour's plans for 'the biggest shake-up in schooling for 50 years'. State schools will not offer traditional academic subjects like foreign languages, history and geography to pupils

who do not do well enough in exams. Schooling will become a purely functional basic skills agency for the majority of the working class. Bingo Mrs Thatcher!

A butcher or a banker

The ruling class say there must be 'parity of esteem' for vocational and academic studies. Yet strangely there are no plumbers nor hairdressers on the benches of the House of Commons. Those employed in the 'caring professions' and catering are among the lowest-paid workers in Britain. In reality, work-related learning schemes cheapen the cost of schooling and are intended to deal with the 25% of pupils who leave secondary school with no qualifications. Research evidence shows that 66% of the differences in results at age 16 in GCSEs are due to family income not inherent ability. Britain is 24th out of the 29 leading industrialised nations for post-16 education.

Learn now – pay later

SUSAN DAVIDSON

The Labour government's announcement in January that universities could charge fees of up to £3,000 to 'home' students has signalled the acceleration of a two-tier higher education system in Britain, increasingly modelled on the US.

The White Paper proposes that students finance their own higher education through personal borrowing. The current yearly £1,100 up-front course fees will be replaced by charges, initially capped, of a maximum £3,000 a year. Students will graduate with an estimated average debt of £18,000-£21,000 after three years (up from £12,000 at present). Labour argues that this level of debt is acceptable because, it claims, a university education guarantees the 'average' graduate an extra £400,000 over their lifetime. This is simply not true, particularly for those who enter the public sector (including nurses and teachers), and black and women workers who receive lower wages. Labour claims that making higher-earning graduates pay higher taxes in the future will not give universities the income boost they demand now.

The level of fee charged is discretionary. Universities will be able to charge higher fees for popular courses, or no fees at all! An 'access regulator', a kind of 'poor person's tsar', will be appointed to monitor universities to ensure they are offering enough places to students from poorer backgrounds. From 2004 up-front grants of up to £1,000 a year will be available for poorer students. Those from households earning less than £10,000 (below a living wage) a year will get the full grant, those with less than £20,000 will get some funding. Despite the sprinkling of bursaries and allowances, the university fees system will mean that students will start



their working lives with huge debts. Fees will be repaid through taxation at a rate of 9% of income on earnings of more than £15,000 a year. 'In some cases, graduates will be paying at a higher rate than billionaires' (Nick Cohen, *Observer*, January 2003). Already, the Financial Services Authority warns that one in five families is having difficulties with debt and government advice is to start saving for a pension now!

The government's proposal opens the way for the privatisation of university education. Drop the term 'fees' and use the word 'price'. Buying a higher education course is just like paying on credit for any other commodity, a holiday or a new kitchen, so that students contemplating university will need an accountant as well as a career adviser to decide where to go or what to study.

The Labour government's target of getting 50% of young adults into higher education is driven by the interests of corporations. There is pressure on the government to give young adults skills training before they enter the workplace. This cheapens the cost of labour as employers do not have to provide on-the-job training and traditional apprenticeships. Meanwhile, unskilled 16-year-olds are forced to take the lowest-paid, deregulated work. Many trades which used to be

open to 16 to 18-year-olds now require a university qualification from applicants. There are strong elements of social control in an education system that rewards only the young people who are subject to continuous institutional selection.

Having expanded the intake of the traditional universities and re-branded the polytechnics in an effort to increase higher education participation, the government is now planning to turn Further Education colleges (16 to 18-year-olds) into 'universities', offering two-year vocational degree courses. With such differentiation in graduate studies it is clear now why universities will be able to charge varying prices for course enrolment.

The Labour government is breaking yet another of its election pledges with the planned increase in university fees, and must tread carefully to avoid alienating its middle-class and better-off working-class voters. For this reason it spins the myths of choice, flexibility and opportunity. The mission statement of the newly-established Learning and Skills Council which has £7 billion a year to fund all post-16 education (except universities) speaks of building a 'knowledge economy' for the 21st century in which there are no barriers to people with talent or ambition. Talent and ambition clearly come at a price.

Labour moves to crush firefighters dispute

JANE BENNETT

On 28 January, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott played his trump card in the long-running firefighters' dispute, announcing that he would reintroduce powers from the 1947 Fire Service Act enabling him to enforce a settlement of the strike on the government's terms. Described by FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist as 'bullying tactics' and 'intimidation', this move by the government clearly expresses its intention to crush this strike, and along with it the pretensions of the public sector unions to challenge New Labour.

Following the eight-day strike in November, and before the national demonstration on 7 December, FBU leader Andy Gilchrist issued his most explicit challenge to the Labour lead-



ership, calling for a socialist programme. In a matter of hours the TUC leadership had stepped in and organised negotiations via ACAS, the arbitration quango. It was at this point that the FBU lost its nerve: two eight-day strikes scheduled for December were called off pending negotiations. In the new year, however, it soon became

clear that the employers were under strict instructions not to reach a deal except on the government's terms: minimum wage rises, maximum cost cutting. The talks failed to get off the ground because the employers demanded acceptance of the Bain recommendations in advance. The FBU resumed intermittent short strikes in mid-

January and it was at this point that Prescott announced his intention to bring back a law formerly repealed by the Tories in 1959.

This dispute is the first time the FBU has launched industrial action since its first national strike in 1977-8 which lasted nine weeks. In 2002 over 87% of FBU members voted for strike action in support of a new pay structure and against the Bain Report recommendations for 'modernisation' that would lead to job losses and station closures. The government has told the local government 'employers' that 'modernisation' must accompany any pay rise above 4% and was already implementing the Bain report in advance of the ACAS talks.

The real issue for the firefighters is that their current pay deal, signed in 1978, ties their level of pay to that of male industrial workers. This is precisely the section of the working class that has suffered disproportionately over the last 25 years. Most of the industrial labour aristocracy has disappeared: in 1978 there were 180,000 miners, there are now

7,000. The numbers of dockers, printers, steelworkers, engineering trades and major manufacturing workers have diminished to almost nothing. The firefighters found that their pay was tied to the aristocracy of labour that had disappeared - formerly the best-paid male workers, now proletarianised. That is why they have launched these strikes.

Discontent among public sector and transport workers because of comparative low pay has led to the election of 'left wing' trade union general secretaries who have promised, from time to time, to challenge Blairism and New Labour in favour of socialism. Andy Gilchrist is one of them. Nothing has come of these promised challenges, and it is becoming clear that their 'socialist' aspirations are limited to the creation of a new layer of well paid (predominantly male) workers, a new labour aristocracy. So far, the trade union movement has been happy to bankroll the New Labour project: and will do so for as long as there is even the distant prospect of a payoff. But this Labour government is

determined that it will not even allow the trade union left's miserable pretensions to be met.

The Labour government has had no shame whatsoever about how it has treated the working class. While it will break necks in order to appease middle class voters and its capitalist backers, it has had no hesitation about systematically bullying and threatening the working class. It is perfectly happy to launch the most racist and authoritarian legislation to quell opposition and stifle working class children, consigning them to the miseries of poverty and squalid housing and working conditions. The trade union movement has not lifted one finger to challenge this treatment.

Now the trade union leadership is faced with the problem that Labour will not even allow a layer of well-paid public sector workers to exist. If the trade union leadership sticks to its previous form, Labour will be allowed to destroy firefighters' jobs, close fire stations and lower standards of fire safety. It won't be Belgravia or the City of London that goes without fire cover.

Trade unions bail out bankrupt Labour

JIM CRAVEN

While the left press is full of enthusiasm about a new generation of militant trade union leaders threatening to cut support for New Labour and ushering in a new era of militancy, the leading trade unions are actually preparing to bail out the bankrupt Labour Party. They have proposed a £40 million deal over five years, enough to cover a third of Labour's running costs, in return for concessions on anti-trade union laws. Bill Morris, general secretary of the T&GWU, said he was optimistic that the deal would go ahead, while another top union leader is reported as saying, 'Labour is the only show in town and we want to show our commitment'.

Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the utterly degenerate state of the so-called Labour movement in Britain. No matter how reactionary and authoritarian Labour becomes; no matter how viciously Labour attacks the working class, no matter what atrocities they commit, the trade unions refuse to break with the party that feeds them their privileged crumbs from the table of imperialism.

Labour hits the poor hardest

Just look at the domestic record of the Labour government the trade unions are defending. In 2000-01, 13.7 million people lived below the poverty line - a higher figure than in 1995-96 and more than double the number 20 years ago. Labour made much of its pledge to cut child poverty by a quarter by 2004-05 and to eradicate it within 20 years. But relative poverty can only be ended by a redistribution of wealth, which Labour will never do. It claims to have made steady progress, but it has done so only through tax cred-



Labour: a vicious, racist, authoritarian party ruling over a divided society of obscene wealth and privilege on one side and, on the other, torment, insecurity and poverty

its, which have moved a few children from just below to just above the poverty line. It is running out of easy options and will not meet its targets. Income inequality in Britain remains the worst in Europe.

In 2002 there were still 3.75 million people unemployed and wanting paid work, and the number of long-term workless households remained at over two million, unchanged since 1995 and showing no signs of falling. Any reduction in the headline unemployment figures has been mainly achieved by forcing people into low-paid, insecure work. There are now 2.6 million workers paid at or below £4.30 an hour. Labour tries to hide the reality behind these figures. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has complained that official data on low pay is now only available at the discretion of the government and then only after a substantial time lag and needing complex statistical procedures to derive estimates. But not to worry! Labour has appointed Adair Turner as head of the Low Pay Commission. Turner used to be director-general of the organisation for big business, the CBI. He should know all about high

and low pay. Under Labour, the average annual salary for directors in the top 100 companies rose to £1.5 million.

Labour's Britain - violent, racist and authoritarian

But being poor doesn't just mean going without money. In Labour's Britain, people on below average incomes are twice as likely to suffer mental illness; one and a half times more likely to have a disability or chronic illness; their children are more likely to be born underweight and to die from accidents and their young men twice as likely to commit suicide.

Last year violent crimes rose by 28%, the use of firearms by 35% and sexual offences by 26%. The poor are the greatest victims of crime. Half of low-income families cannot afford household insurance. They are three times more likely to be burgled than families on above-average income.

Labour's Britain is racist and discriminatory. People from Black Caribbean, African and Bangladeshi backgrounds are twice as likely as white people to be unemployed. Young black people are four times more likely to be excluded from school

and seven times more likely to be in prison. Under Labour the gap between women's and men's pay actually increased last year.

And how does Labour react to this record? Because it has no solutions and the gloss is wearing thin, it lashes out with evermore authoritarian dictates. Labour's Britain sends more of its citizens to prison than any other European country. The goal population is at a record high of over 72,000 and rising. In 2002 there was a record number of 94 suicides in prison, up by 29% on the previous year. Labour was keen to sweep rough sleepers off the streets but not to provide decent housing. In 2002 there were 85,000 households in temporary accommodation; almost double the number in 1997. In 2000-01, 10,000 pupils were permanently excluded from school. The numbers are on the rise again. Labour plans to restrict the right of appeal tribunals to reinstate children. Over 50,000 children skip school every day. Labour's solution is to expand police patrols in and around schools and slap £50 fixed penalties on the parents of truanting children. Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State for Education, said, 'It is time to restore respect for authority to its rightful place'.

This is the reality of Labour's Britain. A vicious, racist, authoritarian party ruling over a divided society of obscene wealth and privilege on one side and, on the other, torment, insecurity and poverty. Only the likes of the British left and *Guardian* journalist Polly Toynbee could ever imagine that such a party of capitalism and imperialism can be reformed. The reality is that capitalism cannot function without class division, inequality, exploitation and an army of unemployed. Ultimately, these things can only be defeated by the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. It remains to be seen whether the 'new breed' of union leaders, so beloved of the left, go beyond their rhetoric to finally break from and take on Labour. We hope so. But don't hold your breath.

WINTER CRACKERS

First the good news...

In January Nestlé, the notorious multinational food company, was forced to withdraw its claim for \$6 million against Ethiopia.

Nestlé had hoped that it could pursue its legal action on the quiet. The claim arose from the 1970s when the Ethiopian government seized the assets of foreign businesses. Not happy about being deprived of its profits from one of the poorest countries in the world, Nestlé, which last year achieved sales of \$60bn, launched a legal action to reclaim \$6 million. Nothing to them; a great deal to a country facing the worst drought for 20 years that has left 11 million facing starvation.

Following publicity about Nestlé's tawdry bid, 40,000 people wrote to the company protesting. Appalled by the prospect of even more bad publicity, Nestlé settled with Ethiopia for \$1.5m, all of which will be used immediately for famine relief.

Of course this is only the tip of the iceberg for Nestlé's activities. It makes a massive profit from instant coffee sales, while coffee growers get a pittance. In the last three years there has been a more than 50% fall in the world price of coffee - in itself a blow for Ethiopia's economy where coffee accounts for two-thirds of export earnings. Nestlé doesn't get less profit and you won't have noticed a fall in price in the shops. Nestlé is also notorious for the way it promotes baby milk products in underdeveloped countries, where breast feeding is the healthier and cheaper option for mothers and children. Incidentally the World Bank, IMF and some of the richest governments in the world are chasing Ethiopia for an annual debt repayment of \$73m. Leopards do not change their spots.

Sub-contracted torture

Fresh from the British Public Record Office comes a report, just released, on US treatment of prisoners of war during the Korean War in 1952. US guards called the prisoners 'slant-eyed, yellow bastards'. Violation of the Geneva

Conventions on PoWs was the norm: 'It became more evident that the US officers and soldiers...thought the Chinese and Korean PoW were Oriental cattle who were to be given quite different treatment to a European'.

Back to 2003, and it is clear that the USA is systematically using torture and illegal interrogation techniques on the prisoners it holds following 11 September 2001. Sleep and sensory deprivation are being used against the detainees at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. These prisoners are kept in limbo, denied the rights of prisoners of war, and detained indefinitely without trial. Others arrested by the USA in Afghanistan and elsewhere have been transferred to countries where torture is usual: a subcontractual arrangement. 'Our guys may kick them around a little bit in the adrenaline of the immediate aftermath', said one US official. Torture has been used on Diego Garcia, the island leased to the USA by Britain. More leopards, more spots.

Oops...

The Ministry of Defence has launched an inquiry into how dozens of phials of anthrax vaccine and the drug dimercaprol (an antidote to heavy metal poisoning) were washed up on a beach in Dorset. Ah, ah, you say. The Iraqi army has been accused of equipping itself against chemical and biological poisoning with such drugs and vaccines; a clear indication that they have such weapons. Surely these phials and ampoules have floated down the Gulf and half way round the world's oceans into the English Channel. Damn devils, those Iraqis.

Not so. The MoD has confirmed that this particular smoking gun was issued to a British warship involved in recent Navy taskforce deployment to the Gulf. Perhaps this warship had the chemical and biological weapons to go with them...But surely not. Being Brits they will stick to the morally clean stuff: nuclear weapons, depleted uranium, etc.

Carol Brickley

WAR ON IRAQ: HORIZONS BATHED IN BLOOD

continued from page 1

gave it a different interpretation to that of the USA and Britain. The latter said that no other resolution was necessary to authorise war against Iraq, the former said that any breach of Resolution 1441 would only lead to 'serious consequences' – war would require a second resolution. Germany, unlike the others not a permanent member of the UN Security Council with the power of veto, opposes war on Iraq. Thus far, the US ruling class has been unable to reassure France, Germany and Russia that they will get some of the spoils, and they do not accept the new US doctrine of 'pre-emptive strikes' which threatens to reduce their bargaining powers to zero.

In mid-January 2003 the EU external relations commissioner Chris Patten warned the USA that the EU would be 'hard to persuade' to contribute to the reconstruction of Iraq if it did not get UN authority for war. The EU is the biggest donor to Afghanistan. On 22 January German Chancellor Schröder and French President Chirac made statements together calling for the UN inspectors to be given more time. Russia and China supported France. US secretary of defence Rumsfeld sneered, 'I think that's old Europe'. German foreign minister Fischer replied, 'Yes, our history, our culture and our civilisation is certainly much older than the United States'. On 23 January Colin Powell and Jack Straw jointly stated that French and German opposition to war would not stop the USA and Britain going ahead if needs be without UN authorisation if Iraq did not disarm, whilst Tony Blair said that Britain would take military action if there were an 'unreasonable blockage' of a UN resolution authorising force. In other words, France, Germany, Russia and China back us or we go to war without you.

Head of the UN inspection team Hans Blix reported to the Security Council on 27 January that Iraq has 'co-operated rather well so far' but said that Iraq had not accepted disarmament. He cited unaccounted-for chemical and biological weapons, but produced nothing! The following day US President Bush used his State of the Union address to accuse Iraq of 'utter contempt' for the international community and said the USA would take 'whatever action is required' regardless of the decisions of others. That same day Jack Straw set out ten questions that Iraq must answer to avoid war. On 30 January the heads of government of Britain, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic issued a statement supporting the US position that Iraq has repeated the 'long established pattern of deception, denial and non-compliance with UN Security Council resolutions'. In effect, they told France and Germany to back the USA in the Security Council. Presumably this is New Europe speaking. The British Labour government has been crucial to the USA in preventing the formation of a common European Union resistance to US bellicosity.

Bush and Blair are co-ordinating their messages, ratcheting up the menace then winding it down, probing the other imperialist powers, exploring what they will accept, forcing them either to declare their positions or accept the will of the US and British governments. The intention is to manoeuvre France, Russia, China and Germany into accepting their authority. If this can be done

through the UN then the USA will be able to share the costs of the war and ensuing occupation of Iraq and US authority will be legitimised. Such legitimacy reduces barriers to future US military expeditions. If the US government with Britain defies the UN Security Council it runs the risk of provoking the other major powers to mobilise in pursuit of their own ruling classes' interests – these will confront those of the US and British ruling classes. The USA and Britain hope to manoeuvre France away from Germany with the prospect of a second resolution. This will not be achieved without a promised reward.

Happy motoring

In January the US Department of Energy published its Annual Energy Outlook 2003. Global oil demand is forecast to rise from the current 76 million barrels of oil per day to 123 million in 2025. US oil imports will rise from 55% of total US consumption to 65-70% in 2025. US oil imports are already at their highest ever level and dependence on imported oil is the highest in history. US reliance on Gulf oil imports is also at an all time high: 14.1% in 2001. The report states that by 2025 51% of oil production will come from Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) compared to 38% today.

Other things being equal the rate of profit varies inversely with the costs of materials and fuel. The Gulf region has the cheapest oil in the world. Not only do company profits depend on cheap oil but so does the 'western life-style'. The USA is the most motorised society in the world with 800 vehicles per 1,000 people. Light vehicle fuel consumption has become less economical: an average 26.2 miles per gallon in 1987 and 24.7 today. The US Energy Information Administration forecast rising demand for petrol 'will require the volume of motor fuel consumed in 2020 ... to be almost as great as the total volume of all oil products consumed in 2000'. (*Financial Times* 13 January 2003.) Car production is the biggest manufacturing employer in the world. War on Iraq is for the benefit of Exxon, BP, Shell, Ford, General Motors, Honda and Toyota, for the consume-and-destroy culture of modern capitalism. Happy motoring with Tony and George!

Brazen theft

Iraq's 12,000-page dossier on its weapons programmes was never going to get in the way of US and British war plans. The US and British governments assume that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and UN failure to find them is evidence that Iraq is breaching UN resolutions. If, however, UN inspectors find the weapons Iraq is again in breach. Either way war will follow.

Iraq issued its dossier on 8 December. It was flown to New York. That evening US representatives, witnessed by British government representatives, took the document from UN offices and transferred it to Washington. 8,000 pages of the document were then edited out in the name of preventing weapons proliferation. The edited version was then circulated to the non-permanent Security Council members while the five permanent members received the complete dossier. US Secretary of State Powell said the document had 'omissions' and was in breach of UN Resolution 1441. On 15 December the British government said the

dossier was 'very disappointing' with 'a lot missing'. Four days later the head of the UN inspection team, Hans Blix, said the document contained relatively little that was new.

The German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung* obtained a full copy of the dossier, presumably from Iraq, and published names of companies supplying Iraq's weapons programme. Included in the dossier are 80 German firms, 24 US firms and 17 British firms. Among the companies named are Siemens, Hewlett Packard, DuPont, Honeywell, Unisys, and Bechtel. US companies shipped materials for anthrax, brucellosis, gas gangrene, toxic varieties of E.coli and salmonella bacteria to Iraq.

Thus far, late January, the UN inspectors have failed to find the 'smoking gun' that will presumably be the trigger for all out war. No doubt one can be 'found' if need be. Before Christmas the inspection team criticised the USA and Britain for not providing the intelligence they claim to have. The US and British governments are seeking to provoke Iraq with frequent bombing raids and an insistence that U2 spy planes be part of the inspection process. The USA wants 500 Iraqi scientists flown to Cyprus for questioning but on 9 January UN inspectors said they were not satisfied with the list of scientists provided by the Iraqi government. The dispute between the US and Britain against the rest of the UN Security Council will now focus on how much longer the UN inspection programme should be given to find evidence to trigger war.

Vast armada

Security Council resolution or not, the means of Iraq's obliteration are assembling. By early February the British Labour government will have deployed approximately 30,000 troops in the Gulf region. The USA will have over 120,000 troops and the total combined US and British contingent could rise to 250,000 soldiers, sailors and aircrew. The British government says it has set £1 billion aside for the war. The true cost will far exceed this. Already in the Gulf are a Royal Navy destroyer, frigate, Tomahawk cruise firing nuclear submarine and support ships. En route are the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* and the helicopter carrier *HMS Ocean*, four more destroyers, a frigate, auxiliary vessels and another missile-firing nuclear submarine. The Royal Airforce has 34 fighter jets in position; bases are being prepared to house the troops on their way along with 120 Challenger II tanks, 150 Warrior armoured personnel carriers and artillery. The Ministry of Defence is chartering around 50 merchant ships to take heavy weapons to the Gulf. At the same time the USA is moving its B-2 stealth bombers, F-17 stealth fighters, B-1B bombers and F-15 fighter-bombers into position across Europe, Asia, the Indian Ocean and North America. If these forces are unleashed the devastation and death they cause will be on an enormous, and predictable, scale.

Whatever strategy the invasion force uses the number one priority will be to secure the oil wells and other facilities. US companies are ready to modernise Iraq's oil infrastructure. For political purposes British forces must play a high profile role in the attack. This is the 'blood price' of 'punching above its weight'. The US government expects an 18-month occupation of Iraq



while a suitable government is established. A measure of the 'liberation' planned is that the Republican Guard will be used to police the population – although this 'offer' may just be a lure to defect.

US B-2 stealth bombers have been moved onto the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The British government leases this island to the US military. It is understood that nuclear weapons are stored on the island. The US government recently stated that, 'Nuclear weapons could be employed against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack (for example, deep underground bunkers or biological weapons facilities)'. In March 2002 British Labour Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon talking of Iraq said, 'I am absolutely confident, in the right conditions, we would be willing to use nuclear weapons'. More recently, replying to a question on whether Britain would use nuclear weapons in response to Iraq using weapons of mass destruction, Prime Minister Blair said Britain would respond 'in any way we thought necessary'. Politically it is sensible for the US military to tie Britain into the use of nuclear weapons to prevent US isolation in the face of global outrage; Diego Garcia offers such a means.

A UN document entitled 'Likely Humanitarian Scenarios', dated 10 December 2002, plans for the consequences of war. It states, 'as many as 500,000 people could require treatment ... as a result of direct or indirect injuries'. As a result of damage to the infrastructure '39% of the population will need to be provided with potable water ... the outbreak of diseases in epidemic if not pandemic proportions is very likely'. The document foresees 'therapeutic feeding' for two million severely and moderately malnourished children under five and one million pregnant women. 900,000 refugees will require assistance; two million people will require shelter. This disaster is being planned in London and Washington.

The Labour Party and supporters of the war

There are journalists and commentators associated with the left who support the threat of war on Iraq and 'regime change'; Christopher Hitch-

ens, Nick Cohen and David Aaronovitch among them. For them imperialism can play a progressive role by removing the Iraqi regime: there is no evidence for such a role whatsoever. It was the British government that set up the Iraqi state and established its army to put down the people. The US CIA helped the Ba'athists come to power, the USA, Britain, France and Germany armed Saddam Hussein's regime. Any popular movement of the people, Shi'ite, Sunni or Kurd, will be attacked by the occupation armies. The gatherings of anti-Saddam forces hosted in London represent disaffected sections of Iraq's military and ruling elite.

Sections of the Labour Party say they will only support war if it is authorised by the UN. 'Bomber' Clare Short and the National Executive are among them. This is a despicable left cover for imperialism. These people support war on Iraq as long as enough other people support it and they are not isolated. The UN is not some expression of world opinion; it is constructed to be an instrument of the major powers. Four out of the five permanent members of the Security Council are affiliated to NATO. UN sanctions, which Tony Benn called for, have killed over 1.5 million Iraqis since 1991, including more than half a million children under five. UN resolutions are used to sanction daily RAF and USAF bombing raids on Iraq. The UN is deployed only when it is useful. With the Soviet Union out of the way the US ruling class has acted with increasing impunity. In 1998 the USA attacked Sudan and Afghanistan with no reference to the UN. In 1999 NATO bombed Serbia with no reference to the UN, it simply voted out a Russian resolution and attacked anyway. The credibility of the UN was mocked by these attacks.

For the US and British imperial forces in the Gulf 'victory is the only exit'. For all those Labour Party members who are thinking of resigning – do it, but that is just the start. The Labour Party is an imperialist, war-mongering party of the ruling class. All those with privilege and status derived from Labour Party membership – MPs, councillors, public service managers, trade union officials and the rest, must be forced to resign. All those on the British left who repeatedly call on people to vote Labour, who protect the 'left wing' Labour MPs who refuse to resign, must be exposed for what they are, a left cover for imperialism. Regime change begins at home.

Despite its use of overwhelming military force the US ruling class will be unable to prevent the emergence of rivals. This year the US current account deficit is heading for over \$500 billion. Net US liabilities to the rest of the world amount to a quarter of the US economy. On recent trends they will amount to 65% of the economy within four years. This is unsustainable. Investors are selling off dollars. In the year to January the dollar had fallen 16% against the euro. It continues to fall. Central banks around the world are diversifying their currency holdings away from dollars. Centrifugal forces are prevailing. The US locomotive for the international capitalist economy is coming off the rails. The anchor currency is uprooted, the lender of last resort is going bankrupt, things are falling apart. They will not be put together again by war. 'A long protracted and devastating war would have devastating effects' on the world economy. (Martin Wolf, *Financial Times*, 23 December 2002.) In the past year oil prices have risen by 57% and gold prices by a third as anxiety deepens. War is a risky gamble, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair are praying that it is over quickly and that the oil flows cheaply once again.

USA anti-war movement grows

Washington

Across the United States hundreds of thousands of people rallied in dozens of towns and cities. In Washington up to 200,000 people faced the bitter cold to march on the capital in the biggest anti-war demonstration since the Vietnam era. On the same day, 100,000 marched in San Francisco (see report below), 20,000 in Portland, Oregon, and thousands more attended co-ordinated actions in nearly every US city.

After the main event in Washington thousands of people marched to the US Navy installations on the Potomac River demanding to carry out an inspection for weapons of mass destruction. Meanwhile other activists planned to inspect their own country's 'presidential palace', the White House. Such a massive mobilisation against a military action that had not yet begun is without historical precedent. A clear majority of US citizens opposes a unilateral attack against Iraq, despite a constant stream of fear-mongering propaganda from the capitalist political parties and the corporate media.

The burgeoning anti-war movement is forcing a confrontation between anti-imperialists and opportunists, most evident in the split that is emerging in the labour movement. On 11 January, 110 trade union representatives, representing millions of US workers, gathered in Chicago to launch US Labor Against the War (USLAW). The meeting passed a resolution which recognised the war as an assault on working-class families in the US and in Iraq, a massive diversion of funds from 'schools, hospitals, housing and social security', a 'pretext for attacks on labour, civil, immigrant and human rights at home' and 'a cover and distraction for the sinking economy, corporate corruption and inequality'.

Despite this growing opposition, the leaders of the AFL-CIO, the largest union in the United States representing 13 million workers, have refused to discuss the impending attack on Iraq. Instead, in a letter to Congress on 7 October, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney declared 'America certainly has the right to act unilaterally if we

International action against imperialist war

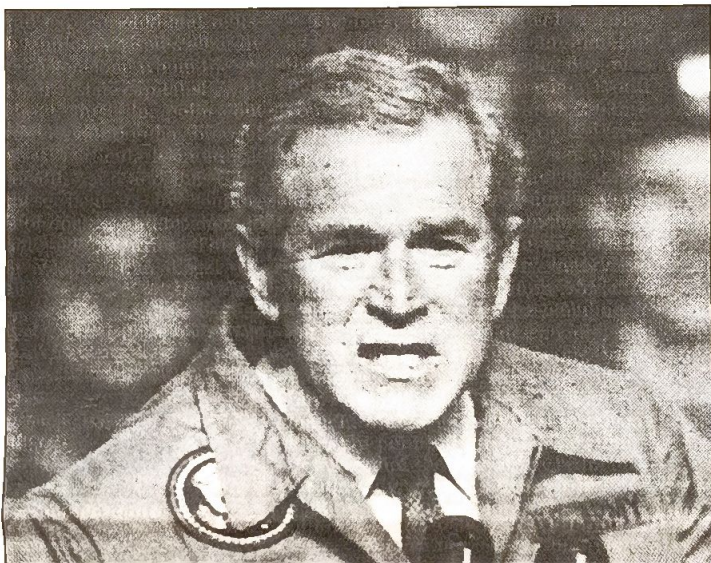
On Saturday 18 January people around the world responded to the call from the International ANSWER coalition - Act Now to Stop War and End Racism - for mid-January actions against war on Iraq to mark the 12th anniversary of the start of the 1991 Gulf War. Actions took place in at least 32 countries from Mexico to Japan.

need to do so to protect our national interests, but the AFL-CIO strongly believes that our national interests are better protected by multilateral action'. This reflects the position of the Democratic Party, the CIA and many in the defence establishment who believe that imperialist objectives can more effectively be met if US aggression maintains the cover of 'multilateralism' and UN approval. However, the dominant themes at the massive demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco were not 'pragmatism' or concerns for how the US can best 'protect our national interests', but a principled opposition to imperialist plunder.

Dalton Hilliard

San Francisco

San Francisco was the scene of the second largest demonstration in the United States. As well as calling for an end to sanctions and war against Iraq, demonstrators linked in the struggle against racism in the US, including the cases of Mumia Abu Jamal and the Miami Five. Around a thousand protesters broke away from the main route of the march to carry out direct actions in the commercial district of



Bush: the USA will take 'whatever action is required' regardless of the decisions of others

the city. Among the targets of the activists was the British Consulate, which was painted with slogans against Britain's role in the war.

The radical left, church groups, immigrant and civil rights organisations, environmental groups, veterans, labour unions and ethnic organisations were all represented, while the Democratic party was conspicuously absent, except for a few black representatives who spoke from the platform.

It was clear that tens of thousands of north Americans who have never protested before felt the need to show their opposition. Many young people and high school students were in the march. The basic economic motives behind the war are taken for granted: 'No blood for oil' was a very popular handwritten placard. There were some pacifist slogans, such as 'Not in our name', but political and economic themes predominated: 'Drop Bush, not bombs'. There were numerous Palestinian flags and many youth wore keffiyeh - a symbol of the challenge to Zionism that has been growing on US campuses over the past year.

ANSWER's anti-racist, anti-imperialist themes have helped broaden the movement, drawing in ethnic and immigrant organisations. Significant numbers of black people were on the New York march; in San Francisco there were contingents of South Asians, Filipinos and people from other Asian communities. The 'all-volunteer' US military is built on the economic conscription of its poorest citizens, making it important to reach out to their families.

Although we've started early, the opposition is not strong enough yet to prevent the war, but never has US imperialism been faced with stronger,

broader or better-prepared opposition before the bombs fall and the body bags begin to return.

San Francisco correspondent

Protests around the world

Meanwhile, on the US-Mexico border, US and Mexican demonstrators gathered from the cities of **El Paso** and **Ciudad Juarez**. Demonstrations were also held in **Mexico City** and **Guatemala**. In Canada at least 20,000 braved -20°C temperatures in **Montreal** to condemn war against Iraq and demand that Canada does not take part in any invasion. In **Moscow** activists demonstrated outside the US Embassy with their red flags and banners to the sound of revolutionary songs played from loudspeakers on the back of a lorry.

Pakistan saw a coalition of different democratic, secular and left organisations lead demonstrations in Lahore and other cities. In **Rawalpindi** several thousand school children formed a human chain to show their opposition to the war. Several thousand gathered in **Tokyo** and other towns and cities in Japan as well as outside US military bases while in Spain demonstrators marched to the Torrejon air base near **Madrid** which could be used to attack Iraq. More than 10,000 people marched through **Berlin** on Sunday 12 January.

Representatives from 40 countries gathered at the second African Social Forum in **Addis Ababa**, Ethiopia between 5 and 9 January to oppose neo-liberal globalisation in Africa. They resolved to 'support all peoples under threat from imperialist aggression and wars which endanger the lives of millions of innocents'.

Opinion polls show that feelings against war on Iraq are growing. Three out of four **Germans** now oppose war and the figure for **France** is similar even if war is given the fig leaf of justification by the UN Security Council. In **Spain** and **Italy** majorities against the war are over 60% and the total for **Europe** and **Asia** together is over 70%. As in Britain the decisive factor in the anti-war movement will be whether it is led by opportunist forces or whether anti-imperialist and revolutionary organisations are able to channel the peoples' opposition to war into effective resistance.

Ed Ralph



Scottish railworkers take a stand against war

At the beginning of January, the rail company EWS attempted to take disciplinary action against two freight train drivers who had refused to move trains carrying weapons and munitions bound for use against the Iraqi people. One stated: 'It was a political protest over the threat to attack Iraq. It was a sign that as individuals and workers we were not prepared to be part of a murderous war, a conscientious objection to helping kill Iraqi civilians.'

The drivers were expected to move war materiel between the Glen Douglas weapons base in Scotland, which is the largest store of NATO weapons in Europe, and naval depots on the west coast. The drivers' ASLEF branch in Motherwell has backed its members and issued a clear statement supporting them, saying it is 'totally opposed to any conflict with Iraq and the USA's seemingly headlong rush into war'. The statement pledged to defend any action that members take to challenge the war.

A week later anti-war activists blocked the road outside Glen Mallon naval base where the warship Ark Royal was awaiting weapons, munitions and supplies and held up loading for four hours, while another activist locked on to the main depot gates. Other activists swam out and chained themselves to the warship's anchors.

Michael MacGregor

Sharon's re-election: green light for ethnic cleansing

Sharon's re-election was no surprise. He may have failed to fulfil his boast to crush the Intifada within 100 days; the Israeli economy may have been grinding to a halt, with 10% unemployment and cuts in social welfare to the old, sick and poor; but when it came to a choice between two former generals – Israeli Labour leader Avram Mitzna and Sharon himself – the Israeli electorate opted for the one who promised to continue pulverising the Palestinian people. The response from the craven Palestinian Authority was to plead for the incoming government to return to the negotiating table.

During the 48 hours leading up to the election on 28 January the entire West Bank and Gaza were locked down in a show of Israeli force. During the election campaign itself the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) attempted to ban two parties supported by Palestinians living in Israel including the National Democratic Assembly Party (Balad) which had two Knesset members, one of them Azmi Bishara. Bishara is on trial for alleged sedition and incitement to violence for statements he made in support of Palestinian resistance at the June 2001 funeral of Syrian President Assad. The CEC also approved the candidacy of Baruch Marvel, former leader of the ultra-racist Kach movement. As the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharanot said on 7 January: 'The message (from the CEC) has already been sent. For the Jewish political system, Arab representatives are illegitimate.' Such naked discrimination, however, risked upsetting key Zionist allies such as the US and Britain, so the Supreme Court overturned the bans. Nevertheless, Sharon's Likud party romped home with 37 Knesset seats out of 120, whilst Labour slumped from 26 to 19. Sharon is now trying to get Labour to support a National Unity government to help relations with the US. However, with or without Labour, it will be a government of war against the Palestinian people.

The interim government headed by Sharon following his dissolution of the Knesset at the beginning of last November signalled what is to come. Israeli forces murdered dozens of children over the period – a fact not reported in the Western media whose obsession is with the latest suicide operation, rather than accurate reporting of the oppression of the Palestinian people. In November, the Zionists killed 44 Palestinians, 12 of them children; in December there were another 63, including 11 children; in January, 70 Palestinians were killed, including nine children. Some of those killed include:

- Nada Madhi, 11, from Rafah, shot dead in her home on 19 December;
- Hanin Sitta, 12, also from Rafah, shot dead as she walked back home from school on 21 December;
- Abdul Al Najjar, a 16-year-old mentally disabled boy, killed in a failed assassination attempt in Khan Younis on 12 January;
- Mohye Hamza, 17, shot dead when Israeli soldiers fired on children throwing stones in Tulkarm in the early hours of 15 January;
- Hazzaa' Shadid, 16, shot dead a few hours later also in Tulkarm, also when Israeli soldiers opened fire on a group of stone throwers;
- Ali Talab Aziz, 7, shot dead in

Rafah by an Israeli soldier who fired at him from a tank; his five-year-old brother was seriously injured;

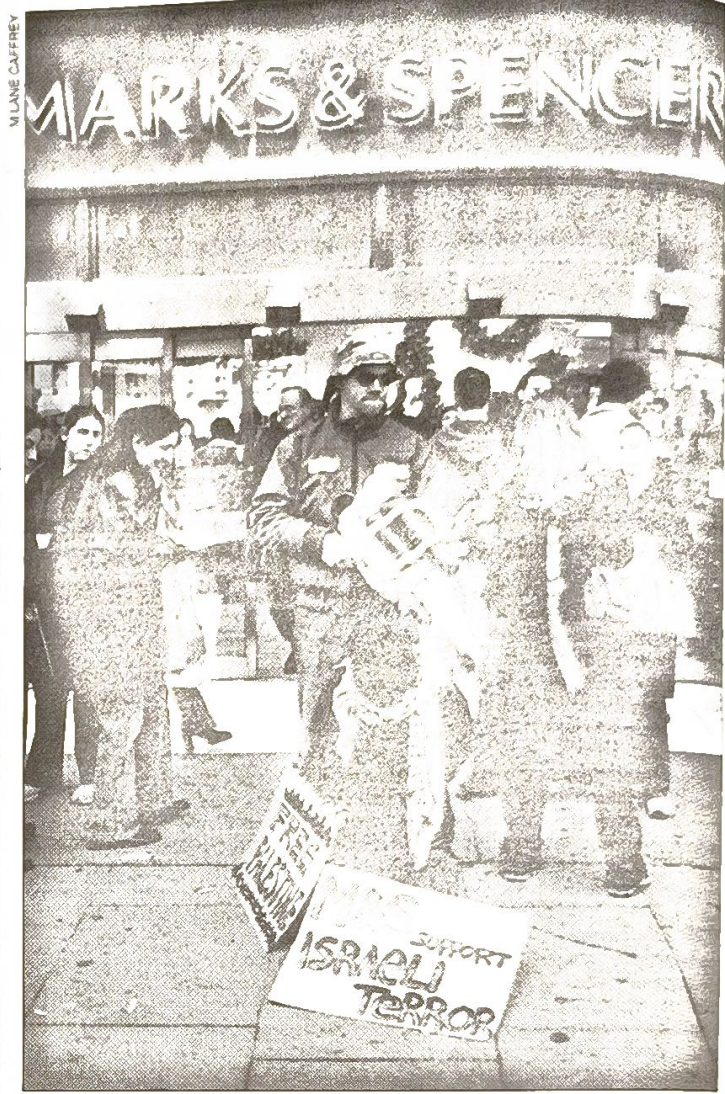
- Three children aged 14 and 15 shot in the head at close range in North Gaza; the Israeli army claimed they were armed with knives.

By the end of December over 2,100 Palestinians had been killed since the start of the Intifada. After a six-week lull, the suicide attack of 5 January in Tel Aviv which killed 23 was indicative of the anger and desperation of the Palestinian people: their suffering is of no significance to the imperialist and Zionist media.

Meanwhile the Zionist army stepped up preparations to completely destroy the infrastructure and economy of the Gaza strip. On 7 December last year, tanks and helicopter gun-

ships killed ten in an attack on al-Buriej in Gaza. From early January, regular invasions targeted workshops and the few factories that still functioned. On 11 January an armoured force invaded Khan Younis killing two and demolishing 30 family businesses. Two weeks later on 25 January, they destroyed four bridges and a dozen houses in Beit Hanoun and blew up 14 houses in Rafah. The following day a Zionist force of 50 tanks and armoured personnel carriers invaded Al Zaytoun, killing 12 Palestinians, injuring 40 more, six critically. Troops dynamited 17 workshops and damaged 15 more. The Israeli excuse was that these were used to manufacture weapons. But they have blown up dozens and produced no evidence to support their

continued on page 7



Supporters of the Victory to the Intifada group protest outside M&S in Oxford Street, London

Visit to Palestinian detainees

Iwent to Palestine at the beginning of December 2002. Whilst I was there I visited six Palestinian detainees held in a special prison in Jericho. The six detainees are alleged by the Israelis to have been involved in the assassination by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) of the extreme right wing Israeli Tourism Minister, Rehavam Ze'evi in October 2001. The assassination of Ze'evi was a direct response by the PFLP to the Israeli assassination of their leader Abu Ali Mustafa in August the same year. The six men were handed over to the British and US military by Arafat in return for an end to the Israeli siege of his headquarters in Ramallah in April 2002.

Four were convicted at Arafat's behest after hastily-arranged kangaroo court trials and sentenced to between one and 18 years in prison. The trial took place behind closed doors in Arafat's compound whilst it was besieged by Israeli tanks. None of the detainees were allowed to give evidence. There is no right of appeal. The remaining two are Fuad Shubeiki and Ahmad Sa'adat, Secretary General of the PFLP and the most senior member of the Palestinian resistance yet to be detained. Israeli government spokesmen have commented that if any of the six are released they will be assassinated. Hence Arafat obligingly keeps them in gaol, an act condemned by the detainees and legitimised by the presence of British and American guards at the prison.

During my visit I was able to speak to Sa'adat. His brother was assassinated by the Israelis in August 2002. His

wife has now also been detained (see letters). Their families' homes have been demolished by the Israelis, leaving them homeless. I was struck by Ahmad's quiet outrage at what had happened, not to them personally, but what was happening to the Palestinian people as a whole. An inspiring, quietly spoken figure, he patiently explained that what was happening to him was not special. Despite the conditions of their detention he and the others had no complaints about their treatment by the Palestinian Authority guards at the prison. On one matter all were agreed. It is not the conditions of their detention that concerns them – some have no access to the telephone, all their correspondence is opened and they have little or no access to books or newspapers. It is the fact that they are detained at all and that the international community – in particular Britain and the USA – is acting only to legitimise their wrongful detention in the same way that it acts to legitimise the actions of the Israeli occupation forces and settlers.

Ahmad asked a lot of questions, to which I had no answer. 'Under what law am I staying here?' he asked. 'They don't tell me anything. We are in the same position now as when we were surrounded in Ramallah. The UK and the US say they are only monitors but really they are guards enforcing the deal the Palestinian Authority made with the Israelis. The Palestinian Authority is co-operating with the Israelis and the guards are helping the Israelis... But the most important thing is that the Palestinian people need to be saved. Not just these six prisoners.



'The Palestinian Authority is co-operating with the Israelis and the guards are helping the Israelis... But the most important thing is that the Palestinian people need to be saved'

The main job of the UK and the US is to save people under occupation, to oblige the Israelis to respect international law and human rights. The real struggle is between our people and the occupation.'

The six detainees are Ilyad Gholmi (already served his one-year sentence), Majdi Rimawi (8 years), Basil Al Asmar (12 years), Hamdi Quran (18 years), Amad Sa'adat and Fuad Shubeiki (both remain detained although their release was ordered by the Palestinian Authority high court in June 2002).

Daniel Guedalla

Sent letters of protest to the Israeli Ambassador at Embassy of Israel 2 Palace Green London W8 4QB Tel: 0207 957 9500 Fax: 0207 957 9555

Write to the detainees c/o Addameer, Prisoners Support and Human Rights Association, Jerusalem, P.O.Box 17338 and Ramallah, Al Irsal Street, 7th Floor, Al Isra' Building. Tel: 00 972 2 2960446 Fax: 00 972 2 2960447 e-mail: addameer@planet.edu

Class forces in Palestine: a response

In FRFI 170, Robert Clough reviewed an important analysis of the class forces in both Israel and Palestine that Palestinian human rights worker ADAM HANIEH had written for US left-wing journal *Monthly Review*. We are very pleased to publish this serious and substantial response from Comrade Hanieh and will be continuing the discussion in future issues of FRFI.

Despite the fact that I don't agree with the political implications you attribute to my analysis, you raise some important questions that do require discussion. I will attempt to deal with what I believe are the shortcomings of your analysis below.

Your major criticism of my article seems to be the fact that I did not explicitly state that the working class should lead the Palestinian revolution. While I agree with this standpoint on a general theoretical level, what I attempted to do in my article was to explain the concrete reality of class relations in Palestinian society and Israel. I strongly believe this should be the starting point of developing a political strategy if we are to avoid schemas that do not fit real life.

What are these concrete social relations? Firstly, the Palestinian working class is concentrated in three sectors: the Palestinian Authority (PA), small family owned businesses, or work in Israel or the settlements. The latter are currently (virtually) idle due to the closures and the economic changes that have taken place since Oslo.

There are no large industries. There is also no 'national' bourgeoisie or even imperialist capital directly exploiting cheap Palestinian labour. Instead, the bourgeoisie has a comprador nature as I attempted to describe in my article.

Secondly, and this is a point that was not adequately explored in the article, Palestinian farmers do not resemble the classic third world peasantry or a rural proletariat. In fact, the vast majority of Palestinian farm holdings are very small and form a supplement to wage labour relations in the cities. There are none of the large *latifundia*-type holdings of the type that are found in Latin America.

Instead, many Palestinians own a small piece of land which is worked seasonally by family members (usually women, children and the elderly) as a supplement to the normal income. Produce from these farms is either sold directly by the farmer (or their family) in urban markets or consumed directly by the owners themselves. Thus, it is very common in olive-picking season for Palestinians living in urban areas to take time off work to harvest olives on their land in the villages from which they originate.

It is important to remember that the land area of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is very small, and that most of the land which was historically cultivated by Palestinian farmers has been confiscated by the Israeli army or settlers. Incidentally,



this land confiscation played a crucial role in the breaking down of traditional village structures and the proletarianisation/urbanisation of a large section of rural youth during the 1970s and 80s.

Now, to turn to the discussion of working class leadership. Firstly, so there can be no confusion on this point, I agree that this is both necessary and desirable. This, however, is not the issue. The real question is *what does this mean in practice?* This is the question that you do not answer apart from vague exhortations that 'the success of the Palestinian revolution crucially depends on a class-conscious Palestinian working class leadership.'

It is of little practical significance to state that Vietnam, Angola and Mozambique did not have an industrial working class but they still made revolutions. Those countries were particularly suited to guerrilla warfare strategies partly due to geographical factors and partly due to the confluence of global power at the time. The West Bank and Gaza Strip is a much smaller area with most of the population living in urban areas, there are no forests or hills to use as liberated zones, and Israel possesses weaponry far superior to anything that Palestinians can utilise. Again, these are all further reasons why the Palestinian armed struggle has taken the form that it has.

Now given that the Palestinian workers cannot use classic tactics such as withdrawal of their labour power in order to bring capitalist industry to a halt (in fact, what has happened in reality is that Israel has withdrawn Palestinian labour from the market place!), what does 'working class leadership of the revolution' mean? If you mean by this a determination not to sacrifice the interests of the Palestinian cause for pragmatic negotiated solutions then I am in complete agreement. Still, this does not go very far in suggesting an effective strategy.

I also don't have any easy answers to this question and I don't believe anyone on the ground here does either. What I can do is suggest a broad outline of how to approach an answer. Firstly, I believe it is imperative to begin with a correct understanding of the class nature of the Israeli state and the PA. The absence of this approach leads to grave political errors such as the belief that Zionism and socialism can be compatible, the Israeli Labour Party is left-wing, or even that historically Israel represented some form of socialism because of the historical weight of the labour movement and the kibbutzim. We see this today with the frenzy of calls from the so-called Zionist 'left' to support Mitzna's candidacy and the Israeli Labour Party against Sharon. These calls stem

from a mistaken view of who the Israeli Labour Party actually represents. The Israeli Labour Party is the first choice of Israeli capital (and indeed US imperialism), it always has been historically and it remains so today.

Secondly, we need to remember that the root of the Palestinian problem is the Zionist colonisation of Palestine which from the 1960s (as you point out) has been backed by US imperialism in order to defend the interests of US capital in the Middle East. Zionism is a racist ideology based on the expropriation of Palestinian land and is a form of Apartheid encapsulated in Israel's self-definition as a 'Jewish state'. There will not be peace or justice as long as Zionism is the ruling ideology of Israel.

This is the point that is obscured by those calling for negotiations and a settlement based on two-states. Even if a Palestinian state was to emerge in the West Bank and Gaza Strip this would only be a temporary step as long as a racist state based on Zionist ideology continues to exist in its current form. It would still be the duty of every revolutionary to oppose the Israeli state and seek the end of Zionism. The only lasting solution and indeed the only just solution is a democratic, secular state in the whole of historic Palestine. On a strategic level, this means that the Palestinian struggle will not be won solely in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinians who remained in Israel after the establishment of the state will play a critical role as will those sections of the Israeli working class which also suffer because of Zionism such as the Mizrahim (even if their present level of consciousness denies this fact.)

Flowing from a critique of Zionism in all its forms is the central importance of the right of return of Palestinian refugees. This demand expresses the link between the current stage of the struggle and the foundation of the Israeli state in 1948. It is for this reason that a Palestinian leadership that actually represents the interests of the oppressed must stand firm with this demand. The current leadership has clearly failed in this regard and this failure stems from their reliance upon foreign capital and their symbiotic relationship with Israel that was fostered during the Oslo years.

Understanding the class nature of the Palestinian Authority and the concrete structure of the Palestinian working class points the way to how it is possible for the Palestinian people to take control of their struggle. I believe that in the future we shall see a resurgence of struggle at the level of the Palestinian workforce, particularly in the public sector. Public sector workers (especially teachers) are very poorly paid and work in extremely difficult conditions. Indeed, in the late 1990s, Palestinian teachers waged a long and bitter struggle over their conditions which was halted with the Intifada. There are signs that this struggle may be renewing along with calls for a democratic and accountable leadership that really represents the interests of the Palestinian people.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to reply to your review. Comradely regards
Adam Hanieh

Spanish ban Batasuna fights banning

Batasuna, the Basque nationalist coalition, faces a two-year ban, with the possibility of it being extended to August 2007. The ban proscribes all Batasuna activity and members face prosecution as 'supporters of terrorism'.

The nationalist left-wing party was banned on August 2002 under the Law of Parties [new legislation on political parties] introduced by the conservative government of José María Aznar (as reported in FRFI 169). Since then Batasuna and the grassroots movement involved with it have organised civil protests and are taking legal steps to challenge the ban.

On 14 September 2002, 40,000 marched in Bilbao. The region's autonomous police attacked the demonstration, wounding dozens. Another march under the slogan 'Democracy for the Basque Country - self-determination now!' took place in San Sebastian on 11 November, involving 25,000-30,000 peaceful demonstrators. Originally banned, this demonstration was declared legal by the Basque High Court on the grounds that the banning of a party does not constitute the criminalisation of an individual's right to demand self-determination. Activists continue to organise against police torture, fascism and the dispersal of Basque prisoners, in universities, local councils and even at the Spanish Embassy in London, where a picket was held on 16 November.

On 7 January, Batasuna's lawyer challenged the Law of Parties as unconstitutional at the High Court. The judgment will be announced in April. The government wants to speed up the process to help ensure victory over nationalist forces in the autonomous municipal elections in May. A major purpose of the ban is to make it easier for pro-Spanish parties to take over the Basque Parliament, where they have never had a majority.

If Batasuna loses the appeal, the case will be taken to the Constitutional Court and then, if necessary, to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The only thing proved by the state is that Batasuna doesn't condemn the armed actions of ETA, but rather places them in the context of the political conflict of the Basque Country, which in Strasbourg wouldn't be enough to ban it, as shown in previous cases involving pro-Kurdish parties banned in Turkey.

Meanwhile the government continues its repression, encouraging the recently-privatised telecommunications company Telefonica to sabotage Batasuna's website, and keeping militant prisoners far away from family and homeland. One such prisoner is Inigo Makazaga (24), held in Belmarsh Prison in London in category A special security conditions since April 2001. A member of Batasuna, accused without any evidence of belonging to an armed wing, Inigo is still awaiting extradition.

The reactionary Spanish government has found the imperialist war on terrorism a convenient excuse for stepping up repression against the Basque movement; privatisation; university, labour and health care reforms; anti-democratic involvement in two wars and ongoing police violence against anyone who opposes any of these measures.

Juanjo Rivas



International News

Cuba news

Between a Reich and a hard place

First, the good news. Otto Reich, Bush's fanatically anti-Cuban choice as US Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs, has failed to win Senate approval for his nomination. Bush's nomination was widely seen as a pay-off to the viciously anti-Cuban Miami Mafia for its role in securing Bush's fraudulent election victory in Florida. Bizarrely, Reich was opposed on the grounds that he lacked the necessary 'range of experience and temperament'. A brief glance at his career suggests that, on the contrary, here was a man whose broad experience made him ideally suited to the brutal defence of US interests throughout Latin America.

- During the USA's covert wars on Nicaragua and El Salvador in the early 1980s, Reich headed the sinister Office of Public Diplomacy, specially set up to produce disinformation and propaganda against the Sandinistas and Salvadorean revolutionaries. During this time he reported to, amongst others, Security Council aide Oliver North, later tried for his role in the Iran/Contra affair. In 1987, US courts ruled that the Office of Public Diplomacy had violated a prohibition

against using federal funds for domestic propaganda, but Reich was never prosecuted.

- From 1986-89, Reich was US ambassador to Venezuela. Within days of his appointment, the terrorist Orlando Bosch, imprisoned in Venezuela for murdering 73 Cubans when he blew up a civilian airliner in 1976, had been freed through Reich's intervention. Bosch flew to the USA, where he was paroled by George Bush Sr and given US residency.

- On his return to the USA, Reich set up as lobbyist, representing such unsavoury clients as Bacardi rum, arms producers Lockheed Martin and British American Tobacco. He also headed the US-Cuba Business Council, a non-profit organisation run by Bacardi and partially funded by the Agency for International Development (USAID). Bacardi is reported to have paid Reich \$600,000 for his services. On Bacardi's behalf, Reich helped draft the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, intensifying the blockade against Cuba and also Section 11 of the 1998 Omnibus Appropriations Act, stripping Cuba of trademark protection and thereby allowing Bacardi to produce and sell its own rum under the Havana Club label.

- Even during his brief tenure in Western Hemispheric

Affairs, Reich's time has not been wasted. In the past year, he has waged a constant battle against those in the US who want to normalise relations with Cuba; rebutting Cuban offers of co-operation on health projects and anti-drugs campaigns and accusing Cuba of preparing a biological weapons programme. He also helped prepare a coup against democratically elected Venezuelan President

stringent regulation of the trade. The chair of WRAP, Joaquin Otero, a former AFL-CIO leader, was prominent in the Labor Committee for a Free Cuba in the 1990s. It's a small world.

The bad news is that the rabidly anti-communist, reactionary Reich has not gone far. Bush has invented a new post for his protégé as 'Special Envoy for Western Hemispheric Initia-



Relatives mourn the 73 Cubans murdered in 1976 when terrorists blew up their plane

Chavez last April. However, so clumsy were his efforts that even the US administration seems to have been embarrassed enough not to fight for him to remain in post.

- This man of many talents also takes an interest in the rag trade. He is vice chairman of Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (WRAP), set up in June 2000 to undermine the growing anti-sweatshop movement and dodge more

tives' based in the executive building next to the White House. His job includes 'home-land security issues in the Caribbean' and 'aspects of Cuba policy', focusing in particular on people-to-people contacts between Americans and Cubans and 'transitional issues in the post-Castro period'. Not much to celebrate there, then.

Nor has the Miami Mafia's hold over George Bush diminished: Bush has replaced Reich with another anti-Cuban fanatic,

ic, Roger Noriega. Noriega has a long history of subversive and dirty propaganda activities with congressional committees and imperialist front organisations such as the Organisation of American States (OAS) and USAID. In 2001 he was awarded the Grand Master of the Order of the Sun by the corrupt, neo-liberal government of Peru for his support for 'the democratic transition and promotion of human rights'. For several years Noriega was the right-hand man to arch-reactionary Jesse Helms, the co-sponsor of the Helms-Burton Act.

Jim Craven and Cat Wiener

Amnesty International takes up Miami 5

Amnesty International has written to US Attorney General John Ashcroft, raising the issue of the Miami 5 and the appalling treatment of visiting relatives as a human rights abuse. The case has been taken up in particular by the Irish branch of Amnesty, which highlights the travesty of a trial which relied almost exclusively on evidence from convicted terrorists and where there was extensive intimidation of jurors by these same terrorists. It dedicates the campaign to free the Miami 5 'to the memory of 3,478 Cubans killed and 2,099 maimed at the hands of US-based terrorist groups since 1959.'

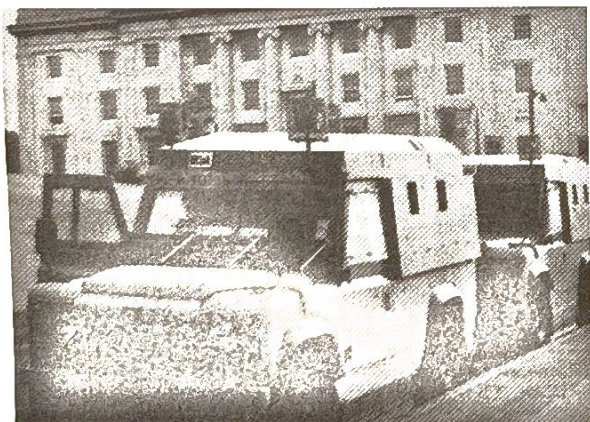
International awareness of the campaign to free the five

men, political prisoners of US imperialism, is growing. Meanwhile, in Cuba, National Assembly Minister Ricardo Alarcon has informed the National Assembly that in 1998, just five months before the men were arrested, he had submitted files to the FBI including a chronology of terrorist acts perpetrated by terrorists from the Cuban American National Foundation, operating out of US territory, in the 1990s; telephone transcripts pinpointing the location of the terrorist Posada Carriles and a list of 64 known terrorists operating in the USA. The US authorities have never acted on this information. So much for the War on Terrorism.

Credit for terrorism

In January, the *Miami Herald* reported that credit card MBNA would be joining forces with the USA Cuba Financial Funds organisation to ensure that from 'every purchase made using the card a percentage of the amount will go directly to aid needy Cubans outside of the island and even internal dissidents'. Leading lights at USA Cuba Financial Funds are Marta Lima, president of the World Federation of Former Cuban Political Prisoners, and Eugenio Llanera, a known Miami fanatic who organised violent attacks on Cuba in the 1960s as part of a terrorist organisation going by the innocuous name of the Democratic National Unity Party.

Ireland: direct rule continues



PAUL MALLON

As the British government gears up for war in Iraq, it is attempting to maintain stability in the north of Ireland. It is hoping for a return to devolved Stormont rule by the end of February, ahead of elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly scheduled for 1 May. On 23 and 24 January the British government held an 'Ulster Summit' in London attended by the Irish government, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and former First Minister David Trimble and Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams.

Earlier, David Trimble had called for the issue of IRA disbandment to be on the agenda as part of discussions about the re-establishment of the Stormont parliament. The British govern-

ment backed the Unionist call for the IRA to disband. Speaking at the end of 2002 in Belfast, Tony Blair stated that Britain would respond 'generously' to what he called 'acts of completion' by the IRA. 'Acts of completion' is Labour Party language for what will amount to the disbandment of the IRA. At the end of the Ulster Summit, Adams felt able to predict an 'imaginative gesture' by the IRA in response to the implementation of the devolved institutions.

A round of talks to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly - suspended on 14 October 2002 - broke down on 19 December following the leakage of a confidential Irish government position paper which stated that the IRA was still active. In late December, media in Britain and Ireland quoted a senior Irish government source saying that

the IRA was planning to make a 'historic gesture' to resuscitate the peace process, although this was said to fall short of full IRA disbandment. Yet, when in its New Year message the IRA restated its total commitment to the peace process and once more called on British imperialism to implement the Good Friday Agreement, it rejected what it called 'unrealistic ultimatums' in regard to calls for its disbandment. The reality, however, is that the Ulster Unionist Party and the British government have manoeuvred the IRA into a position where nothing short of a significant statement from the IRA on disbandment will restore the devolved institutions. The Republican movement is once again being compelled to save the peace process.

In a measure of how far Sinn Féin is dependent on the success of the peace process, Martin McGuinness suggested that the period of January and February was probably 'the most critical six to eight weeks that we have seen in the course of the last 30 years'. Sinn Féin Assembly member Martin Ferris went further and described the negotiations to restore the devolved institutions as the most important since Britain imposed the partition of Ireland in 1921.

As the negotiations drag on, organised fascist loyalist attacks on the nationalist working class continue. In North Belfast in January as part of their continuing terror campaign against Catholic schools across the north, loyalists placed a bomb at the Holy Cross primary school. A loyalist feud has claimed two lives over the New Year period and threatens loyalist involvement in the peace process. In a bid to stabilise the escalating

Scottish debate on sectarianism cloaks attacks on Republicans

PAUL MALLON

In recent months a debate has begun in Scotland surrounding religious discrimination and sectarianism. Scottish politics reflect that of the north of Ireland, with a working class divided along the same lines: a fascist Orange section on the one hand and a strongly pro-Republican section on the other.

These differences are reflected in support for the two major Glasgow football clubs. Rangers draws its support from the loyalists and Celtic from Republicans. It is not only Ireland that divides the working class: Rangers supporters often wave the Israeli flag at football matches whilst Celtic supporters are strongly pro-Palestinian. However, this new debate over sectarianism is a coded attack on

violence within the loyalist community, new Northern Ireland Minister Paul Murphy revoked the licence of freedom granted to leading Belfast loyalist Johnny Adair for being 'a threat to others'. The UDA terror group of which he was a member has expelled him and has now threatened to assassinate him. But neither a loyalist feud nor a return to Stormont rule will make a difference to the sustained daily attacks the nationalist community suffers at the hands of loyalist hate mobs and death squads.

Republicanism.

In the Scottish Parliament, Liberal Democrat MSP Donald Gorrie has put forward an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, the aim of which is to make 'sectarian and religious hatred an aggravation of existing criminal offences'. However the emphasis is quite clear: any expression of Irishness is being labelled 'sectarian'. Flying the Irish flag is now being banned in football grounds, while Irish pubs are being threatened with closure for depicting images of the Irish uprising in 1916.

An anti-sectarianism industry has emerged. One group, Sense Over Sectarianism, a coalition of forces including churches, football clubs and Glasgow City Council, was awarded £420,000 by the Millennium Commission. Another such group, Nil By Mouth, has been given £25,000 per year for the next three years by the Scottish Executive. These groups have maintained in common a deafening silence on the sectarianism of the British state. There is no mention in their literature and much-hyped press releases of the role of the British state or the Labour party in fostering religious tension. Yet there is damning evidence of widespread institutionalised sectarianism in Scotland, of the sort which the 'anti-sectarianism' lobby refuses to acknowledge. In 1999 a doctoral student at Edinburgh University, Michael Rosie, showed that almost

one in three of prisoners within the Scottish prison system (30%) is Roman Catholic while only 15% of the Scottish population are Roman Catholic. Such figures reveal the reality of the Scottish judicial system.

At the same time, the state maintains complete silence on sectarian Orange marches which regularly take place across Scotland. Contrast this with the recent police ban on a march in commemoration of the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre. Scheduled to take place on 25 January in Wishaw near Glasgow, police stopped it just hours before it was due to go ahead, following pressure from the local MSP and First Minister Jack McConnell.

In December 2002, McConnell had declared that 'some of the problems are caused by the symbols that are sold outside the grounds by street traders'. The Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council has responded by tightening local by-laws prohibiting the sale of political and 'provocative' literature outside football grounds. This could be deemed to include *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, given our opposition to the Good Friday Agreement, our opposition to war on Iraq and our support for Palestine. In a calculated attack on our democratic rights, Labour is attempting to stamp out any expression of political consciousness and organisation. *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* will resist this censorship.

'Economic coup' against Chávez crumbles

The centre of this struggle focuses on legislation that came into force on 1 January 2003. The new Hydrocarbons Act gives the state a 50%+ stake in new joint ventures in the oil sector and gives it 30% royalties on all extracted crude. In 1974, PDVSA delivered 80% of its income to the state and kept 20% (as 'operating costs' entering the coffers of foreign companies and its directors and managers). In 1990, the ratio was 50:50 and in 1998 it became 20:80! The government is stopping this theft. The *New York Times* denounced the Hydrocarbons Act as a 'grave risk' to foreign investment.

Furthermore, the new Law on Land and Agricultural Development legalises the government's takeover of idle estates and other land, and its distribution to landless and homeless families. The Law on Fishing and Aquaculture favours small fishermen over large monopolies. These and other legal changes (see FRFI 167) are being fought against tooth and nail by the wealthy in the courts, with administrative obstruction and now by business stoppages.

Since 1998 there have been increasingly serious clashes between the supporters of President Chávez and those of business, whose self-appointed 'democratic co-ordinators' rejected a joint 'declaration against the use of violence and intolerance' with the government on 12 November. On the same day Alfredo Peña, the mayor of Caracas, allowed his metropolitan police to fire on pro-Chávez demonstrators, killing one and wounding 20. He also attempted to force pro-Chávez police officers into early retirement. After armed confrontation between police officers on opposing sides, the President deployed the National Guard on 16 November to take control of ten city police stations and replaced the police chief. Yet the Supreme Court ordered Chávez to restore the force's autonomy on 19 December.

Labour aristocracy walks out
Business's current anti-government 'lockout' was organised after 28 November when the government rejected an illegal decision by the National Electoral Council (CEN) to call a referendum on 2 February over President Chávez's tenure. From 2 December the business elite decided to stop all fuels for electricity generating stations, for the aluminium and steel industry, water distribution, transport and domestic use, preventing the filling of oil tankers. This blocked food supplies to the workers. In the first week about 30,000 technicians and administrative personnel stayed away. The National Guard arrested several PDVSA managers trying to lock and weld shut the gates of refineries to prevent production workers from entering. Most production workers in oil extraction and refining did not leave their posts.

By 5 December, 23 oil tankers were unable to load, bringing most exports to a standstill. In some cases, technicians shut off computerised refinery controls and the US company, Intensa, running the computers, passively obstructed attempts to restart systems. 'What is going on in my country is not a strike,' Chávez charged. 'It is a coup attempt disguised as a strike' organised by 'terrorists who are blocking oil and food

For ten weeks an acute struggle has taken place over Venezuela's future. Managers of the national oil corporation – Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) – with leaders of skilled trades unions, prompted by big businesses, carrying out economic sabotage to get rid of President Chávez. With their military allies, they suffered defeat in a coup attempt in April 2002 (FRFI 167). A second planned coup was aborted on 25 June. Several assassination attempts have been made on the President's life. Then, in August, the new 'Patria para Todos' party called for an 'economic coup'. 'It's all part of our strategy,' said Carlos Ortega, fraudulently elected head of Venezuela's CTV union federation. So on 2 December the business sponsored opposition launched its most serious attempt at a business shutdown. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.



President Chávez

distribution and sabotaging refineries.' Fires were started at some oil wells. The National Guard and many production workers manually restarted operations, whilst support from volunteer technicians from OPEC countries was sought.

About 20% of the working population were locked out on the first day, reduced to 10% after three days, despite a vitriolic mass media campaign supporting the strike. The media continuously spreads anti-Chávez lies. He is supposedly giving free oil to Cuba, wants to impose communism, is dealing with North Korea over atomic weapons, has funded Al Qaida, is a dictator, ruining the economy (sic!) and so on.

In Caracas on 6 December, the day before a major pro-government rally, a gunman opened fire on supporters of the military officers on trial for the April coup attempt (see FRFI 170). In exchanges of fire – guns are to be seen everywhere – three people were killed and 28 wounded. Security forces arrested seven people; one, a Portuguese 'drifter', admitted opening fire. Such provocation provided grist for the anti-Chávez mill. Later, Vice President Rangel, attending a wake for one of the victims, said the government had videotape showing city police were responsible for the deaths.

The mass of workers is furious with the old elite and is demanding strong measures from the President. On 7 December, despite the night's shootings, more than 400,000 peasants, workers, students and others marched in Caracas supporting the President. José Prieto, Minister of Defence, said the armed forces would defend the oil industry so that Venezuela could meet its international

obligations. Constant pressure, including bribes, has been used to get army officers to support the opposition. The President again called for an end to the lockout, leaving open the possibility of declaring a state of emergency. The National Guard deployed at petrol stations prevented panic buying. Venezuelan navy commandos took control of the tanker *Pilin León*, allowing 280,000 barrels of petroleum to be unloaded. Brazil's President Cardoso sent 520,000 barrels of petroleum to Venezuela as an act of support.

Olga Fonseca, Venezuela's chargé d'affaires in Havana, warned of 'the possibility of a low intensity war. The internal affairs of Venezuela have never been beyond the reach of foreign influences. The US is an important power factor in the region, it's an important factor in the historical future of our countries'. Fonseca suggested that another coup d'état, Chávez's murder, guerrilla war or low intensity war, were on the opposition's agenda.

On 14 December, the 'opposition' organised a large demonstration, but within two days almost every store in the wealthy neighbourhoods of Eastern Caracas had opened for business. Their losses were mounting. The opposition kept agitating for a 'mega-march' or the 'taking of Caracas'. Carlos Ortega announced there would 'not be any Christmas for Venezuelan families' and declared the stoppage indefinite. However all holiday season flights from Caracas to Miami for the middle class were booked solid!

Before Christmas the Supreme Court declared the strike illegal; contempt of court can be punished by up to 15 months' imprisonment. By now

90% of all contracted oil industry employees had returned to work. The remainder, the managers, were to be fired if they did not also return.

On 22 December Chávez informed the country of PDVSA's reactivation and the dispatch to the USA of 2.18 million barrels of oil in order to maintain Venezuela's commercial commitments. The army now guarded installations, ports and pipelines; PDVSA has been reorganised and split into two regional entities; its Caracas HQ will be largely dismantled.

On 23 December opposition leaders desperately tried to block highways into Caracas – typically four or five cars or trucks per route. They were met by angry workers and quickly disbanded after violent clashes at ten locations. Vice President Rangel announced that banks would return to their usual schedule, apparently ending their partial work stoppage. The anger of people denied access to their own money had brought huge pressure on the National Banking Council to reopen branches.

In an increasingly desperate situation for the propertied classes, Caracas police attacked pro-Chávez demonstrators on 3 January 2003, killing two. 20,000 marchers demanded justice for the two murdered youths on 5 January. At night, police fired shots and tear gas at a vigil for one of the victims. 'How long will metropolitan police officers continue being used to repress the people?' Chávez demanded. 'We will find the assassins of Oscar Gomez and Jairo Gregorio Moran wherever they are hiding.'

Banks again closed on 9 and 10 January. Thousands of workers could not access their wages, but the banks have admitted defeat for the moment, accusing the government of threatening them! As we said in FRFI 152, 'Chávez...has the massive pressure of a young and energetic coalition representing the mass of workers urging him into action'. It is the constant action of the mass of workers that threatens the banks, not fear of government fines.

By 10 January, to guarantee food distribution, Chávez ordered the military to prepare to seize food stocks and plants made idle by the now 40-day-old strike. The National Guard reopened two Coca-Cola and other plants to ensure supplies of bottled water. The US ambassador protested!

On 12 January opposition marchers in Caracas urged the army to oust Chávez. But after tens of millions of dollars in losses, the country's middle class was now seriously affected by currency devaluation, diminishing the value of their salaries and reducing business access to credit. Continuing their strike could now be devastating. Matters are not going well for the leaders of

the 'economic coup'. By the last week of January the Spanish government unofficially agreed to safe conduct and asylum for Carlos Ortega and Chambers of Commerce & Industry president Carlos Fernandez. On 22 January these two flew to New York, officially to a 'dog and pony show' at Rockefeller's 'Council of The Americas'. That day the country's Supreme Court declared the CEN referendum decision invalid.

The next day over 300,000 marchers again demonstrated for Chávez. Shipping pilots returned to work. By the end of January, 5,111 strikers in the oil industry had been sacked (mostly managers). Nevertheless, oil supplies had been more than halved, from 3.1 million barrels per day (bpd), returning to 1.5 million bpd by the end of January, losing the country an average of \$50 million every day.

US interference

Since the defeated April coup, the opposition has been supported by the USA within the Organisation of American States. Yet on 17 December the OAS, for the first time in the organisation's history, rejected a major US initiative calling for elections. It resolved (32-0 with two abstentions) 'to fully back the democratic and constitutional legitimacy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, whose government is led by Hugo Chávez Frías, and to reject, categorically, any coup attempt or alteration of constitutional order that seriously affects democratic rule'.

Now the USA wants to subvert the Friends of Venezuela group proposed by Brazil's President Lula da Silva. Because the PDVSA usually provides the USA with 15% of its oil imports the continued struggle has inconvenienced the USA, but imperialism is not reconciled to the Chávez government. So now, along with ex-President Carter's travelling peace circus, meeting in Washington at the OAS, the opposition's call for early elections is being repeated.

Attacking the restructured PDVSA in December, Moody's Investors Service downgraded its credit rating, as well as four heavy oil projects the state firm is developing with foreign oil companies such as ConocoPhillips, Exxon Mobil, and Total-Fina-Elf. On 21 January foreign exchange markets were closed for five days and restrictions put on foreign currency withdrawals. Unemployment now stands at 17% and inflation is 30%. Oil exports account for half of government revenues. Venezuela has lost over \$2.7 billion in lost oil revenues, money for the government's social plans.

Yet the abolition of school fees means 600,000 more children go to school and the cost of staples to the poor had fallen by mid-2002. Working class opposition to the coup attempts has stiffened. Alexander Carrizo, a shoe repairman says 'They can carry a coup against Chávez, but then we come: those of us who are with Chávez'. Nellie Yaerto, local community leader, says: 'There is going to be a civil war here if they topple Chávez. With all the problems, going back to what we had before 1998 will take away any hope for a better future, any hope to get rid of the slavery to the rich.'

Cinema of protest

■ **Bowling for Columbine**
Michael Moore, USA, 2002,
119 minutes

■ **Dirty pretty things**
Stephen Frears, UK, 2002,
107 minutes

Blood-thirsty Britain is in the process of sending more troops to the Gulf than have been deployed since the Second World War: unequal Britain has 75,000 millionaires, yet has one in three children born into poverty; worldwide 850 million people go hungry every day and 11 million children die of preventable diseases every year, while the imperialist powers gear up for a war that will bring even more suffering to the poor of the world. In the face of a compliant British media controlled by ever-fewer people, it is welcome to find two films that offer a searing critique of the world we live in.

Bowling for Columbine was made in the US by Michael Moore who is known for his investigative film making, his humour and his stunts. This film incorporates all of these aspects and takes the viewer on a journey of discovery about the gun lobby in the US, while exploring the effects of capitalism on the psyche of a nation. He demonstrates beautifully the role of the governing ideology in shaping a society, how children are affected by the world in which they grow up, how the media, in the hands of the capitalist state, will find as many individuals as possible to blame for horrific events such as the killing of children by children, but will never confront the system that created the

In *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore offers a searing critique of a trigger-happy USA.

The coverage of shootings by US schoolchildren in Columbine and elsewhere is shocking and horrific, but Moore looks behind the images. In the case of a six-year-old girl shot by her classmate, a six-year-old boy, Moore shows the viewer the life of the little boy's mother – a black single parent forced by the brutal Welfare scheme to leave her son with relatives as she left before dawn on a works bus to a distant white, middle-class town to earn poverty wages holding down two jobs in a shopping mall and getting home after her son's bedtime.

One of the most powerful interviews in the film was with Marilyn Manson, the singer who was blamed for the Columbine school massacre because his lyrics contain lines about death and destruction. As Manson points out, the Columbine massacre occurred on the heaviest day of bombing of Serbia by US President Clinton. Which, he asks, is the more

Moore and two boys who survived the Columbine massacre, with bullets lodged in their bodies and one paralysed from the waist down, successfully campaigned to get leading US retailer K-Mart to stop selling ammunition. This is a victory and shows the viewer that Moore does more than just talk: it is possible to change things.

The theme of imperialist plunder and violence abroad leading to a violent, racist and dangerous society at home is explored by Stephen Frears in *Dirty pretty things*. This is the story of immigrants in London, fleeing terror and oppression in their own countries, forced to survive in an underground world of illegal work, evading authorities, under constant threat of being found out and deported. The film shows a Nigerian man and a Turkish woman who have no choice but to act outside the law. They are not criminals but rather are criminalised by a system and a society that needs cheap labour and a pervasive racist ideology to justify its domestic and foreign policies.

This film will serve to educate many people, forcing them to confront their own prejudices about the qualifications and abilities of immigrants and asylum seekers, of people for whom English is not the first language. The film shows well the sexual exploitation of women who fear for their lives. The viewer is left in no doubt that this is all going on now in the Britain of 2003 where people lead their lives with no idea of the exploitation implicit in a capitalist country with a history of past and present imperialist plunder.

The twist at the end of the film is a triumph for the two main characters and gives a feeling of vindication to the viewer that some small element of justice has been done. For maximum effect this film should be shown with an introduction about Britain's history of persecution abroad and racist immigration laws at home.

We need more films like these two courageous offerings. In a climate where debate is increasingly stifled, progressive films remain one of the most powerful tools for reaching out to a mainstream audience and encouraging people to challenge the prevailing racist and militaristic culture.

Hannah Callier

Fidel – the untold story

■ **Fidel** Directed by Estela Bravo. First shown Channel 4, 2000. Shown on Discovery Channel, December 2002.

This docu-biography of Fidel Castro is sympathetic towards its subject, entertaining yet educational and worth watching. Because the journalism is honest, often using newsreel footage of the periods it covers, it dispels some of the lies of social democrat opportunists. For instance, during the Agrarian Reform phase of the Cuban Revolution, Castro's own family had land expropriated and redistributed to landless peasants – hardly the actions of someone whom the so-called left call a 'state capitalist'.

Throughout, this film points out the gains the Revolution has brought to the masses, particularly in education and health care, and that Cuba exports these benefits by sending thousands of doctors and teachers to under-developed countries. This is happening despite the illegal US blockade.



Another anecdote was from 1960 when Castro and the Cuban delegation to the United Nations were thrown out of their hotel in New York. They threatened to doss down in the UN building but the proprietor of the Hotel Theresa in the black working class area of Harlem came to the Cubans' rescue and put them up. There was news footage of the world's great leaders – as well as black revolutionaries such as Mul-

colm X – visiting the Cuban delegation in working class Harlem, while Fidel Castro was mobbed and greeted as a hero by the other USA, the one we never hear about, the USA that lives in poverty. No guards, no cops, no guns, just the US masses and the Cuban revolutionary! Castro received the same heartfelt welcome when he returned to Harlem in 1995.

The film briefly went into the special economic period after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Cuba's problems after it lost its main trading partner. It dealt with some of the new industries that Cuba is developing.

The biography covers the terrorist attacks on Cuba by the Miami Mafia, the illegal blockade and the Bay of Pigs invasion. As someone who was a young man in the week of 20-27 October 1962, when the Cold War almost turned into nuclear war over the Cuban Missile Crisis, even this documentary could not capture the fear everyone felt and which I still remember. The documentary also touched on Cuba's military victory – with its allies – over South African troops in Angola which hastened the end of the apartheid regime.

If this film has a fault it is one that it cannot avoid because it is a biography. Although Fidel Castro is a great man, history is not made just by great men. By pointing this out I am not denying that the subjective factor of an individual leader's personality or character is a vital ingredient in a revolution. If you watch this film with open eyes and more importantly an open mind, you will see another lie disproved. The Cuban workers and peasants were not passive onlookers of the Revolution. The Revolution is their story.

I watched this film in a packed room at a meeting organised by Rock around the Blockade at the London School of Economics. There was a good political discussion afterwards. That old question was asked: 'What will happen after Castro dies?' I assume there will be a funeral! Seriously, nobody can answer that because we cannot guess at any adventure the Miami Mafia and/or US imperialism may launch. All we can say is that the Revolution is entrenched in the masses. Ask them!

Jimmy German

In memoriam

Terry O'Halloran

1 May 1952-23 January 1989

FRFI remembers comrade Terry O'Halloran, who died tragically young, 14 years ago. Terry could have been a successful bourgeois journalist, but chose instead to put his skills at the service of the movement for socialism.

He was a consistent revolutionary, who actively campaigned for Irish freedom and the rights of prisoners. He was at the forefront of the RCG's Hands Off Ireland campaign in the 1970s while Labour was in office and following the election of the Tory government he steadfastly

opposed the Troops Out Movement and other social-democratic organisations which saw Labour as a potential ally.

He would have had no illusions about today's Labour government, nor any time



for those who voice their disappointment about the rejection of 'old Labour' values. Terry always knew that Labour was a racist, imperialist party and would turn the most biting sarcasm on those who defended it. He is greatly missed.



The film starts with Moore in a bank in a small town in the US where a gun is given to every new account holder. This is funny, but it is also shocking and the film goes on to show that this attitude to weapons is not unusual in the US. Moore explores the media and how it is used to plant fear in people's minds. Racism pervades the press and the television leading to fear of foreigners, racist attitudes to black and Hispanic US citizens and an overwhelming sense of the need to protect oneself. Hence the power of the gun lobby, enshrined in Article 2 of the US constitution – the right to bear arms.

powerful example to America's youth – lyrics to a song or the President's actions?

Moore confronts actor Charles 'From My Cold, Dead Hand' Heston, the leading spokesperson for the US National Rifle Association (NRA) and in a clever interview manages to humiliate him for the pro-gun rallies that he hosted in the towns where, just days earlier, children had been gunned down by other children. A fantastic cartoon interspersed just before this traces the links between America's racist history and the rise of the NRA, formed the same year the Ku Klux Klan was banned.

Uprising at Shotts prison

On 2 January at least 80 long-term prisoners at Shotts maximum security prison in Scotland staged a mass protest by seizing control of two wings of the gaol for 19 hours. A negotiated end to the 'disturbance' eventually took place, indicating a recognition by the authorities that the use of physical force to end the prisoners' protest would encounter fierce resistance, although the source of the prisoners' rage remains unresolved.

Throughout the protest the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) maintained a conspicuous silence on exactly what had fuelled the prisoners' action, while the media's reporting of the protest focused almost solely on the alleged injuries received by two prison officers who, it was claimed, had been hurt while trying to intervene and stop a fight between rival prisoner gangs. This was a total lie as it turned out, and eventually the prisoners hung a banner from a window, saying 'Leave our visitors alone', indicating that the protest had been sparked by the treatment of prisoners' families. An earlier uprising at Shotts in the late 1980s was provoked by the strip-searching of prisoners' families, including old people and small children.

Less than a week after the protest on 2 January, a second 'disturbance' broke out at Shotts. This time in a special unit for 'difficult' prisoners, and again the media focussed exclusively on the injuries allegedly sustained by prison officers, while the SPS maintained its usual silence on exactly why Shotts was so clearly in a state of turmoil and open revolt. The impression deliberately created was one of violent and unmanageable prisoners attacking and injuring prison staff without reason or cause.

In reality, Shotts as an institution is intrinsically designed to provoke



bitterness and confrontation, and since its creation in the early 1980s, its regime has been based on the principle of completely disempowering prisoners and denying them any opportunity or right to peacefully resolve their differences with the administration. It is a gaol purpose-built for repression and brutality.

Since 1987 there have been at least five major uprisings at Shotts, and for much of the gaol's history prisoners there have experienced a virtual lockdown regime. In 1995 prisoner John Brannan described to FRFI something of the atmosphere prevailing at Shotts:

'Each Hall is divided up into six sections, each containing 20 prisoners who are caged as a group into a tiny self-contained area that is sealed almost the whole time by locked grille gates. The screws remain beyond the gates, entering the sections only to lock us in our cells. We only leave the cells for work and are made to walk in strict single file to and from the work-sheds. The atmosphere of intimidation is something that you're up against here day and night. Tension within the living sections is really bad and prisoners just pace up and down all the time, full of

anger and paranoia. The screws obviously feel safe and in control with everyone locked up on the sections and have dished out so much shit that they're now too frightened to open up the gates and deal with us as a larger group, face to face. People here are being seriously damaged mentally and I think that few of us will ever be able to readjust to normal life again.'

John Brannan's description clearly illustrates how the administration at Shotts was and is itself responsible for creating the conditions for revolt and rebellion.

In 1995 the Scottish Inspectorate for Prisons strongly criticised the SPS for its treatment of prisoners at Shotts. In 2002 the Inspectorate again criticised conditions at Shotts. Unfortunately, the SPS has never been particularly receptive to even official criticism of its methods, and the continuously repressive and confrontational nature of the Shotts regime is indicative of this.

The protests and disturbances will therefore, continue at Shotts because of two related factors: the unwillingness of the administration there to treat prisoners with human dignity, and the proven ability and determination of long-term prisoners in Scotland to organise, resist and fight back with courage and tenacity.

John Bowden, HMP Durham

News in brief

Massive rise in prison suicides in 2002

A rise in the prison population has contributed to a 28% increase in instances of suicide. A total of 94 prisoners took their lives in 2002, compared with 73 the previous year, according to Home Office figures released on 30 December. A further 141 prisoners attempted suicide but were resuscitated.

The prison population rose by 6,840 in 2002 to a record 72,500. The Home Office predicts continued rises which by 2009 could see the number of prisoners reach 110,000.

The huge rise in prison numbers has led to reductions in facilities, fewer opportunities for education and work, even worse access to health care than was already the case, more time spent 'banged up', and a generally more oppressive atmosphere, in which vulnerable and weak prisoners are more isolated and prone to bullying, both by other prisoners, and by members of prison staff. In her annual report, the Chief Inspector of Prisons says 'There can be no doubt that most prisons are less safe than they were a year ago'.

Black people six times more likely to be imprisoned

A new survey exposes the intense and irrefutable racism of the British criminal justice system. The study examined data on more than 3,000 prisoners and confirmed that black people are six times more likely to be sent to prison than white people.

It also contradicted myths that minority ethnic communities live in a disadvantaged 'ghetto' culture, revealing on the contrary that white prisoners more often come from a background that is impoverished or abusive. Black prisoners were half as likely as whites to have been taken into local authority care during childhood, to have reported violence in their homes or suffered sexual abuse.

Professor Jeremy Coid of the Royal London School of Medicine, who led the study, said the findings suggest that black people are 'more likely to receive imprisonment, even though it is their first offence.'

Almost a quarter of Britain's prison population of 72,416 people come from an ethnic minority background. Black prisoners account for 15% of all prisoners and if 'black Britain' were to be a separate country it would have the highest imprisonment rate in the world.

Black people are five times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched by police and, once arrested, are more likely to be remanded in custody than others charged with similar offences.

Mahmoud Abu Rideh

Mahmoud is a Palestinian refugee with severe mental health problems who was imprisoned in the wake of 11 September as a 'suspected terrorist'. He has not been charged with any crime and is being held under the draconian, racist provisions of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which allows for the indefinite detention without trial of foreign nationals.

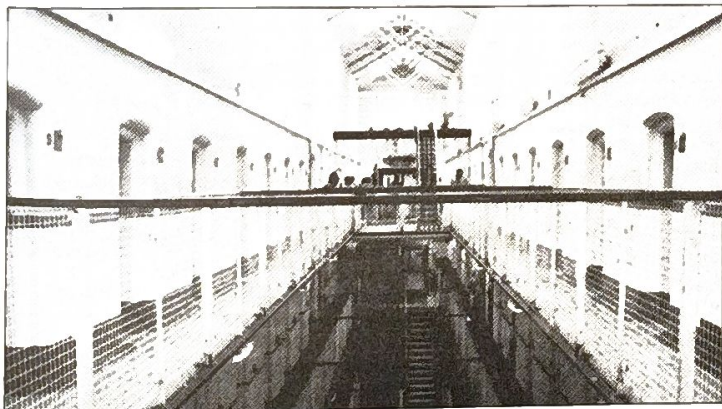
In Belmarsh prison he suffered flashbacks and other problems relating to his torture in Israeli prisons. He began harming himself and was in acute danger. After an appeal by his lawyers and his doctor, Mahmoud was transferred to Broadmoor Secure Psychiatric Hospital, but he has now been returned to prison. Campaigners on his behalf are asking for protest letters to be sent to Home Secretary David Blunkett, urgently demanding the release of Mahmoud Abu Rideh.

Solidarity at Bristol

On 30 December long-term prisoners at Bristol prison staged a 24-hour hunger-strike, in protest at increased repression in the prison, and in solidarity with political prisoners in Turkey. The Turkish prisoners have been engaged in a massive struggle since 2000 against the imposition of cellular prisons, in which they are unable to organise and communicate freely with one another. So far this struggle has claimed the lives of 101 prisoners and their supporters.

Leech - a parasite

On 22 September 2002, ex-prisoner and prison reform entrepreneur Mark Leech was interviewed by the media concerning the transfer of disgraced Tory MP Jeffrey Archer from North Sea Camp open prison to inner-city Lincoln prison. Asked about the sort of prisoners held at Lincoln, Leech described them as the 'riffraff of the prison system'. This remark seemed rather incongruous from someone who had built a fairly lucrative career as a self-proclaimed supporter and representative of prisoners. In fact, I was so intrigued that I asked 'Inside Time', a prison newspaper produced by the charity New Bridge, to investigate exactly why Mark Leech had apparently been so keen to please news editors with reactionary sound-bites, instead of using the opportunity to align himself with the prisoners at Lincoln, and communicate their experience of life in an overcrowded hell-hole.



Since his release from prison in 1995, Mark Leech has metamorphosed from a small-time criminal and litigious prisoner into a resourceful and media-savvy penal reform operator whom the Prison Service now endorses as one of its most significant success stories. He has compiled and edited *The Prisoners' Handbook* (later re-titled *The Prisons Handbook*), now consid-

ered a standard text on British prisons and their regimes, and founded two organisations: Unlock and Mark Leech Associates. *The Prisons Handbook* describes him as having 'taken a journey from the strip-cells and punishment blocks of prisons to the point today where he meets every six weeks with the Home Secretary and Director General of Prisons to discuss policy'.

Unlock, of which he was Chief Executive until 2002, describes itself as an organisation 'run by ex-offenders for ex-offenders' and seeks to assist them to 'successfully rebuild their lives'. Towards this end, it claims to work in partnership with the prison system itself, though maintains that it will 'not get under the covers with anyone'. In fact, Unlock was launched at a Prison Service event at Pentonville prison, during which the Director General of the Prison Service publicly endorsed the organisation.

Unlock's mission statement claimed that an important part of its work should involve 'informing political debate' and 'educating the public' about the need to reintegrate ex-offenders back into the community - one wonders how Leech's characterisation of Lincoln prisoners as 'riffraff' possibly equates with that.

Leech's second organisation, or more precisely Limited Company, Mark Leech Associates, seems to be geared towards accumulating capital from the publication of literature and media interviews. It is obvious that 'helping prisoners' has become an

occupation and career for Mark Leech, and consequently self-interest and aggrandisement now characterise much of his behaviour.

Inside Time, after persistent writing, telephoning and faxing, eventually managed to elicit a response from Mr Leech concerning his 'riffraff' remark. He flatly denied making it, claiming 'that this would be completely out of character for me and it is not what I said. In explaining the difference between North Sea Camp and Lincoln, I expressed the view that in Lincoln, Jeffrey Archer would be with the mish-mash - not riffraff - of the prison system; meaning that Lincoln Prison contains remands, convicted, short and long term prisoners.' This was an incredible denial, considering the remark was broadcast on BBC TV and published in *The Times*.

Unfortunately, *Inside Time*, which depends on the goodwill of the Director General of Prisons to have its paper distributed to prisoners, decided to give Leech 'the benefit of the doubt', and say no more.

I was understandably vexed, so decided to write to Mark Leech myself. I received a short, terse letter from his 'Practice Manager', Jonny Berry, informing me I had got it wrong and that the Press Association had misquoted Leech. No explanation was offered regarding the film evidence.

People involved in prison reform should be cautious of individuals like Mark Leech and understand that much of what he does is out of self-interest and a desire for celebrity. He certainly doesn't speak on behalf of prisoners or ex-prisoners, many of whom now consider him a hireling of the system. He has yet to explain or apologise for the description of the prisoners at Lincoln, while he continues to speak in the name of prisoners and to further his career on their backs.

John Bowden

Against war

Up and down the country FRFI has been organising political debate and activity against the war and in support of the Palestinian people. Anti-imperialist forums have been discussing British imperialism's leading role in the build-up to the war on Iraq and assessing Labour's role both now and in the past as a defender of British imperialism.

FRFI supporters in London attended the January Stop the War national conference. It was dull and lifeless. There was no debate. Resolutions were effectively nodded through on the say-so of the executive. One left organisation, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL), demanded the exclusion of the Muslim Association of Britain from the Stop the War Coalition. In its place it proposed an alliance with the reactionary British Labour and trade union movement. In fact it is Asian youth mainly mobilised by Muslim organisations who have kept Palestine firmly on the anti-war platform. Given the AWL is an apologist for Zionism, its motion can only be described as racist.

As well as political discussion there has been action. FRFI supporters continue to organise street theatre and pickets in support of Palestine and against



Manchester M&S tried to stop the pickets with illegal parking of bikes!

the war. In London, regular pickets of Marble Arch M&S continue to attract significant support. On 21 December, the busiest shopping day of the year, picketers marched along Oxford Street attracting attention and support. Incorporating street theatre into the pickets has made them much livelier, and attracted even more Zionists whose attempts at disruption in turn brings the local street guards and the police along. Fortnightly meetings of the Victory to the Intifada group are continuing with their programme of political education and organisation.

In Manchester supporters have defeated attempts by the city council, the police and M&S to stop the weekly pickets. First a senior licensing officer, Andrew Butcher, hand-delivered letters to a number of regular picketers demanding they attend interviews in the Town Hall because he claimed they might have breached the Highways Act. Needless to say, the picketers declined his invitation.

Two weeks earlier, police had seized a placard with a mug-shot of Sharon behind bars with the slogan 'Sharon... New Hitler'. In mid-December,

the picket steward received a summons for breach of the Public Order Act - 'causing harm or alarm to members of the public'. At the beginning of January, however, he received another letter, this time from the CPS, dropping the charges for lack of evidence.

In January M&S managers had a brilliant idea: why not get their staff to chain bicycles to railings outside the store where picketers hang their placards. Unfortunately the picketers could see what was going on and just hung the placards over

the bikes. Out came M&S workers to complain, one choosing a moment when there were some police around. Whoops - it backfired when picketers pointed out to the police that it was an offence against local by-laws to chain bikes to council railings. The picketers knew because Licensing Officer Butcher had said so. The police had to agree, and told the complainant to remove his bike.

Elsewhere, regular M&S pickets are taking place in Leicester, and supporters are also organising regular stalls in Birmingham.

ham. These stalls make the link between the struggle of the Palestinian people and the impending war against Iraq. In addition they have posters and material illustrating Cuba's anti-imperialist stance and the support it has given to the Palestinian and Iraqi people.

FRFI urges all its readers to get active now. Join the anti-imperialist contingent FRFI is organising on 15 February, but get active with us locally. For more details, e-mail us at rcgrfi@easynet.co.uk or phone 020 7837 1688.

EVENTS

LONDON

Anti-imperialist forum: Get active! Stop the war! Know your rights! Sunday 23 February 1pm-5pm at London School of Economics (LSE), Graham Wallis Room, 5th floor, main building, Houghton Street, WC2. Holborn tube. Discussion of the situation in Britain and the Middle East and the role of the police as defenders of the capitalist state. 15 February March against the war - join the FRFI anti-imperialist contingent. Assemble 12 noon at Temple tube. Bring whistles, drums, banners! Pickets of Marks & Spencer, alternate Saturdays 12-2pm, 1, 15 and 29 March. Victory to the Intifada meets on alternate Wednesdays. Next meetings: 12 & 26 February and 12 & 26 March. All start at 6.30pm. Room S75, LSE (as above). Stop the war street stalls: contact us for details. For further information e-mail rcgrfi@easynet.co.uk or phone 020 7837 1688.

MIDLANDS

Regular pickets of Marks and Spencer

and stalls against the war on Iraq in Leicester city centre, at Leicester De Montfort University and in Birmingham, mid-week and weekends. For details ring 07803 939 713 or e-mail midlandsrsg@hotmail.com Anti-imperialist forums: Sunday 23 February, Secular Hall, 72 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Fidel - video showing followed by discussion. Starts 2.30pm. Imperialist hands off Iraq! Victory to the Intifada! Video on the occupation of Palestine, discussion. Sunday 9 March, Secular Hall, 72, Humberstone Gate, Leicester Starts 2.30pm.

MANCHESTER

Anti-imperialist forum, Sunday 2 March, 2-5pm. Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, Manchester city centre. £1 donation on door. Marks & Spencer pickets: every Saturday (except 15 February and the Saturday immediately war breaks out) 12-3pm. Market Street, Manchester city centre. On the Saturday immediately after war against Iraq breaks out, an anti-war demonstration will be held: assemble 11am, All Saints. The day war breaks out, protest 5pm All Saints, 5.30pm Piccadilly

GARDENS

SCOTLAND

Scottish Coalition for Justice Not War Demonstrate Saturday 15 February. Assemble Glasgow Green 10am. Join the FRFI anti-imperialist contingent - No to Labour warmongers! Anti-imperialist forum - No to war! No to imperialism! Saturday 22 February, 11am-3pm, Queen Margaret Union, University Garden, Glasgow University. Sessions on: Iraq, oil imperialism and war; Building an anti-imperialist, anti-war movement; Cuba and Palestine. Public meetings Glasgow University: Friday 7 February 1.30pm: Fidel - video and talk on the Cuban Revolution. Queen Margaret Union, University Garden. Friday 14 March 2pm: Organise against the war! Queen Margaret Union, University Garden. Dundee University: Thursday 27 March 7.30pm: No to war! No to imperialism! Room G1, University Tower, Perth Road, Dundee. For further details of events in Scotland e-mail: friscotland@yahoo.co.uk or phone 07779 785 529.

Rock around the Blockade round-up

Brigade to Cuba

Rock around the Blockade (RATB) members are gearing up for a brigade to Cuba this spring with members of the Revolutionary Communist Group. The brigadistas will stay with cadre from Cuba's Union of Young Communists (UJC) in Guantanamo province, in the east of the island. Guantanamo is the site of the infamous US naval base, a symbol of US imperialism on the island since 1901 where the USA holds prisoners from its war in Afghanistan in contravention of every law under the sun. The brigadistas will check out the mobile sound system which RATB donated to the province in April 2000. Since then, the sound system has been continuously driven around for three-day parties, particularly in rural and mountain communities.

The spring brigade will enable members to deepen their knowledge of Cuban socialism, understanding the daily struggles faced and the concrete measures taken to overcome them in the interests of the Cuban people. The brigade will meet and discuss with groups from numerous sections of Cuban society, for example, with workers, to learn about the position of trade unions, and with students, to discuss Cuba's current educational revolution. The brigade will return to Havana to celebrate International Workers Day on 1 May, when millions of Cubans



On 1 May millions of Cuban workers will parade through the streets of Havana

take to the streets of the capital in a triumphant parade.

As part of the preparation for the brigade, RATB is holding a series of educational meetings in London, with video showings and discussions on aspects of the Revolution.

A meeting in late November showed a documentary about Cuba's Meningitis B vaccination which the world has been denied access to because of the illegal US blockade. The documentary shows how the government had responded to the levels of Meningitis B in the early 1980s by developing a vaccine rapidly. RATB member Dr Hannah Caller spoke about Cuba's healthcare system and explained why efforts by British medical professionals to emu-

late Cuba's successes had limited results. Under capitalism the medical system cannot place people's needs above profit, as happens under socialism.

In late January, Rock around the Blockade's showing of a documentary about Fidel Castro's contribution to the Cuban revolution attracted a big audience at the London School of Economics (LSE). The footage shows Fidel engaging with Cubans in the streets and workplaces, revealing the incredible rapport he has built up with people of all generations and backgrounds. See page 12 for a review of this film.

The issue of Cuban trade relations with US businessmen is a complex one. Despite the blockade, last year Cuba pur-

chased \$253 million worth of goods from the USA. Cuba's trade with US farmers is explained and explored in the January/February 2003 issue of the RATB newsletter *Viva Cuba*. It also carries news about the United Nations vote against the illegal US blockade of Cuba, passed by a huge majority in November 2002 for the eleventh year running. 173 countries voted to end the blockade, but it will remain because the US has the power of veto, making a mockery of democracy.

The newsletter also contains a statement by black activist and US political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal, urging support for the campaign to release the Miami Five, Cuban political prisoners in the USA. The Five were working to uncover right-wing terrorist plots organised in Miami against the Cuban people and the revolution.

Viva Cuba is a valuable source of information for anyone interested in Cuba, socialism or the struggle for justice. It is sent to all members of RATB, so we urge you to join us now! Membership subscriptions help to fund our work in support of the Cuban people. We hope it will inspire you to get active with RATB and keep you informed of events. Cuba needs our solidarity more than ever!

RATB will be marching against the war on Saturday 15 February with the anti-imperialist contingent. Join us at 12

noon Temple tube. The next educational meeting in London will take place on Wednesday 5 March at 7pm, LSE, Houghton Street, WC2. A documentary charting the revolutionary life of Che Guevara will be followed by a discussion about his economic and political ideas. Rebel Music, the money raising conscious club nights, will be up and partying in March. Contact us for details: www.ratb.org.uk



The streets are ours - Revolutionary Cuba

Pamphlet from Rock around the Blockade

It celebrates the achievements of the Cuban revolution and shows what lessons can be drawn for the global struggle against imperialism we are all engaged in today. Its 56 pages also include a history of Cuba's revolutionary struggle and a frank examination of the economic and social problems still faced by the Cubans in their courageous and difficult struggle to build socialism. Help us get the message out by ordering copies in bulk to sell to your friends and fellow political activists.

£2.95 each plus 80p p&p. Cheque/PO to Rock around the Blockade (address below).

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CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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Free Palestinian prisoners

Shortly after my visit to the six PFLP detainees in December (see article page 7), at the end of January 2003, Abia, the wife of detainee Ahmad Sa'adat, was detained by the Israeli authorities as she was attempting to leave the West Bank to get to Jordan. She was due to travel to the World Social Forum in Brazil to speak as a women's activist about the occupation. She is an incredibly impressive woman who has had to deal with the most extraordinary of circumstances, not least of which is having to support a large family on her own (she has four children) since her husband was detained. Simultaneously she worked tirelessly as a women's rights and human rights activist. Abia was welcoming and more than happy to allow me and two others to visit her husband with her and their children and it is with great sadness and anger that I learned what has now happened to her too. Abia was given four months administrative detention (internment without charge or trial) and was being held at the Beit El Israeli military detention centre in the West Bank.

Send letters of protest to the Israeli Ambassador, Embassy of Israel, 2 Palace Green, London W8 4QB (Tel 020 7957 9500; fax 020 7957 9555).

DANIEL GUEDELLA
North London

LETTERS

write to
FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk
website: www.revolutionarycommunist.com and www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk

Zionist collaboration with Hitler

In his criticism in FRFI 170 of my letter, Anthony Bidgood seems to be arguing that were it not for Zionist efforts to transfer Jews to Palestine even more Jews would have died in Nazi Germany. His analysis fails to understand Zionism as an essentially middle class, capitalist, racist, nationalist and totalitarian ideology that puts its political project above the welfare of Jewish people, or indeed humanity.

Zionists have persistently sought to reap political advantage from European anti-Semitism aimed at Jews; not only right wing fanatics such as Jabotinsky and his Revisionist followers who betrayed Jews in Russia, Britain and Poland with their collaborations with murderous anti-Semite rulers, but also so-called Labour Zionists. Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, himself stated: 'Anti-Semitism has grown and continues to grow – and so do I.' So it was that three weeks after Hitler gained power in Germany in 1933, the German Zionist newspaper printed these sentiments: 'The anti-liberal character of German nationalism

meets with the anti-liberal position of Zionism and here we are faced with finding, not a basis for understanding but one for discussion.' While the majority of German Jews as well as German communists called for a united front against fascism and fought anti-Semitism, and Jews all over the world demanded an economic boycott of Germany, Zionist leaders (with, surprisingly, the exception of the Revisionists) preferred 'to persuade and to build.' This entailed making trade arrangements that assured Germany an export market. The Ha'avara agreement that was set up in the summer of 1933 was designed to transfer Jewish wealth and Jews with wealth to Palestine, not to save Jews from Nazi oppression. It demanded a minimum payment of £1,000 from the emigrant and therefore excluded Jewish workers, leaving them to their fate. In 1938 Zionist leaders managed to get the Nazis to allow them to set up training camps for young Jews in Vienna and Berlin, yet refused to try to persuade other countries to take in Jewish refugees at the Evian Conference called by Roosevelt.

Morris Ernst, Roosevelt's adviser, was attacked as if he was a traitor by Zionists for suggesting that America admit German Jews, while David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, asserted in 1938 that Zionism is endangered by anti-Zionist Jews who want refugees to go to places other than Palestine. This at a time when, as Anthony Bidgood illustrates, there were terrible anti-Semitic 'excesses' in Germany. Far from being interested in overthrowing Hitler's fascist dictatorship and preventing the murder of millions of innocent people, Zionist leaders took actions that sabotaged the anti-fascist front, and increased their economy in Palestine with £8 million in the process.

The second Palestinian Intifada is fighting against a military machine that thrives on Western imperialist sustenance. Once again I urge readers to actively oppose political Zionists and the illegitimate, racist, apartheid state of Israel and support the Palestinians in their fight for life and dignity.

FIONA DONOVAN
North London

No to the Zionist settler state

I can confirm Anthony Bidgood's figures of 525,000 German and 220,000 Austrian Jews in 1933 and 1939 to within a small margin (FRFI 170). However, the comrade appears to be missing the point.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, an Israeli publication in Guildhall Library, London, Zionist organisations continued to maintain offices in Nazi Germany all the time German Jews were being persecuted, expelled, imprisoned, deported or murdered. A similar thing happened in Hungary when it went Nazi in 1944. Please see the record of the notorious Kastner case for details. The Zionists did not counsel resistance to Nazism. They used the opportunity to get recruits for settlement in Palestine.

The Nazis wanted Jewish property, money and living space. They did not want the Jews. The Zionists wanted the

Jews – for Palestine.

Ever since the 11th century Yiddish has been the *mameh-loshen*, the mother tongue, of millions of Jews throughout the world. Its colourfulness, its target-accurate phrases, idioms and sayings make Yiddish one of the most expressive languages, perhaps because it grew in response to adversity.

Hitler murdered 6,000,000 Yiddish-speaking, non-Zionist Jews.

The Zionists do not like Yiddish. They want Jews to come to Israel and speak Hebrew, a previously dead language except for religious purposes. Speaking Hebrew fits in with the concept of the Promised Land from Sinai to the Euphrates, and a literal Zionist interpretation of the first five books of the Old Testament, the Torah.

There is a thin red line in the Palestine solidarity movement.

There are those who call the West Bank and Gaza 'Palestine' and the rest (78% of Palestine) 'Israel' – with a right to exist. When Israel has colonised the West Bank and Gaza and has started advancing towards the Euphrates, these de facto Zionists will still defend Israel.

Then there are the rest of us. We don't want Israel to be there. We want all Palestinians and their descendants to have the right of return to the whole of Palestine.

We value the contribution which Jews have made and are making to world culture, not least through the Yiddish language, in their home countries. We would like the Jewish settlers to return to their home countries. Here, for example.

This is the best solution all round. When imperialism has been defeated it will no longer be able to maintain Israel as a dagger at the heart of the Arab nation.

IVOR KENNA
North London

Supporting the struggle in Latin America

I do enjoy Alvaro Michaels' political analysis of Latin America. I never cease to be angry that so much suffering is visited upon the people there.

Reading of Fidel Castro's dynamic response in the face of such overwhelming adversity from the USA, presents as something of a gentle breeze and a model for the rest of the world, where

- government owns production resources, whereby the role of private property is gradually lessened as heavy industries are nationalised;
- instead of the laissez-faire free play of profits, there is co-ordinated planning – 'production for use, not for profit';
- one other unmistakable feature is that of professional people developing instincts of craftsmanship, social order and service, and being guided by motives other than those of

acquisitive society.

Of course the key is redistribution, but what possible argument can there be for swollen incomes of inherited wealth not being reduced by the use of taxation and for transfer payments? And for cradle to grave welfare services? What is America so frightened of?

What are the disadvantaged and displaced expected to do to bring about a more level playing field? We all know that a study of history reveals that the story of humanity is simply of endless warfare between the powerful elite and the helpless multitude. Of course we also have some idea of what a government can muster in deceit, division and in other unfeeling cruelty.

Thinking about the popular movements and their challenges, I am reminded of father Miguel Hidalgo and Castillo's 'gustar de

dolores' speech on what is now Mexico's day of independence – 16 September 1810: 'my children, will you be free, will you make the effort to recover from the hated Spanish the land stolen from your forefathers 300 years ago?'

Land reform is a permanent theme of Latin American revolutions, yet what the disadvantaged and displaced are without is a Hidalgo unifying type figure to inspire a defence and counter-attack. Perhaps in Fidel Castro the Latin Americans see such a figure.

I am interested in learning as much as possible about the situation in Latin America. In solidarity I have been learning Spanish and can now both read and write it.

I suppose I should explain a little about myself. I am 36 years old and have spent the past 14

Zionism = fascism

I noted in FRFI 170 that a comrade is being threatened with a summons for carrying a placard on the Marks and Spencer picket in Manchester, reading 'Sharon... New Hitler'.

I also read Anthony Bidgood's letter, criticising Fiona Donovan's letter in FRFI 169, calling for support for the London M&S picket.

Perhaps I could add something which will aid the Greater Manchester police and Mr Bidgood in their enquiries.

Sharon is a member of the Likud Party. In the 1930s, Likud was called The Revisionist. They used the same salute as the Nazis and Italian fascists. In 1936 their HQ in Tel Aviv was called Brown House in imitation of the Nazi HQ in Munich.

Also, the Stern Gang used the same symbols as the Italian fascists. They argued that British imperialism needed Zionism to face Arab hostility but as they were weaker, Italian imperialism would need the Zionists even more. Of course, all this changed as news of events in Europe came out.

As to Mr Bidgood's point about the Nazis and Zionists being unequal, Avraham Stern was not Benito Mussolini's equal, but that did not stop him trying to woo him.

That Zionism and fascism are first cousins in the same nutty political family should be no problem to those who have a materialist view of history. It is no good for an understanding of the past – and how it affects the present – to give a Trivial Pursuit view of the Third Reich. For scientific socialists there is a clear line between imperialism and its Zionist lackeys, and the oppressed. You are in one camp or the other.

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What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit – that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today millions are out of work with many people – women in particular – trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population – the majority women and children – lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. **The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.**

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. **The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.**

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. **The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights – the right to organise and protest.**

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties is subjected to military occupation and brutal repression. **The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.**

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious – low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. **The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.**

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. **We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.**

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. **The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.**

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. It has never defended the interests of the working class. **The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.**

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. **We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.**

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. **The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.**

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Anti-terrorist raids

On Sunday 5 January anti-terrorist police raided a flat in Wood Green, north London, arresting six men. Early press reports intimated that a massive terrorist plot had been smashed, and a lethal and indiscriminate attack, perhaps on the London Underground, been averted. There was talk of cyanide gas and specialist 'terror cells' made up of Algerians and trained (of course) by Al Qaeda.

It soon transpired that there was no cyanide, and probably no terrorist cell as such. Ricin, the poison of which possible tiny traces were allegedly found in the flat, is highly unsuitable for a mass attack, as it needs to be administered to the victim. Speculation changed therefore to whether celebrities or politicians, including the Prime Minister, were being targeted.

The scientific properties of ricin were, however, largely irrelevant to the furore. All that mattered to those whipping up fear and hatred was that there was allegedly some poison in a house in London occupied by young men from north Africa.

On 14 January four of those arrested at Wood Green appeared in court, charged under the Terrorism Act 2000 and Chemical Weapons Act 1996. A fifth man was charged with possessing false documents. On the same day, a house in Manchester was raided by police and immigration officers. The raid was authorised by the Home Secretary, using his powers under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) to certify foreign nationals as 'suspected terrorists' and have them indefinitely detained without trial. In the course of the raid a policeman was fatally stabbed.

On 20 January the Finsbury Park Mosque was raided and seven men arrested under the Terrorism Act. The mosque had repeatedly been named by police and press as a centre where fanatical Islam and violent anti-Westernism were preached. The raid could probably have been authorised at any time, but its timing kept the focus on north London, on Muslims and on so-called radical cleric Abu Hamza, whose picture now features on front-page after front-page of tabloid newspapers, which demand his arrest, detention and deportation (despite his British citizenship). In the run-up to the war on Iraq, the enemy at home is being clearly identified and labelled.

More arrests under the Terrorism Act followed in Manchester, Gatwick Airport and elsewhere, including Cheltenham, where three men were 'seen acting suspiciously' outside the GCHQ spy base.

As was the case with the vast majority of Irish people arrested in the 1970s and 1980s under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, most of those arrested under the Terrorism Act and the ATCSA are never charged with anything, let alone tried or convicted. This has already been the case for many of those arrested during 2001 and 2002 in high profile operations at Bournemouth, Leicester, Birmingham, Luton and elsewhere.

Many of those arrested as suspected terrorists are subsequently detained under immigration law, clearly demonstrating how interlinked

Terrorising asylum seekers

As the Labour government gears up for war against Iraq, it has already begun to wage war in this country. The war at home is a racist war, and it is being waged both through the implementation of draconian legislation and by the use of propaganda. The legislation comes in two distinct but interlinked forms: immigration laws, targeting those seeking asylum here, and anti-terrorist laws, aimed at criminalising people already in this country, citizens or otherwise. The propaganda is disseminated on a variety of levels, official and unofficial, with the government claiming unconvincingly to be outraged by the worst excesses of the right-wing press. Many Muslims understandably view the government's actions as a war on Islam. NICKI JAMESON reports.

the two processes are, and how anti-terrorist raids double as trawls for anyone suspected of immigration law violations.

Immigration clamp-down

On 8 January, sandwiched conveniently between the London and Manchester raids, a part of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 came into force, the effect of which is to deprive all asylum seekers who do not make their asylum claim upon immediate arrival in this country of access to state support.

Legal challenges are in progress on behalf of recently arrived asylum seekers who have been told that they did not make their claims quickly

enough, even though some were made within two days of arrival. So far, interim injunctions have been granted on behalf of eight asylum seekers.

This is not the first attempt to deprive asylum seekers of welfare benefits on this basis. The Conservative government tried it in 1996, but was defeated by legal challenges relying on the 1948 National Assistance Act responsibility to provide against destitution. Labour tried again in 1999, amending the National Assistance Act to exclude persons 'subject to immigration control', and bringing in the voucher system, which proved both unpopular and ultimately unmanageable. Now we are back on the same track, so all anti-refugee propaganda is useful to the government. What right-minded person would want to deprive impoverished families of a small

amount of money that might make the difference between survival and starvation? But, who would want their taxes to fund crazed fundamentalists who have only come here to plot against us?

Worse to come

The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act was rushed through Parliament in the wake of 11 September 2001. It provides for the indefinite detention of foreign nationals suspected of terrorism. In order to pass this part of the Act, Britain was forced to opt out of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which outlaws detention without trial.

Not content with junking one major part of the ECHR just two years after the Human Rights Act enshrined its provisions within British domestic law, Tony Blair is now talking about reviewing Britain's stance on the Convention as a whole. In particular he is concerned about Article 3, which outlaws 'torture or inhuman or degrading treatment'. The Conservative Party is openly arguing that Britain should claim exemption from Article 3 in times of national emergency, and that it should withdraw from the 1951 Convention on Refugees.

At present it is illegal under British and European law to deport someone who will be tortured on their return. If either party leader gets his way, such deportations will become legal in Britain.

'Poison terrorists are asylum seekers'

On 10 January all three of the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Sun* newspapers led with virtually identical front page headlines: 'Poison terrorists are asylum seekers'. By this they clearly meant their readers to understand two things. Firstly, that the men arrested in north London earlier that week were ungrateful scroungers biting the generous British hand that is feeding them. Secondly, that asylum seekers in general are indistinguishable from 'poison terrorists'.

The *Sun* is now waging an overtly racist petition campaign to 'End this asylum madness now'. While the actual petition wording calls simply for a 'harder line on illegal immigrants', the articles which accompany the petition coupons claim to speak for 'all those decent people who are terrorised by Albanian, Kosovan and Turkish drug and vice gangs... a nation that lives in fear of Algerian terrorists who are allowed to roam free among us'.

With breathtaking hypocrisy, Home Secretary David Blunkett has denounced the racism of the right-wing tabloids, as though the policies of his government have done nothing at all to fuel a climate in which it is considered acceptable to vilify foreigners, demand immigrants be arrested or deported without question, and label all those who oppose you as 'terrorist'. But the right-wing press is doing the government a favour. Compared to the seemingly insane rantings of some of the tabloids, the more measured delivery of Blunkett and co is designed to make racism sound palatable. But no-one should be fooled. The agenda of *The Sun* and the agenda of the government are the same - racist, imperialist war abroad and at home.

Turkish activists arrested under Terrorism Act

On 11 December 2002 five men and two women were arrested under the Terrorism Act and taken to Paddington Green police station, where they were held until Monday 16 December when they were bailed by Bow Street Magistrates' Court. They are charged with raising funds for and supporting an organisation banned under the Terrorism Act. The organisation, the DHKP-C, is a Turkish communist organisation.

The DHKP-C has never been involved in any armed actions in Britain. Its members and support-

ers in this country do community work and provide support for political prisoners in Turkey. The organisation's inclusion in the list of those banned in Britain was an opportunistic favour to Turkey, as was the timing of these arrests, which coincided with Turkey's application for EU membership being discussed at the Copenhagen summit.

The campaign against these arrests and the criminalisation of these activists is being co-ordinated by PATA (People against the Terrorism Act), who can be contacted on 07810 397 268 or pata_info@yahoo.co.uk

Kurdish children detained in Scotland

The Labour government's dispersal system for asylum seeking applicants is being challenged in the courts by one Kurdish family, who have been sent to the Dungavel detention centre near Glasgow. The Ay family have been victims of Britain's racist immigration laws since they arrived in Britain from Turkey via Germany three years ago. As Kurds they were forced to flee from Turkey's brutal fascist regime fearing political persecution. Salih Ay, father of four children, was deported from the UK to Germany in May 2002 and then immediately deported again to Istanbul. Since then the rest of the Ay family; mother Yurdugul and her

four children aged between seven and fourteen have been subjected to Labour's dispersal scheme which dragged them away from life and schooling in Gravesend, Kent where they had settled, to the Dungavel detention centre, 450 miles from their adopted home. At the Scottish detention centre the children's education has been severely disrupted. A Home Office spokeswoman made the government's position clear on the future of the Ay family stating 'The point of an immigration centre is not to educate children'.

To contact the campaign write to: Ay Family Campaign, c/o NCADC, 131 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0HF. Email Ay-Family-Campaign@ncadc.org.uk



If asylum seekers do not lodge their claims for asylum immediately they arrive in Britain, they will be denied all benefits