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HANDS

**NOW, TURN
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OFF IRAQ!

GET ON THE STREETS TO STOP THE WAR!

Bradford prison sentences - British justice, racist justice

When Asian youth in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford defended their neighbourhoods last year from fascist attack and then fought back against police provocation, the story dominated headlines. The subsequent police clampdown and experience of British "justice" have been relegated deep inside the pages of the broadsheets.

In April 2001 a Hindu wedding in Bradford had been attacked by racists. In Burnley and Oldham weeks of fascist provocations culminated in attacks on the local South Asian communities. It was the threat of a National Front march in Bradford last July and the presence of fascists in a city centre pub that spurred 300 Asian youth to come into the city centre.

The police drove the youth back into Manningham, a neighbourhood with a long-established, largely Asian community. Up to 2,000 youth - some of them white - responded by erecting barricades and fighting back with bricks, fireworks and petrol bombs. The papers screamed that instigators and ring-leaders from Oldham and Burnley were involved, but it was the police who brought in 10 vanloads of reinforcements from Manchester. It wasn't until the next morning that they reoccupied Manningham.

As the smoke began to clear the establishment's hysteria grew at the biggest "race riot" since the 1980s. "The brutality of the teenagers" was contrasted to the injuries suffered by police, whose own brutality had helped spark the entire episode. In response, police in Bradford mounted "Operation Wheel", a huge criminal investigation that rounded up 200 suspects. Labour politicians talked about community regeneration on the one hand, but made it clear that they were going to use Bradford to show just how tough on crime they could be.

From the outset the police lodged charges of riot, authorised by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). It is rare for the police to apply the riot charge (which

carries a maximum 10-year jail term), preferring lesser charges available under the Public Order Act 1986.

In Bradford 150 people have been charged with riot and 40 with violent disorder. So far 97 young men and youths have been sentenced, with average terms of more than four years and some up to six-and-a-half years. A further 11 were jailed for violent disorder. In nearby Oldham, the trials of 150 people are now underway too - 57 of them are charged with riot.

In addition to draconian sentencing the judiciary has shown blatant bias. Judge Stephen Gullick said "Each case has been and will be looked at individually. The colour, creed, ethnic origin or religion of the individual defendant is of no consequence whatsoever. Sentences have been and will be passed in respect of any offence a defendant admits or is convicted of by a jury regardless of the racial origin of the defendant." The facts suggest otherwise.

Take these all too typical cases, for example: Asam Latif, four years and nine months for lobbing six stones; Mohammed Akram, five years for hurling various missiles; Mohammed Munir, four years and nine months for throwing two stones; and Ashraf Hussain, four years for throwing three stones. Most of those convicted or entering guilty pleas have been first-time offenders.

By contrast in Belfast, where the rioters are white and often Loyalists, a first offence of riot gets you a fine! The day after events in Manningham, white youths on Bradford's Ravenscliffe estate rioted, burning cars and attacking police, but the maximum sentence for any of those prosecuted was 18 months.

Judge Gullick even explained the political nature of his sentencing, stressing that the jail terms were not simply for what each defendant had done individually. Collectively they were guilty of revolt and the sentences had to reflect that.

Gerry Sutcliffe, Labour MP for Bradford South, chimed in, defending the sentences as right due to the damage that was done "to the reputation of the city."

Meanwhile, police investigations are continuing and so the threat of more arrests hangs over the community and its youth. Richard Critchley, secretary of the West Yorkshire Police Federation, said: "We think the local community in Bradford support the sentences that were handed down by the courts... the local community gave up these people."

Many parents did indeed force their sons to hand themselves in, and some mosque elders actually went through photos with the police to finger rioters. But even the conservative parts of the community are now outraged by blatantly racist injustice. As one said, "How can it be fair that someone drawn into throwing one stone in a moment of frenzy goes to prison for more than four years?" As a result normally quiescent people have been stirred to action. Mothers have been the backbone of a campaign called "Fair Justice for All" to get the sentences reduced.

More than 30 cases are being prepared for the Court of Appeal by the anti-racist solicitor Imran Khan, and Bradford now sees a mothers' vigil every Friday outside the city's crown court. With 57 still to be sentenced, the campaign held a rally of hundreds of supporters on the August bank holiday. Speakers condemned the rioting and did not oppose jail terms as such, but only the length of the sentences. Asian community politicians were quick to jump on the bandwagon, including a recent Tory candidate.

But Labour MP Sutcliffe, playing divide and rule to the end, criticises the group for addressing the issue "collectively" rather than focusing on selected cases of individuals. The Yorkshire Evening Post has accused them of playing the race card!



Socialists and anti-racists should support this campaign, but should push it to go further: we should demand the release of all prisoners, self defence is no offence. The government has no right to condemn and punish those whose lives it has blighted.

The police and the politicians won't fight the worsening racism in Bradford. Segregation is as bad as ever, with over half the schools in Bradford all-white and many estates no-go areas for Asians. Violent racists are feeling more confident due to the BNP's electoral successes in nearby Burnley.

Last month 14-year-old Eloise Watson was badly beaten by a gang of eight white girls for walking home from school with her Asian friends. A month before another student, Omar Bashir, 16, had surgery to save his sight after being punched with a knuckle duster. In March racist arsonists

torched a house in the mostly white Bolton Woods area as a mother with a mixed-race daughter prepared to move in.

These trials have not been about burnt-out pubs or car dealerships, but about crushing the spirit of a revolt that fought the hated police - a similar if smaller uprising occurred in 1995, triggered by police harassment of Asian taxi drivers.

Consciously or otherwise, last summer was also a revolt against the everyday racism, poverty and boredom of the established order, where official unemployment is 8.2 per cent, the highest in urban Yorkshire, and many live in properties unfit for human habitation. Labour is much more interested in criminalising those who revolted than in addressing the poverty and racism that drove them to do so.

Johannesburg - summit in the air

As floods engulf much of Europe and Asia and droughts devastate parts of Africa and North America, it's clear that solutions must be found to the problems afflicting the global environment. One place where these will not be found is the United Nations' summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg.

Ten years after the earth summit in Rio, the Johannesburg gathering proclaims that it wishes to "conserve our natural resources in a world that is growing in population, with ever-increasing demands for food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health services and economic security."

It is the largest summit ever, with over 65,000 delegates from 185 countries. George Bush may have decided that the event did not warrant his attention, but global corporations are well represented in the corridors of luxury hotels. The main conference takes place in an affluent, virtually all-white suburb literally looking down on the miserable poverty of the Alexandra township.

The summit's aims are incredibly broad, but a number of key issues can be identified. The first of these is that of water supply. Over two billion people currently face water shortages and three billion lack ade-

quate sanitation. Water is becoming increasingly commodified, with disputes arising over access to supplies in areas such as the Middle East, and privatisation of supplies becoming the norm internationally. The host nation, South Africa, has seen bitter struggles in recent months against the sell-off of municipal water companies.

Another area of concern is ecosystem protection. The world's forests have declined by around 90,000 sq. km a year during the past decade, and on current trends by 2025 fifteen per cent of all forest species will be extinct. Half of the world's rivers are polluted and 11,000 species are threatened by extinction.

The summit also aims to tackle poverty and the problems caused by it. Over two billion people struggle to survive on less than a dollar a day, but in 2000 80 per cent of global finance flows went to rich countries. Over the past 20 years much of the Third World is now poorer in absolute terms after swallowing the neo-liberal economic prescriptions force-fed by the IMF and World Bank.

Some 815 million people are severely undernourished, and 24,000 people die daily from hunger. Since Rio the total earmarked for foreign aid has actually fallen.



Anti-war demonstrators marched in Johannesburg

Perhaps the biggest threat to the environment is that of global warming. The 1990s were the warmest decade since records began and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods have become more commonplace. The Rio summit introduced the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which laid the basis for the Kyoto agreement, and a commitment from the major polluters to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kyoto convention is now in tatters, with the US (the world's biggest polluter) refusing to ratify it, and carbon dioxide emissions are increasing rapidly. There was a 6 per cent rise on 1990 emission levels in the EU and Japan, while countries such as China, Brazil and Indonesia saw increases of between 20 and 40 per cent.

The intransigence of big business and its government puppets in the west looks certain to block any effective reforms, how-

ever modest. Multinational corporations are heavily represented at Johannesburg, with companies like McDonald's, Nike and Nestle lobbying hard to protect their interests. The official British delegation even includes representatives from Rio Tinto, a mining company notorious for its abuses of human rights and the environment, and Thames Water, which has already faced more fines for pollution incidents than any of the privateers in the UK water industry.

So far these companies have succeeded in diluting the proposals of the summit, successfully blocking attempts to reduce the huge subsidies given to farmers in the west, and a clause which would assist the victims of corporations to sue for environmental pollution and damage to health.

As with all the other summits of its kind, the capitalists are more concerned with protecting their ability to make profit, than introducing measures to ensure the protection of the planet and its inhabitants.

The thousands protesting outside the summit represent both the aspirations of the world's poor and embody a hope for the planet's future in sharp contrast the official delegations gathered behind the phalanxes of riot police.

September 11: one year on

"Things will never be the same again"; "a turning point"; "the real beginning of the twenty first century": these and many similar pronouncements, greeted the collapse of the twin towers on what has come to be known simply as 9/11.

Though the number of the victims claimed has been steadily reduced - to over 3,000, not the 8-10,000 originally announced - that the world's sole superpower could suffer such a devastating blow at the hands of 19 terrorists shocked the world. Instinctively everyone knew that the rulers of the USA would wreak a devastating revenge, and they would not care whether their victims had anything to do with 9/11 or not.

Operation "Infinite Justice", was rapidly rebranded as "Enduring Freedom" when religious figures objected to the former name as blasphemous. In any case both had an Orwellian ring to them. Billions of dollars were expended in dropping every imaginable type of bomb on the poorest and most war-ravaged country on the planet. By the end of 2001 the innocent victims 9/11 had been "avenged" by the deaths of over 4,000 totally innocent Afghan civilians. Since then the bombing of whole villages has increased this figure considerably.

The numbers of Afghan Taliban or so-called al-Qaida "foreigners" killed is not known. US forces do not count enemy dead in the wars to impose the New World Order. What is clear is that thousands were killed after they surrendered or attempted to surrender. These murders were carried out by Northern Alliance troops with the active collusion of US Special Forces.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld gave the green light for this by stating that the USA "was not inclined to negotiate surrender". The Daily Telegraph accurately, if infamously commented; "Mr Rumsfeld, in his recent statements has made it clear that swift, local brutality may cause the problem [the large number of prisoners] to disappear. Better not to speculate about the detail."

Six hundred were killed during the "uprising" by prisoners in Qala-i-Jangi fort where journalists examining the bodies found many still had their hands wired behind their backs. Evidence has come to light that many more, maybe thousands, were herded into giant metal containers and left to die of asphyxiation.

So much for the Geneva Convention as far as these "civilised" "Christian" soldiers are concerned.

Sadly there is nothing new in this. In 1991 on the road to Basra US war planes immobilised two enormous columns of Iraqi troops - many miles long - retreating out of Kuwait. They were flying white flags and had with them thousands of civilian workers fleeing Kuwait in fear of reprisals. For hours they were bombed and strafed till there was not a soul left alive. US commanders callously but candidly called it "a turkey shoot". Over 250,000 people, soldiers and civilians, perished in Bush Senior's war. Bush Junior looks set to beat this record.

And US politicians ask - "why do they hate us?"

The "war against terrorism" was waged at home too. The Patriot Act savaged civil lib-



erties. Over 1200 people of Islamic or Middle Eastern origin were rounded up and imprisoned indefinitely. Prisoners from Afghanistan were brought to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, put into cages open to the weather, deprived of sleep by constant bright lights, and denied prisoner of war status (and therefore once more the protection of the Geneva Convention).

In the USA anti-war activists were pilloried and witch-hunted. Corporations coined it out of flag-waving patriotism so much that eventually there were protests. The military-industrial complex received massive arms orders. Bush went from being the least popular new president in history - he stole the election remember - to being the most popular ever, all in a week or two.

George W Bush - like his father - is the president for Big Oil. Oil companies always form the most aggressive, rapacious sector of capital. By the nature of finding "their" product in other people's countries they are prone to organise coups and make sure they have sympathetic regimes there. Today the specific interests of this fraction of capital coincides with the desire of the whole US ruling class to take maximum advantage of its role as sole superpower. "We can do it and so we will do it", is their motto.

Dick Cheney. Bush's even more unilateralist vice president, is a typical Big Oil man. He was, until 1998, busy negotiating on behalf of a huge consortium of top oil companies (all the US giants but also BP) to build a pipeline through Afghanistan and Pakistan, what the Wall Street Journal called "a prime transhipment route for the export of Central Asia's vast oil, gas and other natural resources".

Indeed there is mounting evidence that the USA was intending to launch a war in Afghanistan before the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. A former Pakistan foreign secretary, Niaz Niak, claims to have been told that a US attack against Afghanistan would go ahead by October 2001. Colin Powell was touring the area that summer trying to build a coalition for such an intervention.

Indeed Powell - laughably treated by the western media as a "dove" - has since expressed his surprise and deep satisfaction at the outcome:

"America will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind we could not have dreamed of before [9/11]."

The families of the 350 firefighters who died in the world trade centre must be really glad about that.

As for revenge for 9/11, Osama bin Laden is still "somewhere in the mountains of Afghanistan" and the al-Qaida networks around the world are unbroken. But then only the truly naïve and unwary could believe that hunting them down was the real reason for this war.

The post-September 11 declaration of a "war against terrorism" created a stampede by the major states to prove their loyalty to the USA. Partly out of fear - Rumsfeld talked of 40-50 countries against which action might be taken for "harbouring terrorists". Partly out of greed. They were well aware that some countries - or rather their rulers - did very well out of George Bush Senior. Others lost out.

During the 1991 Gulf War Yemen lost \$70 million dollars in US aid for opposing it: Egypt got \$7 billion in loans for supporting it. So a series of states hoped to gain not only economic but strategic advantages for themselves. Vladimir Putin, first to phone the White House on 9/11, flew to Dubya's Texas ranch, declaring "he's my new best friend." Never mind that with 250,000 Chechen civilian deaths and the cruel and relentless bombing of Grozny on his hands he might seem a strange ally in the "war against terrorism". China got fast track entry into the WTO. Turkey got huge IMF loans to stave off economic collapse. Pakistan got a \$1 billion aid package and the lifting of various sanctions imposed when it tested its own nuclear weapons.

But in the company of the Indonesian military (200,000 massacred in East Timor), the Turkish regime (tens thousands of Kurds killed) and given his father's record, it is clear that Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar were small time terrorists compared to the "anti-terrorist" alliance lined up against them by George Bush.

Putin hoped to find a role as a gendarme for the US oil companies' planning to plunder Central Asia. Like the jackal he is he hoped that the US lion will leave enough on the carcass for Russia to gnaw at. But the USA has jumped several squares on the chessboard in "the great game". It has its own bases in Central Asia now. Putin may rapidly find himself demoted from "best friend" to unwanted guest at the victory feast.

The twelve years of harassment of Iraq, and Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld's determination to have a regime change there, the scarcely concealed contempt of the Bush Administration for the Saudi regime, the stymieing of the EU countries' diplomatic wooing of Iran, all show that the USA wants to rearrange the domination of the oilfields of the Gulf and "open up" Central Asia. It wants to install totally subordinate regimes - ones totally integrated into global capitalism.

The US has overwhelming military preponderance and it thinks this is sufficient to get its way. It sees no reason to make any long term concessions to either its imperialist or its semi-colonial allies. This is the root of the USA's "unilateralism".

That is why Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld have decided to "take out" a whole list of rogue states: If not 40 or 50 then at least half a dozen of the perceived obstacles to their plans. This

should "discourage the others".

First comes the unfinished business with Iraq. If this succeeds then it will be the turn of Iran, Somalia or Sudan. But this threatens - as the European imperialists clearly realise - a conflagration in the whole Middle East.

Bush plainly feels he has no need to make any more concessions to the Arab regimes. The US thinks that they will knuckle under once the US acts. But none of them can be relied upon as a base for US military operations. That is why the US wants to strengthen Israel in its role as regional gendarme and in its role in dividing and weakening the Arab regimes. They believe that they can scare others into a "regime change" too. This way they can insure themselves against an Islamist palace revolution in Saudi Arabia.

Intoxicated by their own military power, confirmed in their arrogance by the bowing and scraping of Blair and Putin, Bush and Cheney may well forget that not all their foes can be dealt with by carpet bombing or "daisy cutters". The last five years have seen a mounting fightback against neoliberalism in the semi-colonial world. In Latin America, Africa and Asia there have been big movements of resistance to the unemployment and misery caused by imperialism and globalisation.

In the imperialist countries, from 1999 onwards, the anti-capitalist movement demonstrated a growing solidarity with the masses of the semi-colonial countries. The second intifada against the USA's Zionist gendarme has led to a growing solidarity with the Palestinians.

During the weeks of war in Afghanistan a strong anti-war movement sprang up, especially powerful in Europe and the Middle East. But in the USA too tens of thousands courageously said "Not in our name!" to Bush and Cheney. It was limited by the understandable revulsion of ordinary people for the carnage of 9/11 and their mistaken belief that this war was some sort of insurance against further indiscriminate attacks.

But the attack on Iraq, planned for November or soon after, will bring into existence a massive anti-war movement right around the world. This movement will be increasingly anti-imperialist. We must make sure that it is internationalist in spirit - not "anti-American". We can help the anti-capitalist and anti-war forces in the USA to build a mass opposition "in the belly of the beast". We should never forget the role that the American anti-war movement played in helping to defeating the USA in Vietnam.

US imperialism and its British ally can be defeated - and will only be defeated - by the mass resistance of the ordinary people of the world, first and foremost the workers and the poor of city and countryside. They cannot carpet bomb us all. We have to open up a massive assault on US corporate interests and those of their allies on every continent, demand the expulsion of their troops and bases from every country. We need to support and encourage Americans to rise up to put an end to Bush's evil regime. One year on from 9/11, we need to turn their war against terrorism into our war against capitalism and imperialism.

Public sector pay battle

The pay battle in the public sector and recently privatised "public services" has reached a crucial point. Either workers across the sector can step up the campaign through united action and score some major victories, or they will have to settle for deals that will continue to condemn millions to low pay and lousy conditions. *Lesley Day* and *GR McColl* review this summer's action and map out the way ahead

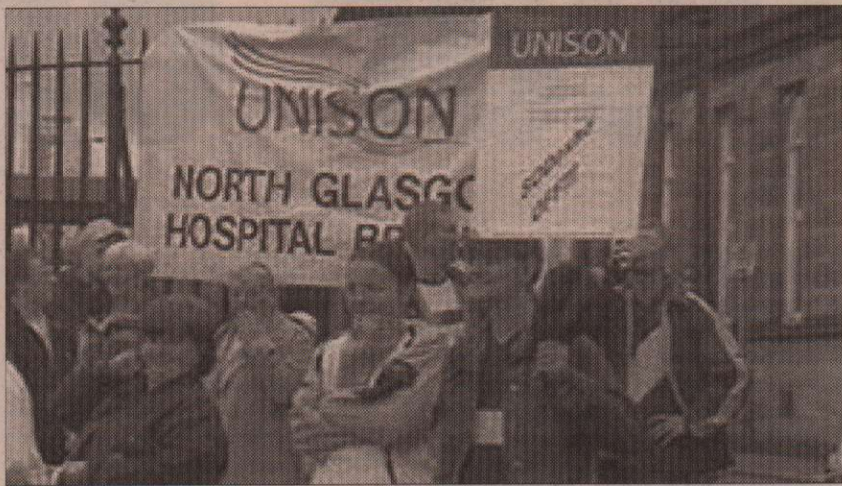
The patience shown by public sector trade unionists during Blair's first term has definitely run out. Workers in the rail, post, local councils, health, education and even the British Library have shown that strike action can bring results on pay and against the privateers.

While older militants have done much of the initial organising and building young workers have started to come forward in these disputes. As one young council technician told Workers Power, "once the strike was called, people started saying they wanted to come out, but were not in the union. I got hold of some forms and on the day itself we organised a picket. I feel much more confident now".

A single day of strike action on 17 July by one million council workers sent Blair, Brown and Prescott scurrying for a way out of a protracted confrontation with the single largest component of the public sector workforce. Local authority bosses were actually pressed to increase the offer - and, no doubt, union officials were pressed to accept it.

The inadequate two-year deal on offer still leaves tens of thousands making little more than £5 an hour, but the concession from the employers also shows to a new generation of workers that action can produce results.

Other groups from Newcastle metro workers to Ministry of Defence staff have won inflation-busting deals. The rail unions continue bitter battles with Arriva North-



ern and First North Western, but elsewhere have forced employers to the table and extracted concessions from a number of the train operating companies.

The most stunning victory was that of Unison members working in Glasgow hospitals, employed by the anti-union multinational privateer, Sodexo. Determined strike action in late July and early August by 300 domestic and ancillary workers forced the low-wage giant to concede major improvements on both pay and conditions after Sodexo's attempts at old-fashioned strikebreaking failed.

The success of the Glasgow action spurred an unofficial walk-out by several hundred workers at the Inverclyde Royal

Hospital in nearby Greenock, who secured a minimum hourly wage of over £5 before returning to work on 28 August. There is still the possibility of action spreading across hospitals in the west of Scotland.

Still in the pipeline may be further strikes over local government workers' London Weighting allowance, an issue where the council bosses have so far conceded nothing despite four days of action between May and July. RMT members on London Underground look set to strike over pay and possibly over the part-privatisation of the Tube. A dispute with a number of train operators over the job descriptions of guards is also in the offing.

In the further education (FE) colleges joint strike action is planned by teaching and support staff unions for 5 November.

Meanwhile, the FBU has continued its rallies and appeals for public support in its "£30K is fair pay" campaign across the fire service. The union's executive looks likely to give the green light to a strike ballot at a special session on 12 September after

rejecting the latest offer from the bosses' side of a 4 per cent increase on basic pay.

Following many false starts there may finally be official industrial action across the Royal Mail nationally, as CWU members ballot for a strike against privatisation in the engineering section, ROMEK.

All these disputes point to a renewed confidence and militancy across the public sector workforce. But all of them reveal a strategic problem - the control over the disputes and their settlement currently lies with a union bureaucracy which is either ready to give up the fight at the first hint of a compromise (the right and centre) or does not have a coherent strategy for scoring a decisive victory (the left).

This means that instead of a concerted and united fight across the sector different groups of workers are fighting pretty much in isolation from one another, even though the issues of pay and privatisation link their struggles.

A much more sustained and serious fight against low pay and privatisation is needed. This means facing up to the real problems that confront public sector workers.

The Labour government is committed to keeping a tight grip on public spending. Although there were real increases unveiled by Gordon Brown in his July Comprehensive Spending Review, these were narrowly targeted and most came with strings attached. But Brown does want to retain union support - probably as the basis for an eventual leadership bid.

His means of placating the union leaderships consists of the two-three year deals currently being advocated by the Treasury, which he hopes, will buy off enough sections of workers with modest real wage rises. He hopes that these can deliver industrial peace between now and the next general election, likely in 2005.

So far such multi-year pacts include the Ministry of Defence, Scottish teachers and local government workers, and the proposed council deal in England, Wales and the north of Ireland. Similar deals have been mooted for other teachers and NHS staff. But the course of events over the new few months could scupper a number of Brown's assumptions.

First off, even Brown's modest spending increases could soon be under threat. There is mounting evidence of a slowdown, not just in manufacturing and IT, but in the UK economy generally. This would signal a major fall in the Treasury's tax takings. In addition, the likelihood of Britain joining Bush's war against Iraq squeezes resources further and also raises the spectre of serious splits within the Labour Party itself. If war does erupt in the Persian Gulf it would send oil prices skyrocketing at least temporarily, creating new inflationary pressures that would make long-term deals look far less attractive to workers.

But the government is not simply constrained by its refusal to increase taxes on the rich and big business. It is committed lock, stock and barrel to privatisation; it is fully tied the pro-privatisation policies of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Services (GATS). These policies, dictated by the giant corporations through the World Bank and IMF, mean that more and more services are to be hived off to the privateers. Thus, Scotland's "first minister", Jack McConnell, promised Scottish councils extra money - but only if they signed up to Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals.

Whether it's the requirement to repay capital over the space of decades for PFI schemes, or to allow private firms to run services, privatisation deals curb wage costs. In short, the fights for better pay and against privatisation are inextricably linked. The task of militants is to make this link in practice.

Local government deal: just bin it



A second national council workers' strike was set for 14 August. This was to follow the hugely successful 17 July action - involving Unison, TGWU and GMB members and the largest strike by women workers in British history as cleaners, care assistants and catering staff joined committee clerks on picket lines.

But the August strike never happened. After a couple of marathon sessions at ACAS, union negotiators and the local government employers emerged with a two-year deal, which officials of all three unions are trying to persuade their members to accept.

There is no doubt that the employers made some real concessions, but the settlement falls far below the original joint union claim of a rise of 6 per cent or £1,750 -

whichever figure was higher. Only a small proportion of those on low pay will actually receive the widely reported 10.9 per cent rises over the two-year period.

Though inflation is currently low, workers should not be locked into multi-year deals.

In Unison the United Left has issued a leaflet opposing the deal and calling on members to reject it. A number of Unison branch committees and the union's Greater London executive for local government have called for "no" votes.

It is vital to maximise the "no" vote. If, as looks likely, the bureaucrats win a majority for the settlement a big no vote can lay the basis for future battles including the still unfinished fight for the £4,000 London Weighting claim.

A rank and file strategy to win

A fightback against both low pay and privatisation needs:

* **Public sector unity:** Workers understandably want to press the case of "their" service, but this instinct is exploited by Blair and Brown to open up divisions. Instead, there needs to be a united fight for resources and against PFI and PPP. We need public sector alliances at all levels, not just the leaderships, but right down to towns and workplaces. We need co-ordinated strike action and a fight for all-out action - much more likely if others are out too. We need unified claims and cast-iron commitments to stick by each other. Workers in areas experiencing skills shortages may be able to force higher deals, but if others are left behind, this will eventually drag down overall rates.

* **Unity between users and workers:** Gordon Brown says there is a "simple choice" between paying workers more or improving services. This is nonsense. Better-paid workers with proper conditions provide better services. The argument is simple: stop paying the private profiteers instead.

* **Be prepared to defy the anti-union laws:** The law currently outlaws strikes against privatisation and sympathy

strikes. National strikes are hugely difficult to organise where there are many different employers, as in the privatised rail industry. The legally prescribed timetables and balloting rules give huge advantages to the employers (and to the union leaders who want to keep the lid on action). Any serious challenge to the government would come up against class laws that should be scrapped and must be actively opposed.

* **Rank and file control of the strikes and campaigns:** We need forms of organisation that can involve members, especially new layers, and where necessary, challenge the leadership over the control of the action. That means action groups, delegate bodies as well as informal networks and strike committees when action is launched. The all-London teachers meeting called last June for and by rank and file delegates is a good starting point. We have to build alternatives to the existing leaderships and, indeed, to the whole bureaucratic way the unions work. The moves to develop various united left bodies, whether through the Socialist Alliance or the revival of NATFHE Rank and File, are useful initiatives. But these will have to be more than ginger groups if they are to be capable of challenging existing leaders.

* **Transforming the unions:** Despite the recent elections of left leaders and the revival in membership and militancy, the trade union movement is not adequate for the tasks at hand. The leaders are either tied to Labour or, in the case of the "awkward squad", so far unwilling to mount a head-on challenge. We need class struggle unions, democratically controlled by their rank and file members with leaders paid the average wage of the members they represent and subject to regular election and recall by those members.

* **Political explanation and leadership:** Militants who are trying to build up the confidence of their members need to explain what we are up against and how we can win. This means putting a political alternative, a socialist alternative, not just to New Labour and the bureaucrats but to capitalism itself. Building for the European Social Forum in Florence, giving examples of successful fightbacks, showing that there are national and international allies - all of this will build lasting and sustained recovery, and lay the basis for much more fundamental victories in the future.

Employment rights & wrongs

Frank Kellerman looks at the issues behind the latest row between the union leaders and Tony Blair

Anger over the anti-union laws looks set to dominate the TUC Congress and spill over into the Labour Party Conference too. Tony Blair - who once boasted that Britain has the most repressive union laws in Europe - now faces a coalition of rank and file trade unionists, union leaders and Labour MPs calling for reform.

In response to labour movement concerns, Patricia Hewitt, the trade and industry secretary, has set up a review of the 1999 Employment Relations Act (ERA) - the hideously inadequate law designed by Peter Mandelson and his friends in the CBI. It now looks like that won't be enough to buy-off union opposition.

When the ERA was passed, despite all its restrictions (see box), there was a howl of protest from the CBI. It would destroy jobs and slash competitiveness, complained the bosses. But the results in the workplace have been mixed. In general the ERA - which was not fully enacted until June 2000 - gave the green light to activists in sectors where there had been widespread de-recognition under Thatcher, namely the print and media industries. Here a series of ballots were launched and quickly won.

These early successes encouraged union officials to go on recruitment and recognition drives. At Romeike, a white-collar monitoring organisation in London and Peterborough, the recognition drive started with just six employees meeting in the pub. Eighteen months later they won a 92 per cent majority for recognition among the 300 strong workforce. And they used the experience of the recognition campaign to gear up for a fight against redundancies: a proposed 50 job losses were reduced to 15 after a fight by the newly-recognised GPMU branch.

The GPMU's website lists a whole host of deals signed in the last few months alone, including employers who dragged their feet and enforced all the anti-union clauses in the ERA. Many of these deals are never reported because they take place at small workplaces.

But despite these deals at smaller firms there are big problems with the ERA: first, the near total absence of recognition deals done with large employers in the booming service sector which makes up 80 per cent of the UK economy; second the nature of the deals being cut.

Firms like Caudwell, which owns Phones4u and whose boss hates unions and hates workers who won't work unpaid overtime, have been at the forefront of resisting the effects of the ERA. The Communications Workers' Union cannot even get a foot in the door at its sweatshop call centres. Likewise a long-running campaign at Amazon.com in Milton Keynes, organised by the GPMU, has met with sackings, sabotage and harassment.

Employers like these have been secretly hiring anti-union law firms and advisers to shore up their defences. One key defence, allowed by the ERA, is to treat company-backed staff associations the same as unions, and allow them to win ballots for representation.

The second problem is the sweetheart nature of the deals being made. Every press release announcing a new agreement usually goes like this: the union leader welcomes a new era of partnership; the HR director says we've always been a good employer, look at our awards from the DTI. The deal usually includes swift recourse to ACAS if a serious dispute looks like blowing up.

So while "partnership" has become a dirty word among union militants, partnership is mostly what you get when you win a recognition agreement: a very low level of independent bargaining power.

Of the 470 deals signed in 2001, according to the TUC, just 20 were statutory deals made at the Central Arbitration Committee. The rest were voluntary deals made with the



TUC General Secretary John Monks

What is the Employment Relations Act?

Labour Party members are well used to the phrase "too little, too late", but there is no better description of the ERA. When it came, in the form of the Fairness at Work White Paper, the philosophy behind Labour's long promised reform of union rights was depressingly clear: the emphasis would be on "individual" rights rather than collective rights, and the whole law would be designed in consultation with the bosses.

The main reform to collective rights was to allow statutory union recognition where the workforce voted for it. But the measure was full of get out clauses and small print. You have to win a majority of those voting AND 40 per cent of the whole workforce have to vote yes: so abstentions count as No.

The employer can have a say in

defining the bargaining unit to be represented. And the law does not apply to firms with fewer than 21 employees. The whole process is littered with time-outs and delays that, according to the TUC has, in practice, given employers "a window of opportunity to engage in unfettered anti-union campaigning".

On individual rights, the proposal to scrap the limit on compensation payments for unfair dismissal was watered down to a £52,000 limit - still a big jump from the derisory £12,000 fine employers were happily paying to get rid of troublesome shop stewards. There is now a statutory right for workers to be "accompanied" by a union representative at a disciplinary hearing - a measure watered down from the original proposal which guaranteed "representation", and

the difference between the two has been quickly exploited by employers.

The ERA contains a clause saying workers on strike cannot be dismissed in the first eight weeks of strike action. This is yet another arbitrary limitation of principles and rights and employers have taken advantage of it in several prolonged disputes, notably at Friction Dynamix in North Wales, where all 87 workers on strike were sacked the minute the time limit passed, with the full backing of New Labour employment legislation.

The law reduced another time limit - the time it takes for people's individual workplace rights to kick in - from two years to one year. Still a far cry from the "rights from day one" promised by former Labour leader John Smith.

encouragement of the legislation but not actually invoking it. The deals include some high-profile, formerly anti-union employers: Honda, Express Newspapers, Easyjet and Securicor.

While at Easyjet the recognition deal has been swiftly followed by a baggage handlers' pay dispute, you can bet that the Honda deal, signed with the AEEU - at the time led by Sir Ken Jackson - was a masterpiece of sweetheartism. One third of the deals covered in the TUC survey actually came about as a result of an approach by an employer!

All this shows that joining a union and getting union recognition is only the start of things when you want better pay and conditions. Union bureaucrats are always keen to play a mediating role between workers and employers: whereas a rank and file activist or shop steward will have to sometimes compromise as a necessity, during a dispute, for the bureaucracy compromise is an art form, a way of life.

But despite steady progress in recognition deals, the union leaders are not happy with New Labour. The reason is that, as fast as they are patching up agreements with some employers - including in the private sector where only 20 per cent of workers are union members - the government's privatisation programme is eroding union rights, membership and even recognition in the public sector, where the unions are strong.

The Glasgow Royal Infirmary dispute shows what we are up against. Sodexo - a union-busting private firm - refused to give its employees the same rights as state-employed workers in the same hospital. A hard-fought strike ensued, with some of the most serious picket line violence seen for some time.

The unions won, and though the strike was led by socialists it had the full backing of the Unison hierarchy. Just two or three years ago that same hierarchy was systematically stabbing strike action by its members in the back.

In the first term of New Labour, the right wing of the union hierarchy had the upper hand. When Peter Mandelson, the architect of ERA, got booted out of office on alleged corruption charges, not once but twice, he found a ready welcome at the hearth of Sir Ken Jackson, former leader of the AEEU. The leaders of Unison and the T&G dutifully repressed the rank and file, witch-hunted socialist activists and sat back in anticipation that the ERA would deliver the goods. But it has not.

And as right wingers have been defeated in ballot after ballot, a new configuration of general secretaries has emerged that will get its first real run-out at the Labour Conference and the TUC. The only "far left" general secretaries are Mark Serwotka, a Socialist Alliance supporter, and Bob Crow, who has dallied with the Socialist Alliance but remains

in some ways a loose cannon on the left.

The real action is going on just to the right of them: Mick Rix of Aslef, Andy Gilchrist of the FBU, Billy Hayes of the CWU and newly-elected Derek Simpson of the AEEU-Amicus are all vociferous in their condemnation of Tony Blair on issues from PFI to Palestine, though they remain committed to keeping their unions affiliated to Labour.

More mainstream centre-left union lead-

ers like John Edmonds of the GMB and Dave Prentis of Unison have, in a way, been influenced by the way the wind is blowing. Increasingly they are sharing platforms and rhetoric with the more left leaders.

But the real extent of rank and file pressure can be gauged when you see what the centre right is doing. At this month's TUC Congress the vast majority of general secretaries - including TUC leader John Monks - are set to back a new Charter of Employment Rights prepared by the Institute for Employment Rights (IER).

Unlike the official TUC position, which is a set of changes to the ERA, the IER Charter starts off from a series of international agreements Britain has signed but not implemented. It goes on to outline a series of broad principles which, if enacted into law, would transform union rights in this country, massively tilting the battle in favour of the unions.

They include the right to strike, the right to representation and union recognition, the right to employment rights from day one. The fact that it has all been outlined "in principle" is what has allowed so many union leaders to sign up to the Charter. But even if pursued as a long-term goal it puts the union hierarchy on a collision course with Blair and Hewitt over the future of Employment Rights - and of course with the CBI.

All studies of the past two years, and anecdotal evidence, reveal that recognition drives have boosted union membership. Overall the decline in union membership has stopped and slightly turned round - there are 200,000 more union members now than in 1997, but at 7.6m unions still represent less than a third of the workforce and are concentrated in manufacturing and the public sector.

But even more than recognition it is industrial action that revives union membership. The PCS - where Mark Serwotka has now secured victory, in both the courts and the ballot box, over the Cold War right wing - the union has put on 27,000 members in the last two years, mainly as a result of the determined fight led by Serwotka over changes to conditions for Jobcentre staff.

The union leaders' spat with Labour over employment rights will be limited and controlled. The bureaucrats are happy as long as they can get their feet under the table - and ERA is an issue where they can share tea and biscuits with both the Labour government and a growing number of "enlightened" employers.

The IER Charter contains vaunted principles but history shows only by determined class struggle can they be enacted. At best a left trade union leader can unleash the struggle. They cannot be relied upon to see the struggle through to the end. It needs rank and file organisation to win it. And building such organisation is a central task for socialists today.

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Nablus: a city under siege

Joy Macready visited Nablus as part of an ISM delegation. She experienced the full horror of the Israeli occupation - and the heroism of the Palestinian resistance

Walking along the road past the Huwara checkpoint to Nablus, I saw for the first time the extent of the destruction the Israeli army had wrought on the infrastructure in the Occupied Territories since the second Intifada began two years ago.

Everywhere was rubble: shelled buildings, demolished houses, and bombed-out roads.

During the current Intifada, the Israeli government's policies have led to devastation and destruction in all areas of Palestinian life.

Between 29 September 2000 and 12 June 2002, 1,588 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 20,000 injured. Alongside its excessive use of force against civilians, the Israeli government has imposed various collective punishments that have choked the physical, economic, social and political life of Palestinians. These measures include invasions, curfews, strict internal and external closure, and the destruction of houses, agriculture and industry.

"We are being brutalised, terrorised and humiliated into turning our backs on peace," Ghassan, 22 year old chef from Beit Sahour, told me.

The Israeli military has destroyed more

than 2,650 Palestinian homes, offices, buildings and other civilian structures. The rate of destruction of Palestinian homes is matched with a macabre precision by the growth of the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Over 1,500 families (17,000 people) have settled on Palestinian land during the same period and presently there are 6,000 more new houses either with government approval or already under construction.

CURFEW

We walked into a city under siege. When we arrived, Nablus had been under a complete curfew for 54 days. It had only been lifted for a total of 34 hours. The curfew still continues.

The Israeli army uses the curfew to harass and humiliate the Palestinians. They impose curfew for days on end, and then lift it for only a few hours so people have to scramble for food and water. People find out by television or word of mouth usually only a few hours before that the curfew will be lifted.

The army uses the curfews to wear down resistance: if the population is panicking about where and when they can get their



basic needs for survival, there is less time to organise the fightback. The army increases the sense of desperation by cutting off water and food supplies, especially to outlying villages.

In the eight days that we were in Nablus, the army lifted curfew for just four hours - while a UN delegation came to speak to the mayor. To outside eyes, the city appeared as bustling and vibrant as it used to be with people on the streets, buying and selling, taxis and cars, even a city bus.

But underneath the normality is the panic to get enough staples to last an indefinite time for there is never any indication when the curfew will be lifted again. And even though Nablus was open, the surrounding villages were closed so that all the people dependent on trade with the city are barred.

CHECKPOINTS

Before the present Intifada, 150,000 Palestinians used to cross the "Green Line" to work in Israel. This was an important part of the Israeli economy. But since September 2000 the Palestinians are under lock-down. As Waddah, an insurance broker from Beit Eiba, said, "It is like living in a huge prison. But worse because at least in prison you know how long your sentence is. I can't see an end in sight."

Since March 2002, Palestinians are not even allowed to travel between villages under Palestinian National Authority control. Now they have to produce an "ahoyya" (identity card) wherever they go and pass through checkpoints even in their own city.

Awni, a Palestinian from Beit Sahour, explained to me how difficult the checkpoints make travelling for an average Palestinian. "From Bethlehem to Jenin used to take 45 minutes by car. Now it takes over 6 hours and 21 checkpoints to get there - that is if you make it through the checkpoints."

The checkpoints were a product of the Oslo peace accords. "Massoms" can be - at best - a scene of humiliation for a Palestinian and at worst the site of an execution. It is up to the whim of the soldiers what the

procedure is and how long it will take. I have seen Palestinian men lined up, face against a wall, hands clasped behind their backs; old women on medication made to sit in the hot sun for hours; and ambulances held up for two and a half hours waiting for their ID checks to finish.

OCCUPATION

It is the randomness of the operations within the Occupied Territories and of the soldiers themselves that makes it almost impossible for the residents to live except in constant fear.

At any moment the rules - which make no sense in the first place - can change. It is very difficult to find any rhyme or reason because there isn't any. The purpose is to disorient, confuse and instil fear into the Palestinian population. For example:

Two days before we arrived in Nablus, a man driving a well-marked municipal rubbish truck was shot dead by a group of soldiers even though there is an agreement with the army that the trucks can collect litter during curfew.

One man in Beit Eiba was having a cigarette on his rooftop (not breaking curfew) when the Israeli soldiers opened fire and killed him.

Mohammed, a doctor at a medical clinic, told us about four ambulances shot up outside the clinic by the army, and also how they were forced to operate on a baby in the kitchen because the army had tear-gassed the operating room.

One mother in New Askar refugee camp told us how the army came at 3am, forced them outside, shot up the wardrobe, bed, and toilet, and took her 18 year old son and all his photos. He has been in prison for one month and they don't know when he will be released.

The Israeli army occupies the homes of Palestinians, sometimes evicting the families but more often keeping the families under house arrest, where no one can visit and no one can leave the house. The Abu-Sanfa home in Al-Maseken has been occupied for six weeks. Four families live

on the basement floor while the army occupies the top two floors. The soldiers have taken the families' belongings without compensation.

The army made an incursion at midnight on 12 August in Beit Dajan, a small town to the east of Nablus. All 2,000 inhabitants were made to come into the streets as soldiers searched, house to house. Six men were arrested without reason. On the same day, in Beit Foreiq one house was demolished and a wanted man killed.

This is the everyday life of Palestinians living under the Occupation: random killings, anger, insecurity, frustration and fear. Jhassan summed it up: "We have lost our security, our livelihoods and our freedom of movement. Unless the peace process addresses these three questions, there will be no peace."

PEACE DEALS

Many would imagine that living under this scale of oppression day after day would break the spirit of the Palestinian people. Waddah admitted that it had changed something: "We are treated like animals. The spirit is damaged. Something is dead inside." But he has not lost hope for the future: "We only want to live as free people live."

Many people that we met voiced their concerns about the next generation. Sabya, Waddah's wife, fears for their 10-year-old daughter. "She needs to go to the doctor but she is afraid because he is Israeli. She sees all Israelis as soldiers. She says that when she grows up, she will impose a curfew on the Israelis." Parents are afraid that being brought up in a state of terror will harden the young people against the Israelis and that they will turn their back on peace.

When I questioned people about how they saw the future, this usually elicited an initially negative response: "I see no future for us." But when asked what would they like to see happen, the majority spoke of a single state where both Jews and Arabs lived together as equal. They've seen the so-called two-state solution and recognise it as a form of apartheid.

THE WAY FORWARD

Walking down the streets of Balata or Askar camps, with four year old kids coming up and asking your opinion of Sharon, Bush and Arafat, you cannot imagine a more politicised group of people.

But, as everyone admits, politically the situation on the ground is very different from the first Intifada of 1988. George, from the Rapprochement Centre in Bethlehem, summed up the differences: "The first Intifada saw mass participation of ordinary Palestinians. Everyone was involved with the resistance. Because of this the struggle was well organised and effective."

"The second Intifada has been limited to a group of militants. Only the first three months saw the beginnings of a real movement. Now it is a complete lock-down situation. We have seen an enormous escalation in the weaponry used against us by the Israeli army. People are now less organised, more frustrated, and less ready to be organised which is a problem. There has been no real armed resistance for a long time."

Is this a crisis of leadership? Even in Balata refugee camp, where the Fatah movement began, there didn't appear to be much support for Arafat, especially amongst the younger generation. To them, Arafat is seen as a capitulator, ready to grab anything he can get. Jhassan stated his position: "Arafat is too weak, too ready to negotiate with Sharon, a killer. The Palestinian people need a fighter and this fighter will probably come

Appeal from Beit-Eiba

26/08/2002

Israel Army re-occupation of Beit-Eiba for the third time since April

Dear Person of Conscience,

When a child must dash through a deserted street or sneak between olive trees to visit her ageing grandparents in the same village, the scene is a tragedy. When a man is forced to clandestinely drive along rock-strewn dirt roads to purchase medicine for his family, people of conscience must fall ill with disgust.

After more than 68 days of curfew over our northern West Bank village of Beit Eiba, this community's 3,000 residents have lost patience with this cruel confinement. Only four kilometres north of the city of Nablus, Beit Eiba might as well be 400 kilometres away for residents who cannot reach the metropolitan centre.

In Beit Eiba, some weeks we have a few hours of sanctioned movement. Some weeks, none. Our curfew is even more heavily enforced on days when Nablus residents can move unhindered.

The Soldiers who impose our confinement do not tell us why. Our children are constantly asking us, "When?" and anxiously wait for our prison gates open.

The curfew may have suspended our daily activities, but it has not diminished our daily needs. Our families still require food to eat, our infants milk to drink. We cannot do without clean water, or adequate medical attention.

Even with the chance to purchase necessities, many of us cannot afford them. Our savings have diminished as many breadwinners wait, frustrated, the curfew blocking us from reaching our jobs.

In our already small village, our world is shrinking. Whatever personal or professional plans we once had now languish. Our children's dreams are more fragile. We cannot persuasively tell our sons and daughters to aspire to become doctors, engineers or presidents when we cannot promise them a trip to the store.

If our condition inspires sympathy, it must also elicit pain in those who have great dreams for their children and themselves. We pray that people of conscience will act to help lift this curfew from our village and our lives.

The People of Beit Eiba
Tel: 00 970 59 277400
email: wkhatib@palnet.com
ibalesw@yahoo.com
karamahn@yahoo.com
mai@palnet.com



from Hamas."

A minority of the people I spoke to simply seemed to put a plus sign wherever the US put a minus. Lena, a 17 year old computer student from Balata, rejected Arafat and gave the thumbs up to Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein.

But this is a sign of the desperation and enforced isolation that the Israeli Defence Force has pushed ordinary Palestinians into. Leaders like Saddam may stand up to America, but they also run oppressive regimes keeping their own people in misery.

Similarly, the horrific conditions in the camps and the daily humiliation of being pushed around by IDF officers as young as 17 are the reasons behind the stream of volunteers prepared to act as suicide bombers (see box). But suicide bombers cannot win liberation. In fact they drive a wedge between the Palestinians and potential Israeli allies, thus further isolating the refugees.

Most of the Palestinians I met knew the loss of elsewhere: in a mass movement. But not just a mass movement of Palestinians, but one of Israelis, Americans, Europeans and Arabs. And this is the enormous scope of the campaign by the International Solidarity Movement.

The continuous flow of visitors breaks the isolation and provides the Palestinian Israeli and Jewish volunteers who see through the lies of George Bush and Ariel Sharon.

Through such initiatives we can begin to build an international movement across the globe to put an end to the decimation of the Palestinians, but also to challenge their own governments and leaders and the system that holds us all in misery - imperialism.

Four days in Rafah

By Rehka

During our 2 week stay in Palestine we spent 4 days in the southern most city in the Gaza Strip - Rafah. It lies right on the Egyptian border and is one of the hardest hit areas in Gaza.

Every night in Rafah, houses are demolished by Israeli tanks and bulldozers. The people here go to sleep every night not knowing if they will see their houses still standing, or even if they'll survive the night.

To reach Rafah from Gaza City you have to cross two roads that have been built for and are used exclusively by Israeli settlers. This means that any Palestinians that want to travel to or from Rafah to visit family and friends, or to study and work, have to wait for anything up to five hours in the baking sun just to cross through checkpoints.

Once in Rafah, we take an area way to Salahedine gate. It's an area in the Yibna Refugee camp that sits along the border of Egypt. Every night Salahedine gate suffers intense attacks from the Israeli military. Tanks permanently patrol the area and have even started to descend onto residential streets and house demolitions have become more frequent.

We meet a man called Ibrahim who shows us the remains of what was once home to him, his wife and his 8 children. What we see has become shockingly familiar. Heaps of concrete blocks that were once the walls, any pieces of walls still standing filled with bullet holes, pieces of clothes, shoes and toys strewn among the rubble.

Ibrahim invites us to his house and we drink tea. He tells us about the night when he had just minutes to wake up his children and get them to safety before his house was attacked and later completely destroyed. They now live in a neighbors house. "Are we not human" he asks. "Is our life worth nothing? I don't want the moon or the stars, I just want to be happy, and I want my house back. Is that too much to ask for?"

That night we accompany Ibrahim and other men from the convoy of tanks that invade the streets without warning. The invasions are getting more and more frequent.

As we sit in the in the still of the night drinking tea and eating watermelon we start to hear heavy firing from the end of the road but it doesn't seem to be aimed at anything. Ibrahim assures us that

everything is fine. We see red lights of night tracers in the sky. Sitting in the dark I start to feel like we are being hunted and I think about the 8 children inside. These are the sounds they sleep to every night and every morning they wake up to fresh bullet holes along the street. That night there was no invasion by the tanks, but another night they might not be so lucky.

Of those killed by the IDF in Rafah 48 per cent are under the age of 12. One night we are taken to a café where young men come to drink tea and smoke after a day of throwing stones. "All we have is stones" one guys tells me. "They have tanks, the latest guns, yet they say they shoot children because they feel threatened. Do you believe this? Does anyone?"

Looking around Rafah, you see a sea of white tents where people who had their houses demolished now live. No clean water, no sewage facilities. You see rubble and dirt. Bullet holes on every wall. You see angry young men on every street corner. You hear the constant sound of machine gun fire. You hear the cries of people who have lost a loved one to the IDF killing machine. You hear accounts of people killed at the border the night before. You see the



18 year old Mohamad Dagma from Dashaisha refugee camp in Bethlehem: martyred March 22 2002

poverty and squalor of the Refugee camps. But you also see a people fighting every day against the occupation with everything they have.

What I most remember about Rafah is the spirit of self-sacrifice and collective struggle. The optimism, the hope, the hospitality and generosity. The belief that things can change - will change.

By virtue of our presence - internationals in action

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) organises international activists to go into the Occupied Territories and work within the communities. The Israeli military actively attempts to stop internationals from entering these areas for they do effectively, curtail what the army can and cannot do, to what extent they can push things.

"By virtue of our presence" was a phrase I heard throughout the training sessions with the other ISM activists, but it didn't hit home until we were in Nablus and witnessed the brutality of every day life.

Throughout our stay in Nablus, we stayed in the homes of "shahids" - martyrs. These are the homes targeted by the Israeli military for demolition. The supreme court in Israel has recently ruled that collective punishment is legal and that the homes

of martyrs can be demolished to punish the grieving family for allowing their son/daughter to become a suicide bomber.

"The state's attorney said that while there was no evidence that the family had been involved in the son's deeds, the house demolition was justified because it would deter other potential terrorists." Ha'aretz Daily

Collective punishment goes against the Geneva Convention Article 33 which states "no person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed" and "collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited". This article of the Geneva Convention was written in response to the Nazi policy of killing completely innocent European citizens in response to the resistance activities of others living in the same towns.

I stayed with two different families in the Balata refugee camp on the edge of Nablus, both of whom told a similar, heart-breaking story of their children or sibling.

The Ibrahim son had only been dead for one month and his mother could not hold back the tears as she showed me his photo and told me about his life. Each family is terrified every night, waiting for the army to invade. And that's exactly what happened to the Atiti family.

Two internationals were staying in the Atiti house in Balata, dead asleep at 4am, when the soldiers fired machine guns randomly at the front of the house and demanded all the inhabitants out onto the street. Men from the neighbouring houses had already been pulled outside, some in plastic handcuffs. The soldiers carried out a thorough search of the house,

pushing a Palestinian man ahead of them as a human shield.

When they didn't find what they were looking for, the soldiers threatened the family that they would be back within 24 hours to demolish the house.

The Israeli soldiers took both internationals and four Palestinian men to Huwara military camp. One man was obviously suffering from a heart condition and his eyes were bulging out of his heads.

The two internationals managed to negotiate with the soldiers to have this man's handcuffs removed and be given some water. All men were checked and dropped off at the Huwara checkpoint to walk the 3km back to Balata camp.

When all the international activists got together, we decided to lock down in the Atiti house to make it as difficult as possi-

ble for the soldiers to carry out their threat. There were 15 people in total from eight different countries.

Five activists agreed to chain themselves to the walls of the house. Through the ISM office, we sent out press releases. The Israeli media picked up the story so it was certain that the Israeli Defence Force knew we were there.

No soldiers came that night but the fear was real.

The next day it was announced that a lawyer had agreed to take up the Atitis' case and make an appeal against the Supreme Court's ruling to demolish their home. By virtue of our presence and help from the international media, a small victory was won. Small, perhaps, but it did make a difference to the people living under these horrific conditions.

The story of Jihad Atiti

Jihad Atiti, the youngest son of a family of ten, was 18 years old when he left the confines of the Balata refugee camp on the outskirts of Nablus armed as a walking bomb and brought the war against the Palestinians into Israel. This is his story as told by his brother, Ala, now targeted by the Israeli Defence Force.

"Shortly before the Israeli army officially reinvaded Nablus earlier this year, soldiers opened fire on several teenage boys in the streets of Balata camp. Jihad's friend was wounded but the Israeli army was not allowing ambulances in to take the wounded to hospital. Jihad ran out into the street to pick up his friend and move him to safety. The army fired at him, hitting him in the right side. He lost a huge chunk of flesh and underwent surgery, but luckily no vital organs were injured.

Within a month of this attack, 1 March,

the army stormed the Atiti house, forced the family into one room, wrecked the home and stole their savings. The soldiers then detonated two plastic explosives on an interior wall to weaken the structure and make it easier for the bulldozer to knock it down with the family still in the house. Just as the bulldozer was going to begin the demolition, reporters from Al Jazeera TV arrived and the army backed off.

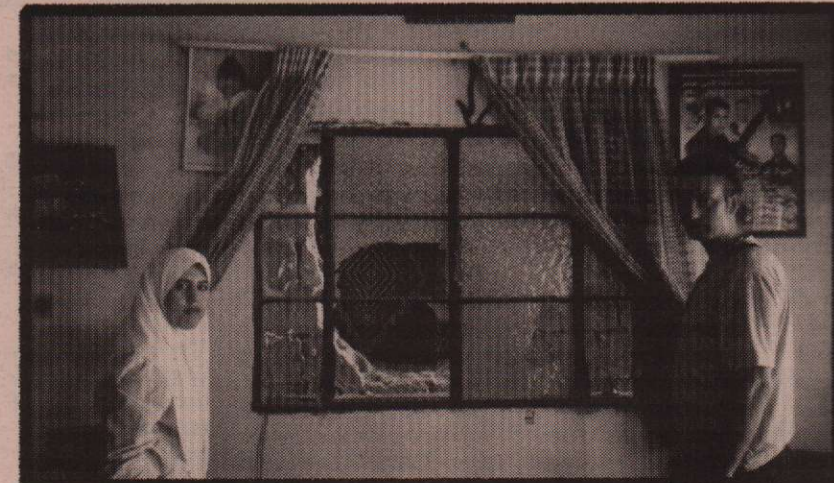
Less than a month later, the Israeli army invaded Balata camp, firing on the residents from Apache helicopters. On April 9, Jihad's older brother, Munir, and 13 year old son, Saleh, were shelled by a tank just outside their front door. Munir's spinal cord was severed and he is just now beginning to walk again. Saleh is now in hospital in Germany to have shrapnel removed from his throat and nose.

On April 28, the Israeli army invaded

Balata camp again. This time all males between 15 and 50 were forced to strip and were paraded through the streets of the camp blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. They were taken to jail where they were questioned for several days and where they suffered more humiliation and torture. While the men were away in jail, the army blasted holes in the walls of all homes so they could move between the houses without entering the streets.

Jihad was shot a second time while participating in a peaceful protest at a roadblock. He stood on a car and waved a Palestinian flag when an Israeli soldier shot him in the leg. He fell off the car and hit his head which affected his eyesight from then on.

His best friend and cousin, Mahmoud, and two friends were assassinated by the Israeli army while visiting a friend's grave on 22nd May. The army fired eight tank



the Atiti house

shells loaded with over 500 nails shaped like arrows. All three were killed by multiple direct hits. Jihad ran to the cemetery and found Mahmoud's body in pieces. He tried to pick his body up but his hand passed through a hole created by the tank.

Four days later, Jihad walked to the cen-

tre of an open air café outside Tel Aviv and detonated an explosive belt that he was wearing under his t-shirt, killing himself, 2 Israelis and injuring 50 others.

The Israeli army refuses to release Jihad's body to his family. They are holding it to a prison sentence of at least 25 years.

Hands off Iraq!

As Bush gets ready for the next stage in the "war against terrorism", *Bill Jenkins* explains why the US is targeting Iraq.

There's unfinished business in Iraq. George Bush Junior isn't going to repeat Daddy's big mistake, leaving Saddam Hussein in power at the end of Gulf War I. They may have argued over golf about the wisdom of an invasion, but Bush Junior, is determined to see the invasion through.

After a period of bogus debate and discussion, where the US ruling elite proves there is no alternative to war and prepares the population for the necessary sacrifices, the war will begin. Exactly when, we cannot say. But soon.

Already a team of 1,000 US military planners is based in the Middle East, plotting every aspect of the invasion. According to a heavily publicised leak to the New York Times, the US Central Command plan a three pronged, land, sea and air assault on Iraq involving at least 250,000 troops along with a massive air and sea bombardment. A further \$50 billion has been added to US defence budgets to pay for the war and a rapid restocking of guided bombs and missiles is already underway.

But why now?

After the outrage of 11 September, the US has been freed from the shackles of the post war military consensus, which outlawed the use of pre-emptive military strikes or wars. The US makes no pretence that their planned attack is within the remit of "international law" or sanctioned by the UN. The war is in US interests and that is enough.

The US wants to turn its overwhelming military superiority, equal to the combined defence spending of the next 16 biggest powers, from a theoretical quantity into an actual reality, into a concrete factor in events. Hence its disinterest in establishing a diplomatic consensus, its refusal to listen to the warnings of its allies, and its increasingly aggressive stance towards former allies, such as Saudi Arabia, seen to be unwilling or unable to contain Islamic militants opposed to the USA.

The USA wants to make it clear to all: it rules the world and will tolerate no opposition to it.

And why Iraq?

In spite of the ranting of the US President and State Department, there is no evidence linking Saddam Hussein to Al-Qaida, the attacks on the World Trade Centre, or the funding of international terrorism. A dossier of evidence has been repeatedly promised but never delivered. The few shreds of evidence linking Saddam to Al-Qaida have been disproved even by US intelligence agencies. This is not surprising given that Bin Laden offered to lead an offensive against Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait and regards Saddam Hussein as a fake Muslim.

Neither has Iraq developed weapons of mass destruction. The US government's own agencies, such as UNSCOM the missile inspectorate, confirm the destruction of 90 per cent of Iraq's missiles. Scott Ritter the former head of the inspection team, further points out that there have been no test firings to enable it to develop replacements, and that Iraq's military is in a state of disrepair.

Defence spending has fallen to 10 per cent of its pre war levels. It is questionable if Iraq even has quantities of nerve gas, or chemical agents. What remains of its air force, already substantially destroyed during the Gulf War and unable to buy spare parts for ten years, is unlikely to be able to deliver the few weapons which may exist.

Could it be a new found humanitarianism which drives US policy? A desire to bring

democracy to the people of Iraq. Hardly. The people of Afghanistan are already experiencing the results of US commitment to democracy and human rights - massacres of prisoners, widespread torture, and the savage repression of women all remain integral to US rule there. In Palestine, the US supports Israel's policy of collective punishment, assassination and occupation against the Palestinians.

It has recently been revealed that the CIA was involved in Saddam's gassing of the Kurds. The US refused to defend the Marsh Arabs when they revolted against Saddam at the end of the last Gulf War and the US supplied arms to Iraq throughout its war with Iran at the cost of over a million lives.

The reason.

The real reason why Iraq now finds itself staring down the end of a US gun barrel is all to do with Bush's plans for US global domination.

After 11 September the US was hurt, humiliated, outraged that a bunch of upstart terrorists, should mount such an audacious assault against the symbols of its world power. Such an assault required a response, any failure by the US to react would have been seen as a terrible weakness by all the nations of the world.

But as well as the motivation for a more aggressive, imperialist policy, it also provided the US with the opportunity to act. It freed them from the constraints of the post war consensus and meant that henceforth they could describe anyone, or anywhere they chose to as a threat to their power and consequently in need of destruction. Anybody who refuses to toe the Washington line is automatically part of the axis of evil.

Iraq has been selected as a test case for this exercise in US unilateralism (though Blair is all set to fall in behind Bush) for one overriding reason - oil. Oil remains the key raw material for global capitalism. Even during normal times reserves of oil never consist of more than three months supply. The imperialists remain acutely conscious of their dependence on oil and the fact that at any time their system could be thrown into crisis if there is some interruption in its supply.

As the US administration has become

increasingly frustrated with Saudi Arabia, the US wants to secure an acceptable alternative supply. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world and its geographical location, close to oil discoveries in the Caucasus, means that a pro-US regime in Baghdad could solve US oil demands at a stroke.

Iraq neatly solves all the difficulties facing the Bush administration: a quick war will boost his patriotic ratings at home and ensure his second term, it will prove US power to the world and provide much of the oil the US needs.

War

But war is not a risk free option for the US government. And it is here that the opponents of war start raising their heads. They point out that although the US cannot conceivably lose a military struggle with Iraq, the war could unleash a chain of events, which could cause its defeat.

The Iraqi army, although only a third of its size at the outset of the Gulf War, is still a significant force, around 400,000 men, with over 2,000 battle tanks and countless pieces of small artillery, anti-tank weapons and small arms. This time the army will not be retreating from Kuwait and acutely vulnerable to US air power, but entrenched in the major cities defending their own nation against invasion.

Baghdad is a metropolis of over 5,000,000 people. They will not welcome the US army as liberators. US and British planes have been bombing their country daily for years now. They are, rightly, seen as oppressors and murderers. The people of Iraq will fight them.

Nor can the US use a proxy army in Iraq, as they did with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Arming the Kurds runs the risk of aggravating Turkey a key ally. In any case the Kurds do not trust the US and are unlikely to fight beyond liberating their own territories. Arming the Marsh Arabs runs the risk of arousing pro-Saudi secessionist feelings and splitting Iraq apart. There is also a risk of what remains of the Iraqi air and missile force being used against US troops massing in Qatar, and more dangerously Israel, unleashing an Israeli nuclear response.

Although the US has become used to wars - in Somalia, the Balkans and



Marine: If we're goin' in to destroy weapons of mass destruction, why don't we start with the ones in Israel, Sir?
Rumsfeld: Take that man's name, Sergeant Wilson

Afghanistan - it has still to overcome its aversion to its armed forces getting killed. US troops fought for one evening in Afghanistan and the loss of one marine's foot was deemed too high a price by the US military for their involvement! Any street combat in Baghdad, even though the Iraqi's would pay a far higher price in terms of death and destruction, would undoubtedly cost significant US casualties.

Further the US runs the risk of inflaming the region in a series of revolutionary crises, not least in Iraq itself. Saddam may be hated, as the brutal dictator he is, but the Iraqi people understand he is *their* dictator, and it is *their* responsibility to remove him. Hence the isolation of the Iraqi opposition and its complete prostration and dependence on the US for support. The opposition will only rule with a massive US army of occupation defending it and the effective reduction of Iraq to colonial status.

Getting rid of Saddam

What's more the war will provide the opportunity for the revolutionary overthrow of Saddam's regime. Already Saddam has been forced by his desperate circumstances to increase his anti-imperialist rhetoric, supporting the Palestinians against Israel, preparing a popular defence of the nation against invasion.

And any effective defence of both himself and Iraq can only take place through the mobilisation of the population against the US imperialists.

While Saddam will attempt to retain control of the armed forces, through the purging of the officer core, limiting weapons to army units, using the Republican Guard as a Praetorian Guard, as soon as the US attacks Baghdad, weapons will flood into the hands of the popular masses and Saddam's ability to control the army will be markedly reduced.

The defence of the nation and the revolutionary struggle against Saddam will be combined into one fight.

The fight for permanent revolution, the destruction of the imperialist forces in Iraq and the spreading of the revolution to Iraq's neighbours, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Palestine will become a living question. A matter of life and death.

At the end of the First Gulf War, the US Secretary of Defence Richard Cheney spoke about the questions facing any US invasion of Iraq proper:

"If we'd gone to Baghdad and got rid of Saddam Hussein - assuming we could have found him - we'd have had to put a lot of forces in and run him to ground some place. He would not have been easy to capture. Then you've got to put a new government in his place and then you're faced with the question of what kind of government are you going to establish in Iraq? Is it going to be a Kurdish government or a Shi'a government or a Sunni government? How many forces are you going to have to leave there to keep it propped up, how many casualties are you going to take through the course of this operation?"

We answer, a lot of casualties, a workers government and a socialist Iraq!

Iraq after 12 years of sanctions

According to the US State Department, "The United States and the Iraqi opposition share a vision of a better future for the Iraqi people after the departure of Saddam Hussein and his regime. Our vision is for a democratic Iraq with a government that respects the rights of its citizens and the rule of law."

The State Department spokesman neglected to mention the major reason for the terrible suffering of the Iraqi people - the US sponsored, UN sanctions imposed since August 1990. These sanctions prohibited all imports into Iraq (except medical supplies) and all exports from Iraq. The State Department described them as "the toughest, most comprehensive sanctions in history".

In 1999 the United Nations Security Council "Humanitarian Panel" reported on the effects of sanctions. While they have failed to remove Saddam, they have resulted in a catastrophic decline in Iraqi living standards.

The report stated that "infant mortality rates in Iraq today are among the highest in the world." These results were confirmed by UNICEF which stated that around 4,500 Iraqi children have been dying each month from a variety of illnesses, compared with 600 a month before the Gulf War. UNICEF confirmed a 160 per cent rise in Iraq's infant mortality rate since 1991. Low infant birth weight affects at least 23 per cent of all births.

UNICEF reported that approximately one in every three Iraqi women who die while of child bearing age (15 - 49 years old) die due to complications surrounding maternity. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies believe that as many as 70 per cent of Iraqi women are suffering from anaemia.

Only 41 per cent of the population has regular access to clean water. The World Health Organisation reported that communicable

diseases, such as water borne diseases and malaria, which had been under control, came back as an epidemic in 1993 and have now become endemic.

School enrolment for all ages (6-23) has declined to 53 per cent. According to a field survey conducted in 1993, as quoted by UNESCO, 83 per cent of all schools need substantial repairs.

As a result of sanctions, the economy has declined by an estimated 40 per cent; Iraq's rate of inflation runs into triple digits, and living standards are half their pre-war level.

Two years ago the former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright, was asked if she thought that the death of half a million Iraqi children [from sanctions in Iraq] was a price worth paying. She replied: "This is a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it."

Forward to Florence

Jeremy Dewar, a member of the Globalise Resistance steering committee, previews the European Social Forum

Globalisation – the drive to tear down the barriers to the West's untrammelled global dominance of financial, industrial and service sector markets – inflicts misery on the vast majority of people.

Water and electricity privatisation, flexible working and anti-union laws, the driving of small farmers and traditional agricultural practices off the land, racist immigration controls, the imperialist war drive – these are the common experiences of millions around the world.

But the spirit of internationalism, of global solidarity and resistance rises everywhere to challenge the big corporations. Everywhere they gather our rulers are challenged by huge demonstrations. Using the internet workers and oppressed people have built links to promote and expand their struggles.

In Europe the anti-capitalist movement has organised militant mobilisations, from the Prague protest at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund summit in September 2000 to Seville in June 2002 against the European Union heads of state summit.

An increasingly important feature of these protests is the involvement of the organised working class. The European workers' movement has launched occasional cross-border strikes against the multinational corporations and staged regular demonstrations against the "Europe of capital" and for a "social Europe".

It is the convergence of these two movements – most notable in Seville where an eight million strong general strike was called by Spanish unions to coincide with the June protests – that has marked the past year.

The calling of a European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence, Italy in November holds out the possibility of making permanent these positive experiences and building on them. With upwards of 30,000 participants expected, the ESF will be the biggest ever conference of workers and the oppressed in Europe.

The idea of a European social forum emerged at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January. On the positive side, it will be open to all who agree with its basic precepts (opposition to neo-liberalism, war and social exclusion) with – theoretically, at least – no privileges afforded to prominent leaders and large organisations. This will allow revolutionaries and radicals, as well as single-issue campaigners, to join in giving the conference a militant and direct action edge.

On the negative side, the ESF has excluded the direct participation of political parties and groups. Neither will it have any mechanism to resolve disputes through democratic decision-making. There are no means to hold the leaders of the main participating social-democratic parties (Parti Socialiste - France, Democratico della Sinistra - Italy, sections of the German SPD) to account.

The ESF, we are told, is a "process" not a "conference". While this is an understandable reaction to the dangers of bureaucratism and the incorporation of the movement by career politicians, it remains a weakness.

Already, at a series of international planning meetings in Brussels, Vienna and Salonika senior representatives of the PS, DS and the reformist trade unions – none of whom have a track record of consistently fighting globalisation – have jostled with more radical elements over the agenda. The reformists and the right wing of the Anti-Capitalist Movement (ACM), led by Attac-



France, have sought to keep contentious issues like the war against "terrorism", Palestine and the market off the agenda, while the left has tried to link the issues and include racism and lessons to be learnt from mass struggles like the Argentine uprising.

The agenda of the ESF reflects these ten-

market, privatisation and the breaking up of the post-war consensus around job security, workers' participation and the welfare state. These were seen as inevitable consequences of globalisation.

But the conservative governments of Alain Juppé, Helmut Kohl and Sylvio

selves a new base to get back into office? These are the questions that defeated social democracy is asking itself.

Attac – and its leader Susan George – had the answers. By implementing a tiny tax on currency speculation (0.01 per cent, the Tobin tax), by cancelling the unviable (because it can never be paid) parts of the third world debt, by offering a diplomatic alternative (trade and development) to the USA's warmongering, and by offering the unions, the (deserving) poor and the immigrant communities a way into European society, social democracy could offer the European bosses an alternative future. One where there is relative social peace and one where they have an edge over the US banks and multinationals in the world markets.

These are the hallmarks of the New Reformism that many hope to see emerge as a coherent force out of Florence.

Right now this remains a pipedream, not least because there is no sign whatsoever that Europe's capitalists are ready to go along with any of these utopian schemes. However, Attac has shown that it is hell-bent on getting the ACM to play this supportive role for the mass reformist organisations.

The likes of Susan George have long dreamed of the day when they could dissociate themselves from the more militant elements in the movement. They have called on demonstrators to refrain from defending themselves from police attack and tried, sometimes successfully, to steer the big summit protests away from a serious defence of democratic rights and trying to enter the Red Zones. They have been in the forefront of those who want to decouple any critique of globalisation from a serious questioning of capitalism itself. And they have fought tooth and nail to prevent the anti-capitalist movement from developing an anti-imperialist critique of Bush and Blair's war-drive.

This is why Attac-France has geared itself up for the ESF by dumping its left secretary, Christophe Aguitton of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. And it is why Attac poses the biggest threat to the other tradition of the ACM, the tradition of direct action and uncompromising opposition to capitalism and its thugs, the tradition of Carlo Giuliani.

But what should we do in the face of this threat?

The Conference of the European Left,

held in Madrid this summer, decided to respond by publishing its own manifesto. Italy's Rifondazione Comunista, Spain's Izquierda Unida and the French LCR have put forward a platform which contains far more references to the fighting traditions of the workers' and anti-capitalist movements and which offers far more reforms to benefit the working class and the poor, at the expense of the capitalists. It even ends with the threat that expropriation and workers' control will be fought for, wherever necessary. The Conference also agreed to seek further allies for this platform including the Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party.

Should revolutionaries support this platform as the means to galvanise opposition to the right wing? Resoundingly, no!

The platform is a left reformist, not a revolutionary alternative to the right. Any government which fails to expropriate the banks and big business from the outset will be faced with sabotage and defeat. And any move towards expropriation will be met by organised resistance from the capitalist state machines: the judiciary, the police and the army. This is the key lesson of all leftist governments, most memorably that of Salvador Allende in Chile, 1973.

But the exclusion of such lessons from the call is deliberate. It is designed to suck in those to the left, like the Socialist Workers Party, the radical youth and syndicalists, while allowing the PRC and IU to dismiss it as a mere phrase, a bit of waffle at the end of the manifesto, when they are negotiating pacts with DS and the Spanish Socialists. After all, the whole record of the PRC during the government of the Olive Tree alliance in the inter-Berlusconi years was one of manoeuvring and abandoning its programme for the greater good of keeping the DS in office. Result: the return of Berlusconi in 2001!

Workers Power and our allies in the League for a Revolutionary Communist International and World Revolution will be seeking to achieve three things in Florence.

Firstly, we must, by all manner of alliances seek to expose the betrayal of the anti-capitalist movement and the working class that is expressed by Attac and the reformist leaders. We do not need to sign up to a left reformist route map to do this – indeed, we will be better able to do so without tying our hands and mincing our words.

Secondly, we will network with all those who want to build on the best traditions of the anti-capitalist and workers' movements. Networks of rank and file trade unionists able to defy the bureaucrats when they sell out struggles, the tradition of workers' control as exemplified by today's wave of Argentine factory occupations, militant self-defence against police attack, practical measures to dismantle refugee detention centres or bring solidarity to the Palestinian people and to oppose imperialist war, the building of an independent revolutionary youth movement: all these should be on our agenda, both in the sessions and outside them.

Finally, we will be looking for discussion partners who see the building of a new, revolutionary international party of socialism as the key task we face today. In doing so, we do not seek to hijack the movement or proclaim ourselves the final product. But we do say that we can and must begin that process today if we want to avoid another round of reformist governments, betrayals and disorientation.

COME TO THE ESF

● www.fse-esf.org ● www.mobilise.org.uk

But the spirit of internationalism, of global solidarity and resistance rises everywhere to challenge the big corporations. Everywhere they gather our rulers are challenged by huge demonstrations.

sions with neither wing getting its way entirely. In the mornings there will be large conferences on three broad topics: globalisation and liberalism; war and peace; and rights, citizenship and democracy. In the evenings large meetings will take place to look at the relationship between the movement, parties and trade unions, alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism, the rest of the world and the future of the ACM. In between, afternoon seminars will be hosted by individuals and groups, collectively or separately.

Obviously, with such broad headings, who gets to speak from the platform at the morning and evening sessions will play a large part in deciding the direction of the ESF. This question will now be decided at the final organising meeting in Barcelona next month.

What, though, are the projects of the main players in this battle of ideas?

As far as the right wing goes, its goal is as plain as it is familiar, even if it has had to dress it up in new clothes. Attac, the trade union leaders and the major social democratic parties want the ESF to give birth to a new reformism.

The early 1990s saw a series of right wing governments come to power in Europe, buoyed by the economic, political and military successes of America's "New World Order". The working class, much of which had been heavily influenced by Stalinism, was still reeling from the collapse of the Berlin Wall and "really existing socialism".

Its cowardly leaders shifted dramatically to the right (though none so far rightwards as New Labour!) and accepted the

Berlusconi over-reached themselves. They both overestimated the preparedness of key sections of the bourgeoisie for a full onslaught on the gains of the working class and a Thatcher-style economic slump, and they underestimated the capacity of the working class to resist this attack. One by one they fell – most dramatically Juppé in November-December 1995 – as workers and sections of the middle class took to the streets.

The resulting reformist governments, however, were politically bankrupt from the word go. They simply carried on where the right wing had left off. Indeed, they often outdid the right because their ties to the trade union bureaucrats enabled them to wrongfoot the working class in a way the right were unable to – supporting wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan, privatising industries and services and double-locking the gates of Fortress Europe.

Inevitably workers became disillusioned with "their" governments and protested at the polls by abstaining or voting for fringe parties – of the right as well as the left. In Italy, France, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands social democrats have recently been unceremoniously dumped. By the time of the ESF, Gerhard Schroder's German SPD could have joined them, despite its recent "conversion" to pacifism.

Meanwhile, the ACM has grown from strength to strength, enthusing and mobilising youth who in another period would have joined the reformist parties. How can we recruit these young activists, how can we make ourselves appear the natural allies of the ACM, how, in short, can we gain our-

German general election

Martin Suchaner argues the case for a vote for the SPD or PDS

The capitalist class is so ungrateful. For four years Gerhard Schröder of the SPD and Joschka Fischer of the Greens have worked their socks off for German imperialism.

- The German army has become part of a global task force
- Internal security rules were tightened
- Massive tax relief has been given to big business and the rich
- Public service privatisation has continued
- The pension system has been opened up for privatisation
- The Euro has been introduced successfully
- Workers' struggles have been kept from generalising thanks to the co-operation of the unions.

But if the German bosses alone could vote the Red-green government would be out and Stoiber (Christian Social Union/Christian Democratic Union) and the liberal economy party, FDP, would be in.

Why? Because even the government's few half-hearted concessions to the working class are too much for the capitalists.

Stoiber wants to put an end to all this and so too does Westerwelle of the FDP. Indeed big business clearly prefers the programme of the FDP. Stoiber, as representative of a "people's party" is a bit more handicapped by the need to look to his mass social base. But he too has indicated that he is willing to "learn". He has close connections to big capital and can boast of having taken an economic hardliner, Späth, into his "team of competence."

Stoiber has been playing catch me if you can with Schröder for months. In order to gain a hearing from the bosses, the SPD and Greens have proposed a number of pro-capitalist reforms. The SPD and the Greens want to negotiate a reform of the labour market and attacks on the unemployed with the

union bureaucracy. Why not just introduce a low pay sector right away, Stoiber replies.

Full scale attacks on employment protection, on national wage agreements and on public services are the core of Stoiber's programme. This means open war with the working class. Stoiber proposes a massive re-armament programme. Over the next four years the defence budget would be doubled, at the very least. These are central reasons why Stoiber is favoured by German finance capital.

Schröder's chances of re-election seemed slim for months. This was easy to understand. It was the SPD that made Stoiber strong by disappointing its working class base. Four years ago Schröder and Lafontaine started government with a few but quite important promises to the working class. They promised the unemployment figures would be halved and the previous government's policy of widening social inequality reversed. But the results didn't match the promises.

Over the last few weeks, however, Schröder has regained some ground. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, Schröder announced that a government led by him would not engage in a war against Iraq. This was a truly popular move, since 80 per cent of the German population are against a war on Iraq. He wrong-footed the CDU and the FDP. Some of their leaders wanted to join the US at any cost, others supported the government - and Stoiber astonished everyone by claiming that the CDU had a clear line.

Secondly, the floods allowed Schröder to present himself as a "peoples chancellor", doing his best to cope with a national emergency, whilst Stoiber was still on holiday. The SPD, the Greens and the PDS quickly argued for taxation of the rich to bear the cost of the floods. Actually this was only a delay in a pro-boss tax reform.

Again the CDU had almost as many posi-

tions as party leaders, changing their policy several times a day.

Finally, despite the betrayals of the past four years many workers still see the SPD and the PDS as "their parties." Others see Schröder as a lesser evil than Stoiber. About two thirds of unionised workers are going to vote SPD. Despite the anti-working class policy of the SPD-leadership and union bureaucracy the workers' movement is still totally dominated by the two reformist mass parties, the SPD (the majority) and the PDS (a smaller but more politically class conscious layer).

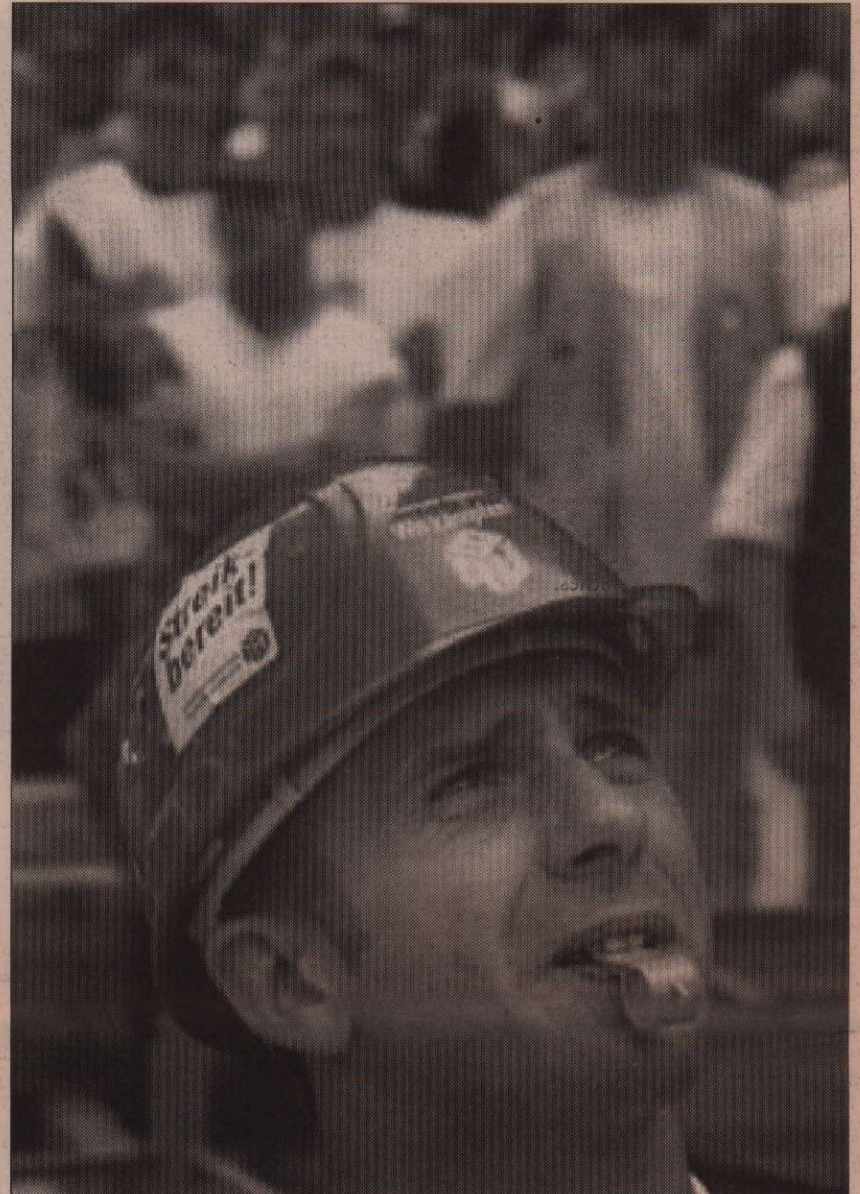
The majority of the organised workers want to prevent Stoiber (and Westerwelle) from coming to power because they consider them a challenge to themselves, to their organisations, their living standards and their social gains.

Despite Schröder's rotten policies it is necessary to stand alongside the reformist workers who want to resist Stoiber's attacks. The Gruppe Arbeitermacht, German section of the LRCI, will critically support both the SPD and PDS. Does this mean supporting the bourgeois policy of SPD and PDS? No.

The next years will see the ruling class menacing the working class by massive attacks. The German and European bourgeoisie is seeking a final show down because only by winning such a battle can they become a serious rival to US imperialism.

These attacks can be fought better, the self-confidence of the working class and the youth increased, if we succeed in beating the favoured candidate of the German bourgeoisie. In power the SPD's pro-capitalist, imperialist policies can be better exposed and the fight to build a revolutionary alternative taken forward.

Vote SPD or PDS! And: Organise the fightback against the vicious attacks by capital and the new government.



Congo, Rwanda and Uganda - what sort of peace?

A great day for the African continent". With these words the South African president greeted the peace agreement signed on 30 July in Pretoria between the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. The deal puts an end to four years of war in central Africa which left nearly three million dead and many more suffering from malnutrition and disease.

In August 1998, Rwandan and Ugandan armies invaded the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC - formerly Zaire) in an attempt to oust their erstwhile ally, President Laurent-Desiré Kabila. Only a year earlier they had helped Kabila bring down the Mobutu dictatorship which had ruled for 30 years under the tutelage of US imperialism.

Mobutu's ruling elite plundered the country's rich natural resources. Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDLC) was able to seize power with little resistance due to the advanced disintegration of the regime and its lack of any support amongst the long-suffering population.

Mobutu had been put into power by US imperialism in 1965 in a bloody coup which ousted the nationalist government of Patrice Lumumba. It did so because it feared the advance of Soviet influence in Africa. However the end of the Cold War meant the US no longer needed the likes of Mobutu. Indeed his hugely corrupt regime actually hindered US strategy in Africa. Hence their support for Kabila, despite his past as a sup-



porter of Lumumba.

But Kabila turned out to be less pliant than hoped. He had been all too happy to accept the support of Rwanda and Uganda to help the AFDLC oust Mobutu. But then he turned his back on his imperialist-backed allies. Rwandan military advisers were sent back to Kigali (capital of Rwanda) and mining contracts with Uganda were ripped up. Worse still he did deals with China, North Korea and Cuba. Clearly for the US, Britain and their Rwandan and Ugandan catspaws, Kabila had to go.

Hence the second Congolese war. In August 1998, Rwandan and Ugandan armies occupied important parts of the Congo including a major dam, depriving Kinshasa,

the capital, of water and electricity. The government's weak military forces would have easily succumbed to the superior Rwandan and Ugandan forces. But Zimbabwe and Angola came to Kabila's rescue. This turned what was supposed to be a short, sharp ousting of Kabila into a four year long war. This war drew in six African armies.

Recognising the threat to the unity of the RDC, Kabila was forced to the negotiating table in 1999. At the same time, Zimbabwe was feeling the cost of the war both financially and politically and was unable to promise continued support. The 1999 peace agreement brokered in Lusaka reflected the weakness of the DRC government.

The partition of the DRC was an option openly discussed, not only in Uganda and Rwanda, but also in US circles. A constellation of micro-states with special relations with neighbouring countries would be easier to control than such a large entity as the DRC as it stands. The US administration would stand to benefit from better trade and investment relations with these weak client states.

But the Lusaka accords did not see the light of day. Kabila obstructed them, recognising that they made his attempts to govern the country impossible. But Kabila's regime could not unify the Congolese nation. Kabila played the ethnic card to consolidate his power. The population soon realised it had in fact traded one dictator for another.

Kabila just like Mobutu showed an inability to distinguish between his private property and that of the state. His assassination by his own men in 2001 opened the door to an agreement. Power passed to his son Joseph Kabila, whose relations with imperialism seem to be much better. After agreeing to implement the Lusaka agreement in full, he announced plans to liberalise the economy. This was met with enthusiastic approval in the imperialist capitals.

If it holds the Pretoria treaty is an important step in the redrawing of Africa in the post-Stalinist era. It points up South Africa's role as the continent's arbiter - bringing "peace" to what is an economically strate-

gic zone on the continent. It also shows the determination of US and British imperialism to extend their influence on the continent.

The USA, was once content to allow the European imperialists continued economic domination of their former colonies in Africa. But now it is eager to extend its economic influence in this region. The Bush administration recently announced plans to break down remaining trade and tariff barriers in Africa - barriers which worked to the benefit of France and Britain.

Given the need for the US to diversify its oil sources after September 11, new oil finds on the continent, including those in the Congo, will be of enormous interest. Pliant regimes will be crucial in assuring US access to oil and other natural resources. However, assuring stability in a region where so many conflicting interests and antagonistic regimes are involved will prove difficult.

The workers and peasants of the region have been completely ignored in the agreement, and yet it is they who produce the mineral wealth that the warlords and the imperialists covet so much. It is they who provide the food that is plundered to nourish the occupying armies. A new carve up of Africa to the advantage of the USA will not help the masses one bit. Only the organised power of the workers and peasants and the establishment of a socialist federation of African states will ensure lasting peace and stability.

Workers' control in Argentina

With the economic crisis worsening, Argentinian workers are fighting back by occupying their workplaces and running production themselves. Miriam visited one of these factories, Brukman, over the summer and sent us this report.

The Brukman textile workers occupied their factory on 18 December when their boss - who owed them months of back wages disappeared from the factory. Rather than lose their jobs in the conditions of total economic meltdown which Argentina was entering, the workers in the Buenos Aires clothes factory decided to occupy.

As I approached the factory I was excited to see the banners and posters proclaiming that this was a factory the under workers' occupation. I was met at the gates, showed around the factory and introduced to some workers there. Most of the workers are women and immigrants. Around 50 workers were producing clothes.

I asked whether women encountered any difficulties at home when they took the decision to occupy the factory. A male worker I was speaking to laughed, "yes, well, a few households were battlegrounds, but they got their way".

The workers were worried at first about the legality of continuing production at the factory and then selling the stock. This means nothing less than the appropriation of the employers' property. Would the courts and the police intervene to restore it to the boss?

Students were among the first to come to the factory to express their solidarity. However, soon after the workers occupied the mass demonstrations of December broke out. These revolutionary days gave the Brukman workers a new confidence.

The government and various bosses' parties wanted Brukman turned into an officially recognised co-operative and lengthy

discussions and debates among the workers ensued. However, the struggle at Brukman is part of a wider workers' movement to occupy and take control over their factories or turn them into co-operatives.

It was the experiences of another occupied factory, Zanón, of the ceramic workers, which was to prove decisive in future developments at Brukman. The Zanón workers had opted for workers' control of their factory, and expressed active solidarity with the workers at Brukman, who consequently refused to have their factory turned into a co-operative, but instead also decided for workers' control.

Clearly the workers were being radicalised by what they saw around them and the solidarity they were given, so they now also started to sell the stock they had produced and they continue production and sales to this day.

Since the workers have been in charge at Brukman the production process at the factory has changed completely. I was told that the first thing was that no-one looked over their shoulders all the time anymore. The workers can now go to the toilet without being harassed.

The next development was that the workers re-organised the production process, so that now individuals did not sew trousers or sleeves or jackets all day, but all the machinists are together on one floor. They can talk to each other and follow the progress of each item of clothing. They were trying to find ways of combating the dehumanising and alienating elements of capi-



Workers occupy the Zanón ceramics factory - one of the first to be occupied and run by workers.

talist production.

Decisions are taken in open, regular meetings - assemblies - held by the workers. The aim of the meetings is to discuss and organise both the daily running of the factory, the production and sale of their products, and political activities. The organisation of and participation in rallies, demonstrations and solidarity work is organised and discussed.

The Brukman workers know that they have to fight together, and they have received and given a tremendous amount of solidarity. They have forged a political unity with the Ceramic workers at Zanón and they promote unity with the unemployment movement. They go on demonstrations together, and join each other in protests.

More recently Brukman has also come together with the factory of Grisonópolis and the printing shop of Chilavert in Buenos Aires which are trying to become co-operatives, who are willing to co-ordinate their struggles and fight together, and a large gig

took place on Saturday 3 August in support of the three factories.

Neither the state nor the bosses can stand by inactive in the face of these events, and after a few months of Brukman being under the control of its own workforce, the boss came back, and a mandatory conciliation process began. But, as one of the workers there put it to me, "the union supported the bosses", and they have "no consideration for the workers". The Brukman workers had no interest in giving in to this process of reconciliation, which would have meant the return of their boss and the old ways.

Earlier in the year the police also briefly took over the Brukman factory. The police entered the factory at 9.00am in the morning, and the workers immediately contacted the media and the network of the popular assemblies. The popular assemblies had previously organised a solidarity commission for a strike fund for the workers as well as self-defence.

They had already witnessed the brutali-

ty and repression of the police in the December days and were aware that they must organise to defend themselves and their gains against the highly organised forces of the state. Hundreds of people were very quickly mobilised and demonstrators arrived banging pots in protest. Facing an ever-growing crowd the police quickly left. On the next day about 4000 people from the popular assemblies came to the factory to express their solidarity with the workers.

The workers of Brukman know that they cannot continue like this for ever, and they cannot go it alone. They want to see all workers in Argentina take over their factories, and they are calling for a general strike. Meetings to plan for a National Meeting of occupied have taken place at the Brukman factory.

As one of the workers stressed to me the Brukman workers do not want their bosses back: "We need to struggle to the end"

Messages of solidarity can be sent to: brukmansolidarity@hotmail.com.

Workers in occupation organise their second national meeting

Report from the Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo

Workers from the factories under workers' management met on August 24 at the occupied Brukman Textile factory in Buenos Aires, to prepare the second national meeting of occupied factories for 7 September. This was jointly convened by the workers of the Zanón ceramic factory in Neuquén, currently producing under workers' control, and the Brukman workers, who were the main organisers of the first meeting in defence of occupied factories in April.

They received greetings and messages of solidarity and the support of the Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD) of Solano and Varela (working class districts in Buenos Aires province), which are part of the Co-ordination of Unemployed Workers Anibal Verón. These unemployed organisations responded to the call of the MTD of Neuquén to take part in this meeting.

This time the alliance among self-managed companies was even wider. A delegation elected from the Junín Clinic assembly traveled from Córdoba province. Also present were: workers from the Tigre Supermarket in Rosario; from the Fricader factory in Río Negro province; miners from Río Turbio; metal workers from the La Baskonia factory in Buenos Aires province; workers from the El Aguante Cooperative; from

the Chilavert printing shop and from the food plant Chelco. All of them are being run under different methods of workers' administration.

Union delegations were present, among them railway workers from the Haedo line in Buenos Aires province, shop stewards of the Meat-packers' Union of Buenos Aires, teachers from La Matanza, the Shop Stewards' Commission of EMFER, health workers from the Garrahan Children's Hospital in Buenos Aires, university teachers from Córdoba, members of the Rosario shop workers' union, university teachers of the CONADU union, a delegation from the La Matanza branch of the metal workers' union UOM.

Present too were building workers from the UOCRA branch in Neuquén, shipyard workers from Astillero Río Santiago, workers from the publishing house Perfil, workers from the food factory Pepsico Snacks, postal workers from Rosario city, and delegates from the Buenos Aires and La Plata branches of the civil servants' union ATE. The unemployed movement of Neuquén was also there. Greetings of solidarity were received from the Corriente Clasista y Combativa.

Many of the factories that attended the

meeting had participated in the Plenary Session of the Co-ordinating Committee of the Alto Valle Region that took place in the Zanón factory on August 10. This had been attended by 1,000 people, among them workers from Zanón, Brukman and Junín Clinic, unemployed, public sector workers, teachers and students of the local university.

Delegates and members of popular assemblies from different neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires city and province participated in the meeting. All of them supported the convening of the Second National Meeting of Occupied Factories for 7 September.

A delegation from the meeting went to the meeting of the Bloque Piquetero at the Grisonópolis Factory (a breadsticks factory under occupation in Buenos Aires) and read a letter calling on them to convene together with other occupied factories the second meeting of occupied factories.

After the meeting, each delegation returned to its factory to discuss in their own assemblies the proposals for the second national meeting. The first priority of the participants is mutual defence in the event of any attack or attempt at eviction. They also agreed to call for the occupation



and workers' control of factories threatened with closure and redundancy and those facing bankruptcy.

It was agreed that one of the points to discuss at the second meeting of the occupied factories is the need for a national meeting of popular assemblies, the picketers' movement, the occupied factories and trade unions in struggle in order to organise a big Workers' Assembly at a national level, as a tool to fight for the trade unions to break with the bourgeois parties and to promote

a general strike to make a reality of the slogan "All of them must go"

The PTS has been active in the movement of the occupied factories, fighting on a programme that shows the potential of the working class to lead the struggle against the capitalist system, and stressing the importance of co-ordinating this movement with other sectors that are in struggle - the picketers, popular assemblies and trade unions.

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Scapegoating refugees leads to racist murder

Blunkett has blood on his hands

The Home Office is intensifying its war on asylum seekers, with tragic consequences. New Labour is, quite literally, driving desperate people to despair and mental breakdowns as well as fuelling an atmosphere where street-level, racist violence is growing.

In late August a 28-year-old Iranian refugee, Tayman Bahmani, lay dead in a Sunderland hospital. He was the victim of a stabbing by a group of white youths in a city where the Nazis of the British National Party have been active and gained 28 per cent of the vote in one ward at the May local elections.

His blood is on Blunkett's hands.

New Labour's bigoted rhetoric and harsh policies on asylum have encouraged the scapegoating of refugees for social ills from poor housing through to unemployment. The cruel and tragic murder of Bahmani is where all of this leads.

Earlier, in July, riot police and immigration officers staged a dawn raid on a mosque in the small town of Lye, in the West Midlands, where an Afghan couple, Farid and Feriba Ahmadi, had sought sanctuary in response to the threat of deportation. They were soon shipped to the Harmondsworth detention centre, where immigration officials later seized their two terrified children, aged six and four - despite the fact that a judge had declared both to be wards of court.

Amid tearful protests by friends and supporters, the police whisked the family out of Harmondsworth to RAF Northolt on 14 August. The family was shipped to Germany on a specially chartered plane at a cost of between £30,000 and £50,000.

On arrival they were taken to a filthy,



Farid and Feriba Ahmadi

decrepit hostel in Munich, where the children had to walk through a pool of blood left by a fatal stabbing on their first night in the facility. They were nearly transferred to the same detention camp from which they had fled in spring 2001, but protests secured places in another cleaner and better-equipped complex.

The Ahmadis, with the support of the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, are still waging a legal battle to return to Britain after it emerged that Home Office representatives had misled the High Court about the family's status in Germany.

Home Secretary David Blunkett appears to have personally authorised the extreme measures taken against the Ahmadis as part of his ongoing effort to become the darling of the rabid racists at the Daily Mail and Express.

A year ago families such as the Ahmadis, themselves victims of the Taliban regime,

might have been politically useful as the government whipped up support for its bombardment of Afghanistan. Now, however, they are expendable "illegal immigrants", stripped of any rights and of their dignity. The government showed naked contempt for psychiatric assessments that showed how fragile the mental health of all four family members had become.

While the Home Office now admits that it won't be able to meet its stated target of 30,000 deportations a year, it is boasting of the removal of a record 3,120 asylum seekers in the second quarter of 2002.

Blunkett has likewise spearheaded an attempt to strip the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns of its grant from a supposedly independent body administering lottery funding. He is hell-bent on making life for refugees as miserable as possible, while trying to stifle the voices of those who would defend them.

The Home Secretary steadfastly refuses a public inquiry into the mid-February fire that destroyed the Yarl's Wood immigration detention centre, the supposed flagship in the Home Office's drive to detain up to 4,000 asylum applicants a week as a stop on the fast track to deportation. At the same time, the Crown Prosecution Service looks set to press ahead with a "show trial" of 13 men detained at the Yarl's Wood complex on the night of the blaze.

The "Yarl's Wood 13" face serious charges, but the evidence against them is extremely flimsy. These men are simply at the sharp end of a blatant attempt to criminalise a growing proportion of refugees.

Several major unions have paper policies in opposition to the government's racist agenda on asylum and immigration. As the

government prepares to railroad through its latest legislative assault on refugee rights when Parliament resumes in mid-October, it is ever more vital that activists push the labour movement to translate words into action. This means putting money into legal defence campaigns, putting members on to the streets to protest against deportations and detention and physically stop them from happening, and mounting an ideological offensive against immigration controls in general.

* *The Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers has incurred large expenses in supporting the Ahmadi family campaign. Please send cheques payable to "CDAS" to BM Box 4289, London WC1X 3XX. Telephone: 07941 566183/E-mail: info@defend-asylum.org*

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