



Direct **Action**

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Home Grown Cult:
the Nine O'clock Service - an insider's story

~ nation of islam ~ falun gong ~ atheism ~ international news ~ Direct Actions ~ anarcho-syndicalism ~

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Everyone knows cults are dangerous. But religion? That is all about luck and judgement.

First, luck. DA No. 13 - unlucky for some - but what could it have to do with religion?

What is unlucky is being on one of the growing number of UK trains which crash - only £500 million annual Railtrack profits to console you. It's great - OK you can't get a seat and you might die, but you get a free coffee if you travel and book a certain way - how nice. This is Blair's Virgin Vision in reality (no luck there then).

Luck is strange - not because it is complex or beyond understanding, but because we keep thinking it is. Our brains are always looking for and explaining newness and change, since it is these which threaten survival (by definition, we have survived everything in our familiar experience so far). These unexpected things are where our idea of '(un)lucky' comes from. We are so keen to find ways to explain things that when we cannot predict or understand something, we make up ideas or patterns that help us pretend to ourselves that everything makes sense. Our 'beliefs' are whatever ideas seem to best fit all our experiences together.

In reality, 'luck' is chance - it can be calculated. Once in a while, even the lowest odds turn up. 'Someone has to win', as some say of the lottery (*answer*; yes - Mr GTech wins every week).

The brain's hardwired desperation to find patterns and meaning, means we sometimes make up stories to incorporate unlikely things (e.g. 'it could be me next week'). Without reasonable logic, most people will not believe you - some may consider you either barking mad or stupid, and quite rightly.

Religion works on the basis that we have big questions we can't answer, and our brains are trying to make patterns of reality that it doesn't really have enough information to form sensibly. The old

cult function



brain training

'why are we here?' may be answered with 'because God made you', 'an alien's experiment', etc. - if you have no other reasonable idea to go on. Strange patterns indeed.

But the real problem with religion, mysticism, cults and what-have-you, is that they use apparent monopolies on key unexplained facts to influence our brain and our motivation - so that the 'believers' among us will accept authority (*A Whine to the Divine*, p.4). Clerics and cultists alike fleece their

confused and at best, a genuine attempt to understand things which are not yet accepted as observable fact. We will not destroy other people's 'wrong' beliefs by assuming we are rational beings and rejecting other people's questions. Humans are not naturally rational - we have to try hard at it, to train our brains to not make silly connections and fall into the big trap of succumbing to a guru, following the leader.

Clearly, religion is not just dog's mess - any more than cults are only for weak people. It is complex crap, and cults are powerful and nasty. Successful cults (*FAQs*, p.21) are good at listening and responding to people's needs - whether it is New Labour or the

Nation of Islam (*Charmed & dangerous*, p.31).

It is the judgemental bit that is the problem - and that is where bible bashers, religious zealots and the whole cleric-cult bandwagon can take a long walk off the nearest short pier. Harmless nutters are not my enemy - it is authority and hierarchy, and the money-grabbers, child-rapers, demonisers, and hypocrites who pronounce themselves close to 'God' and demand that everyone does what they say.

It never was a bad idea to get together in a big, cold echoey room once a week and think about our place in the world - the bad bit was

having a 'leadership', complete with a man (sic) in funny clothes at the front, taking our money, telling us what to think, and threatening us with all kinds of shit if we don't abide by a set of stupid and dangerous rules (oh, and the songs).

There is only one (true) way. Examine beliefs, and develop knowledge, actions and everyday lives to fit them. When my brain makes strange patterns, I hope a small alarm clock will go off somewhere and tell me to get back on 'the path'. Any worthwhile path has to be one that leads to our daily revolution, not one that allows us to passively sit by, unbelieving, as the planet festers into oblivion. Or was that Armageddon?

Oh, shit. 

'believers' (who become 'followers' and 'givers') and live the life of Riley - from the Pope to Chris Brain (*Homegrown Cult*, p.18). Occasionally, they are insane and it goes further - they exercise the power to kill people (*Do you guru?*, p.6). The problem is, our brains make us susceptible to this.

We all have to believe to survive - it is the way our brain works, so it is how we get real sustenance. There is an excellent school of thought that says the only progress you can make in your life is to get more knowledge. To do this, you must steadily come to believe more of reality as you go along. The sticking point is it must all be true, or you are deluding yourself.

Being 'spiritual' is at worst,

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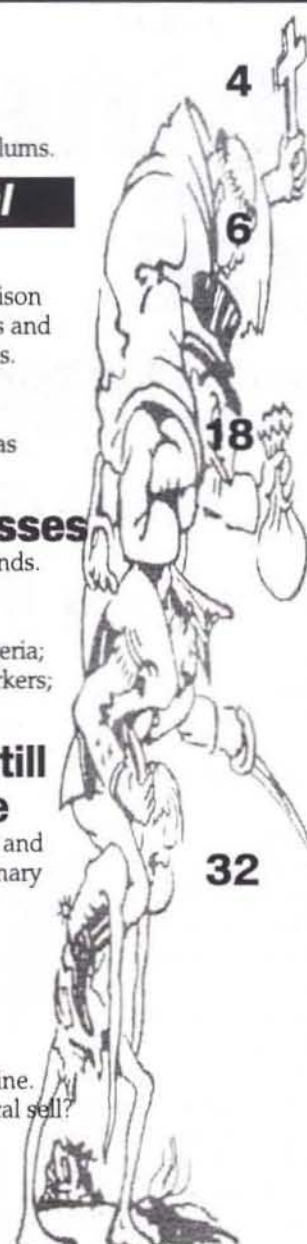
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Crass Art And Other Pre Post-Modernist Monsters - Gee Vaucher

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20 year Millenium Wildcat - Donald Room

The Prawn Cocktail Party: The Hidden Power behind New Labour - C. Ramsey

counterCULTure

Bare-Faced Messiah: The true story of L. Ron Hubbard- Russell Miller

Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, delusion and the appetite for wonder - Richard Dawkins.

review feature: slavery

I was born a slave - An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives (2 Vols) - Yuval Taylor

Britain's Slave Trade - S. I. Martin

periodicals

Fortean Times. The Journal of Strange Phenomena.

The Freethinker. Secular Humanist Society

PERSONAL ODE TO THE ATHEIST INFIDEL

A whine to the divine

atheist - one who denies the existence of God
infidel - one who acknowledges no religious belief

I know it is a bit cheap, trite even, to start an article with quotes from the dictionary, but I just wanted to clarify my terms. I have no belief in the existence of god/gods/divine beings/pink elephants, I acknowledge no religious belief, and as you will find out if you continue to read this, I am moderately hostile to the concept of religious belief.

But I do not deny the existence of the divine. To deny something which requires an act of faith to believe in seems pointless - merely not believing should be enough. I do not believe in god. I don't deny he/she/it exists - why should I? How can you deny the unknowable? I can only deny my faith in the unknowable. I can no more deny the existence of God than I can deny the existence of a giant celestial goat found around a pattern of stars millions of light years apart (but only when looking from this bit of space in this bit of time), called Capricorn ('Corny' to its mates). Both have alleged influences on my existence, and both require acts of faith to believe in them. Both may actually exist!

faith leaping

Religious belief rests on that single concept - faith. You cannot know but you

religion may be the opium of the masses, but, for those who are high, it often seems that no argument will bring them down

must 'believe'. Proof of God destroys faith. Without faith, religion is simply obedience to a bigger and more powerful entity - a celestial bully. On the other hand, I quite like the term 'infidel' - maybe too many adventure yarns about the crusades when I was a kid. It satisfies my concept of my relationship to religious belief and religion. I have no faith and, therefore, I acknowledge no religious belief.

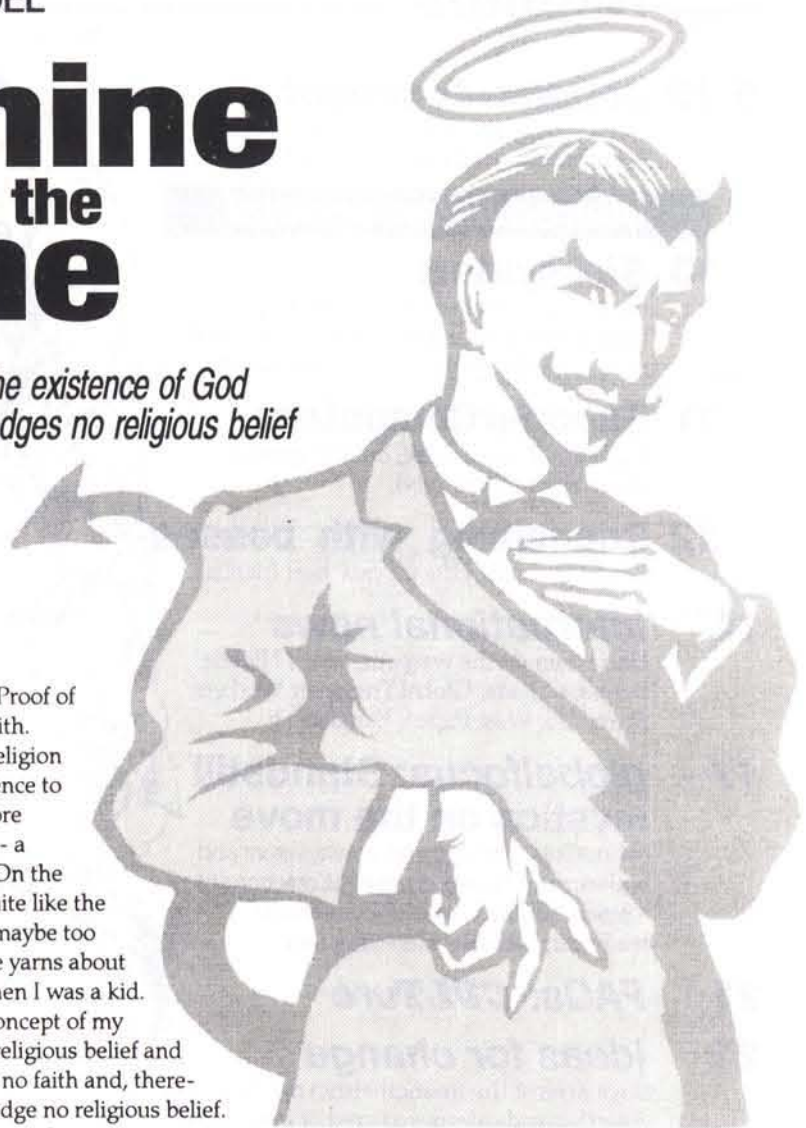
I use the term 'atheist' in a more general way. I will call myself an atheist meaning "I do not believe in God". Not being divine, I have no pretence at being perfect, I am just trying to be better... ;-)

divine problem

There are however other problems I have beyond the mere belief in a divinity, which in itself is of not much import. The main one is the worship of divinity - the subjugation of people (voluntarily) under a mystical super-being. Now, if there is an all powerful, all knowing something out there and it's a bit touchy, prone to grouchiness and random acts of petty vengeance - Yahweh crossed with a merger of the Greek gods - then it might be politic to grovel abjectly before it. Then again, if it is all knowing, it will know you are only acting out the grovel and not *really* getting into it with your full mind and spirit - and your eternal soul is still toast. There was some philosopher (I forget which) who argued that you have a big life-choice. If you

believe and worship, then it is not really relevant; you will, anyway, put in all the time needed to keep the celestial boss happy. If you don't believe, you have the choice. You can go through the motions and, if there is a divine being who thinks it is important for you to regularly visit a certain place and/or ritually torch your sofa every time a menstruating woman sits on it, etc., then you can habitually do these things. Alternatively, you can simply not do all these things.

This philosopher argued that you should do all these things, because, if there is a divine, (s)he may be dead impressed by your kow-towing and overlook the fact that you were faking. On the other hand, if there is no divinity, when you are dead you are dead - all you lost was your time (and a few sofas). In other words, if you didn't jump the hoops, then you have no chance if there is a super-boss so, just in case, you had better jump those hoops.



goat theories


I would like to reverse the argument. If you have no evidence for faith, the pretence of worship is to subjugate yourself to the possibility of a super-boss on the off-chance it exists. You would, therefore, against your better judgement, oppress women, abuse gays and lesbians, slaughter those who follow another translation of the 'Holy DIY one true way to eternal bliss (honest guv) manual' and whatever else the manual and those that interpret it for you tell you to do. Option 1: When you died, if there did indeed turn out to be a divine goat super-boss, it would not notice you were faking (even the omnipresent, omnipotent and eternal must have off days) and you would be home and dry.

On the other hand, there is Option 2. Supergoat may have had an off-day, or be pissed off that only the people of Kansas still get the joke with the dinosaur bones. Either way, it may notice and dislike your faking, and your soul is on the flaming red pitchfork. Let us face it, 'faking it' and hoping supergoat doesn't notice is a risky strategy. Option 3 is that the divine goat is actually pretty cool and generally likes the good in things. It would then recognise you have led a lie, and seen you being nasty to people. This might make it greatly disappointed in you and, thus, you find yourself on the way to purgatory for some therapy.

Option 4, of course, is you die and that is it - no holy goat. You've lived a lie, wasted your time and, as your religion is a bit intolerant of non-believers, you've probably ruined a few other people's lives as well.

simpler solutions

Now, if you ignore all the 'blind faith-options', and try to lead a good life by your own understanding instead, the picture changes. If the divinity was there and not nice, you are fried anyway - but at least you didn't fake it and live a lie. If the divinity was there and nice, was it going to condemn you for being as good as you could? And if it wasn't there, you have led what you considered a good life and hopefully made the world a better place for others.

In short, there is no point arguing about the existence of God with someone who has faith that there is one. It is not a question of argument, it is a question of blind belief. By all means, be offensive when they assume their belief permits them to decry you as a sinner/unclean and demand you get downsized lifestyle opportunities. Otherwise, accept that religion may well be the opium of the masses but, for those who are high, it often seems that no argument will bring them down. 

McDangerous



McDonalds Workers' Day is 12th October, and 1999s events saw groups up and down the country politely asking people to refrain from McTasteless treats for a day.

Why October 12th? On this day in 1992, Mark Hopkins died, electrocuted while working at McDonalds in Manchester (Arndale outlet). The cause was faulty machinery and bad workplace practices.


McDonalds' internal report into his death concluded that "safety is not seen as being important at store level". This report was not disclosed at the inquest into Mark's death, leading the jury to conclude that it was an accident. Mark's parents have demanded a new inquest which takes this evidence into account.

The Judge in the 1997 McLibel trial found that McDonalds pay "low wages", "thereby helping to depress wages for workers in the catering trade in Britain". Other fast food chains might pay as badly or worse, but McDonalds is big, so their policies affect the entire sector. McDonalds are very publicity conscious - boycotts

damage their image.

Of course, McDonalds' is a "bad boss" and workers endure low pay and poor conditions and, of course, the wider economic system is to blame, not just the "immorality" of particular companies.

As individuals, we can do nothing - getting together is the answer. This might mean "join a union", though the existing trade unions are mostly interested in your money, and in selling you financial services like cheap insurance and mortgages. Real organisation to fight back against McDonalds and their ilk is difficult, hard work and risky.

If you work at McDonalds, or anywhere for that matter, resist your exploitation as best you can, and work to organise against it. Join a trade union if you find it is worth it, for example, if you can get short term benefits like decent standards of health, safety and welfare - including sick pay, shorter hours and more holidays - better pay and conditions. In the longer term though, trade unions will have to be replaced by revolutionary organisations, before we can really hope to stop needless deaths like Mark's, caused by profitmongers like McDonalds. 

No union? Need some free support or advice?

Want to make contact with other like-minded people in your type of workplace?

**Contact: SolFed, PO Box 1681,
London N8 7LE or
SolFed, PO Box 29, SW PDO,
Manchester M15 5HW.
(0161 232 7889;
manchestersf@scandrac.demon.co.uk)**

RELIGION REFUTED...



do you guru?

*Suicide or murder not your idea of a good belief system?
Myriad shades of clerical charlatans would have you think different.
And if anyone offers you therapy - just say no.*

Cults are in the news. Countless column-inches are devoted to Moonies, Scientology, Aum Shinri Kyo, Mormons, etc., not to mention horrific orgies of suicide and mayhem committed by the likes of the Order of the Solar Temple, the Jim Jones Cult and Aum Shinri Kyo (see across).

'Cult' is at once both a simple and yet evasive term, which takes in many forms of beliefs and origins, and much misinformation. Then, there is the more politically correct version, 'new religious movement', with a similarly fudgy definition.

What is a cult? At its core, 'cult' is a pejorative word, used often by established religions to describe new, more dynamic, up and coming offshoots of established religions. Of course, there are many reasons *why* they are initially more successful. In any case, cults are upstarts, throwing the cat amongst the pigeons within the smug, self-satisfied establishment churches.

Undoubtedly, some cults are extremely oppressive - some even more so than 'mainstream' Christianity or Islam. Most cults aspire to becoming the establishment religion of the future, some, like the Mormons in Utah, USA, have all but achieved it on a regional level.

religious teaching

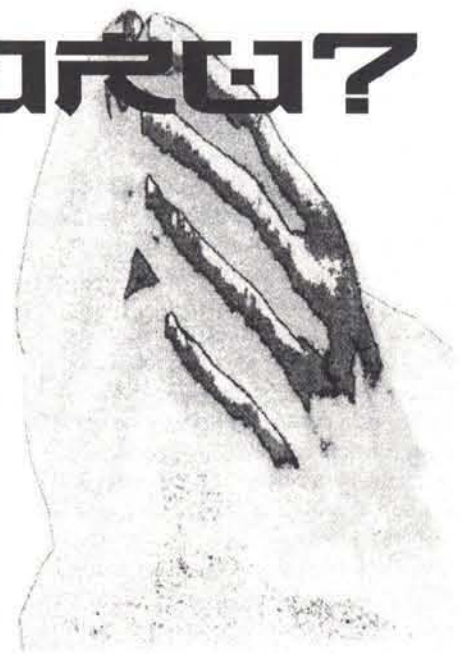
The origin of the word 'religion' is apparently to do with the verb 'bind' (as in 'tie up') and is remotely related to ligature (a binding). When we in the West think of religion, we normally think of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. These have their origins in the Middle East, and are strikingly similar in their beliefs and structure. Religion has been described as "the belief in a spiritual being or beings who involve themselves with and intervene in human affairs". This meaning fits fairly well with the Western religions from the Middle East, but less so when applied to the religions of the Far East, like Taoism or Buddhism. Similarities are also limited with many of the primal indigenous religious beliefs across the developing world.

Generally, the political left and libertarians take a pro-secular stance and, in most cases, are vehemently anti-clerical, if not atheistic. However, it is not certain to what extent these attitudes in the West are due to the activities of these parties and movements. The influence and support enjoyed by religion in the West has sharply declined in the last 200 years, and the decline continues, especially for Christianity in Western Europe. There are two forces at work here; one is the growth of scientific knowledge, the other is the moral bankruptcy of the priesthood, who have overwhelmingly supported oppression by the ruling class. They have always been ready to bless armies and other practices of class rule. In other words, decline was preceded by moral corruption of the churches' support of the powers that be, no matter how bloody these regimes were. With only a few exceptions, they were supportive of (or at least indifferent to) slavery, racial and sexual discrimination, and the misery of the poor, workers and peasants. It is small wonder that the churches were severely treated by ordinary people in the French, Russian and Spanish revolutions. Equally, the churches were totally insensitive to the problems associated with personal life. Reactionary law on such matters as birth control, divorce, abortion, sexuality, medical and social care, were cruelly applied and enforced amidst gross hypocrisy.

enter libertarianism

The overwhelming majority of anarchists have been (and are) also atheists. As the establishment's Christianity as declined, libertarianism has continually shown hostility to it. Opposition to the Church has generally been as important to anarchists as opposition to the State, and the slogan 'neither god nor master' encapsulates this libertarian message. In the 19th Century, many people made their first move towards anarchism by rejecting religion and becoming atheist and rationalist. Rejection of defined religious authority led, in turn, to rejection of the authority of the State and the masterclass.

More recently, however, secularisation of Western society has led to religion being rejected *per se*, without going through the



stage of rejecting hierarchy and priestly authority first and foremost. As this process has continued, and the power of the Church has declined, we have arrived at the point where most people think religion is a 'personal matter'. Consequently, without the threat of church power, all religion is tolerated in a liberal society, and belief is seen as 'personal' and not in the social sphere. The major contradiction with this is that personal beliefs lead to social action - the two cannot be separated. Just as 'personal' racism causes social harm, 'personal' religion affects social health. Liberalism is not able to cope or deal with this in any practical way, any more than rationalism, atheism or secularism was able to in the past. The main question is not whether God exists, but what belief in God makes people do. In other words, the key issue is where your belief leads you to, rather than the nature of the belief itself.

Secularist movements are now sterile. Since the 19th Century, when the freethinkers were at the forefront of progressive movements such as birth control and sexual attitudes, they have lost their way. People don't believe in God nowadays in spite of secularist movements, not because of them. The small, peculiar, secular groups of today tend to be characterised by whinging and wailing, without any practical or useful analysis of WHY religions exist. They are hence largely irrelevant to the changes within present day society.

The main cause of the decline in the influence of religion is its hypocrisy and corruption. There have been many attempts at 'reform' and revival, but eventually, they go the same way as the establishment religions. The main reason for this is that the hierarchy of the church/sect/cult, in every case, wishes to retain its privileged powerful position.

Thus, after a split or schism from the 'parent' religion, the desire of the new hierarchy to be accepted and recognised by the State and other powerful interests in society ensures that they become just as corrupt as those against who they 'protested'.

new labour, new religion?

Many of the 'new religious movements' do not readily fit into the traditional Western model. Modern cults often draw on far eastern religions, 'magic', 'ancient wisdom', psycho-babble, pseudo-science and/or mysticism. Contrary to popular libertarian thought, 'religion' in whatever form is not going to go away easily. We are a long way from the last king being strangled by the entrails of the last priest. Quite the reverse.

In fact, many of the 'new religions' appear to have either dropped the priesthood idea, or have heavily disguised it. This makes them more insidious, as they have often adopted an apparent libertarian tinge themselves. However wrong-headed these cults/sects/religions may be, they appear to fulfil a 'need'. At the centre of this need is a fundamental human desire to overcome alienation and marginalisation. These are the very substance of modern capitalist societies. Under world capitalism, we have the sole prospect of a life of fear, demoralisation, confusion, commodification and general lack of meaning. In such conditions, any hope, even a false one, will do.

New religious movements – and New Labour – are vaguely aware of the yawning ethical and moral abyss at the centre of modern society. Consequently, they seek to push 'personal growth', 'spiritual development', 'love for others' (even if it is a tough, market reality-based love), 'compassion and care', etc. There is a distinct touchy-feeliness about New Labour, and it smacks of 'have a nice day' hollow culture – the type which spawns a million shrinks. Titles may be out, along with dinner suits, Lords and their coronets, but 'therapy' is on the up. In New Labour reality, everyone is on first name terms – the personal touch is a marketable commodity. Therapy is the new religion and the new politics rolled into one. Now we are expected to reveal our innermost feelings to all and sundry. After a hundred years of workers being accused of withholding effort, we have reached the stage where we cannot even withhold our own feelings. Distil Blairite psycho-babble and sell it as a panacea to cure all our fears and insecurities, and you have a new (marketable) cult. Religion has long-provided the ideological support for the status quo, and in the New Labour world order, there is more than a whiff of (aroma)therapy about the cult of governance. 

オウム真理教 Kyo

The Sarin nerve gas cult seems to be growing again with little discouragement from the Japanese Government.

The Aum Shinri Kyo (Supreme Truth) is a Japanese doomsday sect which killed 12 people and injured hundreds by releasing Sarin nerve gas in the Tokyo underground in March 1995.

It is now undergoing alarming regrowth, despite being stripped of its religious status and made bankrupt after it was outlawed in the wake of its infamous killing spree. After over 4 years spent regrouping, it now has 2,000 followers – last year alone it earned £30 million by selling cut-price computers in its shops, put together by its unpaid followers (voluntary slaves?).

While the authorities have taken a laid-back approach to ASK's revival, the Japanese people have started acting for themselves.

The cult acquired a flat in the same block as a woman whose husband was killed in the nerve gas attack. The people in the block forcibly ejected ASK. The inhabitants of Kitamimaki village in central Japan stormed an ASK centre, throwing out the cultists. They then dug a trench and put barbed wire around it to stop them returning to the building. Kitamimaki is near Matsumoto, where ASK mounted the Sarin attack, and in a vast-moving world, this is clearly something no-one will forget in a hurry.



titles may be out, along with dinner suits, Lords and their coronets, but therapy is the new religion and the new politics rolled into one

The World Church of the Creator

The so-called World Church of the Creator (WCC) is one of the fastest growing white racist churches in the US. It claims a membership of 7,000 and was founded by Ben Klassen, author of 'The White Man's Bible', who has since died. In 1993, 8 members were arrested for planning to bomb the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. On Independence Day weekend 1999, Nathaniel Smith, a WCC member, went on a 3-day killing spree, leaving 2 dead and 9 wounded at 7 localities across 3 US States. He eventually turned the gun on his own chin, as FBI agents approached him. He had been a member since 1998. The Rev Matt Hale, leader of the church, described Smith as "an honest man who we will miss very much", going on to describe him as "a martyr for free speech". Let us hope they have more martyrs very soon, this time without the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people.



Polly (Michael Portillo) has finally come out – but strictly within the new unwritten rules of public ‘decency’ (sic).

An old joke. “Why do people hate Michael Portillo at first sight? Because it saves time!” This one appeared in the *Gay Times* years ago, and there was no gay angle, so hands up anyone who thought “Polly” was heterosexual. Well, according to Polly, you are

Pollysexual

right, he just had “homosexual experiences” at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, where it was the done thing, apparently.

The darling of the more “libertarian” wing of the Tory right has obviously learned a few lessons from Ron Davies’ embarrassingly messy handling of his private life and decided that, however disingenuous his revelations about his own sexual history, they had to be clear cut.

By portraying himself as an “ex-homosexual”, Portillo has upheld the heterosexist status quo. He has traded on the accepted myth of “youthful indiscretions”, portraying his bisexuality as a “phase”. This fits in with the dominant ideology, which tacitly accepts widespread bisexuality in its justification for a differential age of consent. The idea is to discourage young men from having sex with

long as we are asexual, or boringly monogamous, and make sure that our lovers are all of one sex. Much of the gay press also has problems accepting bisexuality. Terry Sanderson, the *Gay Times*’ media reviewer, recently accused bisexual men of using their gay mates as sex toys! Davies’ inability to come out neatly, and his bisexuality, have deprived him of most sympathy from that quarter.


Polly looks like he is going to survive, having completely alienated only the really rabid homophobes like Norman Tebbit. The only difficulty he is likely to have is if juicy revelations challenge his story of events. The only significant one so far is from Nigel Hart, who is miffed that Polly apparently ‘forgot’ their 8-year relationship in his ‘admissions’. Apparently, not only did their relationship



people evidently are not, and it’s insulting to dismiss lesbians and gay men who have overcome a lot to claim their identities. Conversely, the lesbian and gay community has to accept us as we are. I am bisexual, and I don’t change with the gender of my partners. I am equally as gay with men and women.

Tony Blair has no sympathy for Ron Davies, but understands Portillo. Caring Tony once allegedly asked Peter Mandelson if he would ever get married. When Mandelson pointed out that he was gay, Blair allegedly replied, “Yes, but after that?”. It might be an urban myth, but “clueless” is a description which fits Blair to a tee. Unless we force it by our own actions, acceptance of sexual diversity will be reduced to tolerance, and the establishment will determine the boundaries of what they are prepared to tolerate.

To add insult to injury, the fact that they are prepared to tolerate us, as long as we conform to their expectations, will be cited as evidence of how enlightened they are. This self-proclaimed enlightenment will then be used to dismiss charges of prejudice and discrimination, in spite of the weight of supporting evidence.

An omission from history brings the premature “first gay/bisexual” Prime Minister speculation about Polly into focus. As well as famously remarking that the best things about the Royal Navy were “rum, sodomy and the lash”, a certain Winston Churchill also once had an affair with Ivor Novello. So did everyone else who was anyone, I’m told, but it’s not something the establishment talk about in front of the servants. It’s those of us whose class is not granted the privilege of a private life who have fought for public acceptance; there is nothing unusual in Mandelson’s preference for the former over the latter. 

Tony once asked Peter Mandelson if he would ever get married. When Mandelson pointed out he was gay, Blair replied, “Yes, but after that?”

other men in order to channel their bisexuality into heterosexual relationships, leaving only the “true” homosexuals, who have no choice but to lie until they’re eighteen. This argument was used by David Blunkett to oppose an equal age of consent a few years ago.

Ron Davies, however, first denied what everyone guessed immediately after his “moment of madness”. He later admitted, first obliquely then explicitly, that he was bisexual, and finally tried to talk about his feelings for women. Not a smart move, because it is not socially acceptable to discover and act on same-sex desire after you’ve grown up and got married. Unless, of course, you declare you’ve been gay all along and coming out is the end of the story. The “naturalness” of heterosexuality is supposed to assert itself. Bisexual adults are considered immature, “confused” and unreliable.

Ron Davies’ erstwhile government colleagues obviously think he is unreliable, and that his media harassment is his own fault. To the establishment, queers are O.K., only as

span Polly’s youth from the age of nineteen to twenty-seven but, when it started, he (Polly) was not inexperienced at lovemaking with men. Their affair was also contemporaneous with Portillo’s relationship with his future wife, and apparently conducted with her knowledge. So Polly was underage when the relationship began, and appears to have decided to marry his wife and stop shagging men only when he went into “public life”.

In the absence of further juicy revelations, let’s assume he really loves his wife and that he has been faithful since marriage. I can also believe that Ron Davies’ feelings have been overwhelmingly orientated towards women. Bisexuality is like that. It is a myth that there are two separate sex drives that have to be satisfied, that it is (always) a phase, or that it is a result of a refusal to accept homosexuality.

The gender of your sexual partners only matters because of its social significance. Sexual liberation is about not defining people on the basis of gender. I don’t hold with the view that “everyone is bisexual” because some

Reclaiming Railtrack

After the events of June 18th and November 30th, there can be few people who read newspapers or watch the news and don't know what the WTO is all about, and more to the point, that millions of people around the world know it is a con-trick by the captains of global capital and are prepared to get mobilised to fight against it.


World domination by Big Brother may appear almost complete, but they won't be happy until we are desperately scratching each other's eyes out for any crumbs they let fall (actually, they still won't be happy then). 'Liberalisation' means 'starvation' to millions of working people, just as 'globalisation' means 'fat profits' to the tiny few with

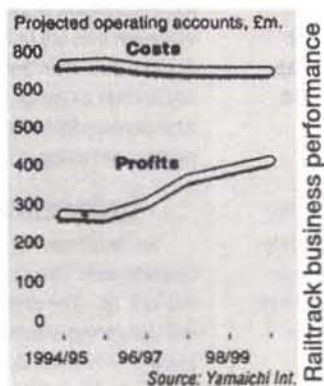
corporate bonus-related pay or big-time share ownership (sorry, a few BT shares doesn't count).

In Britain, some of the most disgusting examples of fat cat 'fuck the rest' society in recent years have been across the privatised utilities sector. New Labour latched onto popular hatred and spoke strong words – then introduced a feeble tax as a climb-down, and quietly forgot it as they nestled up to the fat cats themselves.

Since privatisation, Railtrack has been on a fast track to ripping us off. As early as 1996, new headlines were exposing them siphoning off hundreds of millions of pounds in profit, ignoring slaps on the wrist from the rail regulator. Then came Paddington. More 'uproar' from Government –

followed by more silence.

November 30th included action against Railtrack – they are part of the global profit machine which kills innocent people in the name of profit for the few. The more militant rail unions are now involved in a longer-running campaign – contact DA for details. 



Railtrack business performance



ARRESTED?

- Ask why, demand to see a solicitor (yours, not a duty one).
- Give a name and address, date of birth, then remain silent (you can refuse to give the latter, but it may take longer to get released).
- Afterwards, contact the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group (LDMG, BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX. Tel. 0171 837 7557).
- If you need a good solicitor, try Bindmans (0171 833 4433) or Moss and Co. (0171 240 6350)
- For more advice, contact ABC, 27 Old Gloucester St., London WC1N 3XX (send SAE).

Exclusive Interviews No. 1: Railtrack goes for the revolution

Mr Railtrack: We must make vast profits to attract more investors, otherwise we have no money to spend on improvements.

DA: But each time you announce more profits, that means the investors are getting back a lot more than they put in. The 'interest' is paid for by train travellers – i.e. we are lining the investors' pockets.

Mr Railtrack: But there is no other way we can get money to spend on improvements – the Government won't give us as much since they sold us off. We have to compete for money in the global stockmarket, by 'outperforming' other companies.

DA: So you have to spend less on safety, and therefore kill innocent people, in order to persuade global loan sharks (investors) to invest in you, so you can *then* spend a bit of their money on safety – but then pay even more back in dividends? Would you say this idea – and the whole stockmarket system – is rather flawed?

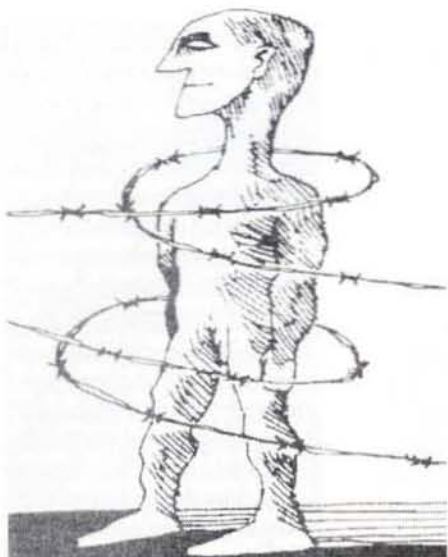
Mr Railtrack: There is no alternative.

DA: What about scrapping capitalism, stockmarkets and globalisation? Then we can prevent ourselves being killed. We simply put more time and effort into making railways safer.

Mr Railtrack: We hadn't thought of that.

DA: So you're with us, then? You are ready to join the people's global movement to smash capitalism and replace it with something more sensible?

Railtrack (resigned): OK, you've convinced us.



Labour's adoption of the far right agenda continues apace. Jack Straw prefers mandatory sentences for certain crimes. Like most of Labour policy, the idea was developed in the USA, home of the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" approach to crime.

The success of this policy can be gauged by events in the State of Texas, where they recently spent \$2 billion dollars on locking up people in prisons and keeping them there. Texas now has the highest rate of incarceration in the US - a Texan is seven times more likely than a Minnesotan to find themselves behind bars.

On the face of it, these policies seemed to be working, as crime in the lone star state initially dropped to a twenty-year low. But behind the apparent success story lies a different picture. Long sentencing and inhumane prison regimes have turned Texas prisons into murky hellholes of violence and rape. In the face of this inhumanity, inmates are turning to gangs in increasing numbers for protection. For instance, an estimated 5% of Texas Spanish speaking inmates belong to the "Emes", the largest of the state prison gangs. The Emes was first formed in the early 1980s to protect inmates from racial attack, but it has now moved on to racketeering. The Emes constitution boasts "We will traffic in drugs, contracts of assassination and prostitution".

syndicate society

The prison gangs are now beginning to extend their activities onto the streets of Texas. Of the 30,000 released on parole from Texas State prisons in 1997, 3,000 are said to have gang affiliation. These newly released gang members, who are well organised, disciplined and brutal, are using the drugs trade to establish a power base in some of the most impoverished sections of American society. As Allan Polunsky, chairman of the Texas prison board, admits, "it is organised crime, no different than that which

SickSystem

Home Secretary Jack Straw wants a new prison regime which encourages prison gangs and rape. Never mind, the profits will be enormous.

took place in Chicago in the 1930s".

That prisoners seek the protection of gangs is hardly surprising, given that the most feared and violent gangs in the prison system are white supremacist. There are an estimated minimum 425 members of the Aryan Brotherhood in Texas prisons - the most violent of the prison supremacist gangs. The motto of the Aryan Brotherhood "kill to get in, die to get out" gives some indication of its activities. Many more white inmates are linked with the KKK and Aryan Circle, who are officially listed as groups but operate as gangs. Reformed supremacists have repeatedly stated that prisons are now the primary recruiting grounds for Neo-Nazis.

balancing the books

So, Jack Straw knows what he wants - to compete with Texas to see how many people he can lock up. The problem with any hair-brained and dangerous scheme is it usually involves money. Where is all the money going to come from to build all the new prisons? You knew the answer all along - private capital - so large companies can start making money out of this criminal business. Although Straw has already experienced a few hiccups with the likes of Group 4 (due to incompetence and corner-cutting), there are many hard-nosed US firms with experience in private prisons queuing for a slice of the action over here. Some have already reached the front of the queue - Corrections Corporation of America and Wackenhut already have prisons in Britain - with more to follow. As one of these prison investors recently said: "I used to invest in hotels, but with prisons, I can guarantee 100% occupancy rate every night".


Here are just a few examples of new prison building in Britain: prison extension at Millom, Cumbria; new 600 place prison at Marchington (opens Oct 2000); new prison at Onley, Staffordshire and prison extension at HMP Stafford; new detention prison at Campfield House, Oxford; several immigration detention centres around Heathrow and Gatwick; new prisons in Ashford, Middlesex and Peterborough, Cambridgeshire; new detention centre at HMP Adlington, Ashford, Kent; and prison upgrades and extensions at HMP Wellington, and in Perth and Inverness in Scotland.

Alongside the private capital schemes, Jack Straw has already set up boot camps, and the

precedence of making prisoners 'earn their keep' is now well-established. Blair's Britain's future already exists in the US. AT&T are using prisoners in Colorado to do telephone marketing and call centre work, Exmark are using Washington prisoners to package up Microsoft products, while American Express and Kentucky Fried Chicken are already major direct investors in private prison building schemes. Who knows, if you are lucky and you manage to avoid prison, you may even end up losing your job to a prisoner. Then you can stay home waiting for those telemarketing calls.

blairedfuture

The British state locks up more people than any other country in Europe, and not surprisingly, since Jack Straw became Home Secretary and read about Texas, the numbers have accelerated further. More people are getting sent down for more offences, for first offences and for longer. The UK prison population is rising by the size of an additional average local prison every month.

Setting aside the moral bankruptcy of locking up masses of people, Straw's policies are dubious in their intention to reduce crime. The Texas State vigilance in locking up offenders may have reduced crime in the short term, but the system has spawned crime syndicates, ruthlessly organised and racially segregated. The long-term outlook is clear - greater racial tension and increased crime. But will Jack Straw care - after all, he only has to last 3-4 more years and he can 'retire' to a career of after-dinner speeches. Just keep that burglar alarm on and don't open the door without the chain on... 

Break the chains...

Brick by brick resistance to prison building is taking shape. Current targets include Sodexo, with 70 prisons and annual sales of \$6.9 billion, and Group 4 Security. Contact: CAGE c/o 180-88 Mansfield Road, Notts, NG1 3HW (CAGE@veggies.org.uk) or SE CAGE, c/o Box G, 101 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RH.

Prisoner support: Support for political, fitted up and needy prisoners is always welcome. Contact: Anarchist Black Cross, BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX.



SnooperComputers

Big Brother is out there, but not quite as clever as you think (yet).

You name it, New Labour has been working on it. Identity cards, DNA fingerprinting, child NI numbers... But something suggests they are not quite there yet. When the new passport control computer system self-destructed last summer, it was the latest in a long line of Government techno-disasters, where the old trick of hiring in a high-tech firm and sacking a load of well-trained staff backfired.

Still, people control using surveillance and the latest information technology is still high on the agenda. The absence of legislation or control over snooping means we have no right to privacy – whether we are doing anything ‘wrong’ or not.

Leeds Metropolitan University’s sterling work in using hidden cameras to spy in the workplace, trawling for information to use against employees, got nationwide recognition in November on Channel 4’s Cutting Edge. Three workers were arrested, suspended and disciplined. Eventually, the charges against them were revealed – they were cautioned for not reporting a conversation two of them had in which reference was made to something that someone else (not an employee of LMU) hadn’t done and didn’t happen! Although this is now apparently ‘done and dusted’, grievances which these workers had against their managers before all this happened are still going through the labour management procedures.

The old Michael Howard saying that ‘only the guilty have anything to fear’ from surveillance is patently untrue. Employers can watch you using hidden cameras and all kinds of clever gadgets, track your car, read your email, and follow you – even *outside* your work, quite lawfully. They can then decide to call you to account for things which may crop up which are entirely unrelated to the apparent ‘reason’ for the surveillance in the first place. As the LMU case proves, they can even ‘do’ you when you are completely innocent, and effectively damage your career and your life.

It is not a nice feeling to be watched. Peeping Tom has a bad name for a very good reason – we are entitled to our privacy. When an employer takes you on, they can expect you to deliver the goods according to your job description – but does that mean they can control what

you *think* 8 hours (or more) per day? An increasing number of employers think so.

Ask your employer about their surveillance code of practice. If they do not have one, ask if they do or may do surveillance. If they refuse to answer – you know why. If they admit it, tell your workmates.

Even outside work, the spying continues. We are all used to cameras now on our high streets – they are there to reduce crime and make us feel safer in the streets. However, the lie to this official Government excuse has been exposed. Over the summer, ‘one of the most comprehensive investigations carried out on the subject’ concluded that ‘CCTV has not succeeded in making the streets safer or in making people feel safer’. This Scottish Office report followed on the heels of similar conclusions reached by researchers in Wales, which ‘cast doubt on the Government’s decision to spend £170m extending CCTV across Britain.’ In-depth research in Glasgow showed that, in the first year after CCTV was introduced, crime actually ROSE in the city by 9% and the crime clear-up rate DROPPED by 4% over the same period. Despite the evidence, the installations continue. In Littlehampton, Tesco is apparently offering £100,000 towards a town CCTV system as a legalised bribe to get planning permission for an extension to its Wick Farm superstore.

Despite the obstacle of a Data Protection Act, the Government is also looking for ways of getting around legal loopholes to openly correlate databases it holds on us, including tax and social security, for example. Under the standard excuse of ‘stamping out welfare fraud’, babies are to be allocated national insurance numbers at birth. Why not just brand their foreheads with a barcode and be done with it?


One of the few places where relative ‘freedom of information’ has been allowed is on the Internet. With the newspapers and TV solidly in the hands of the rich and powerful, cheap and independent access to the information superhighway (even if there are traffic jams from time to time) has been welcomed by the millions of

us who like a more unbrainwashed point of view from time to time. But this modest chink of light has set alarm bells ringing across the Governments of Western ‘democracy’. A partially declassified document from the US OECD notes the importance that the ‘US and UK approaches are actively compatible’, so one in every 500 connections to the Internet is to be monitored.

The big problem for Big Brother is encryption technology. Modern encryption methods use a public key system, whereby each user has a public key, known to sender and recipient, and a private key, linked to it by a complex algorithm. The public key provides enough information to encrypt the message but, without the private key, an unfeasible amount of calculations are needed to crack the code. The US is therefore attempting to limit the complexity of key algorithms and hence reach ‘active compatibility’ (i.e. safe

the old Michael Howard saying that ‘only the guilty have anything to fear’ from surveillance is patently untrue

control). The problem is that the legislation is clumsy and impractical – you and I will be monitored relatively easily, but advances in encryption software will ensure that top corporate criminals and the like will be able to afford to use ways around any Government monitoring for the foreseeable future.

The real issue at the heart of all this snooping is that Government and corporations alike are increasingly using the word ‘control’. The excuses given, such as saving us from nasty people – or ourselves – or making us feel ‘safer’ are untrue – in fact, the *opposite* is the case. 



Councillling with the bosses

The fat cat's best friend...

Last year, a survey of 481 British businesses and organisations of all sizes and from a range of sectors revealed that:

- 36% of employers support compulsory works councils for firms of 50 or more (28% think it's a bad idea and 36% are undecided)
- Only 17% oppose compulsory works councils for 250+ employee firms (56% in favour and 28% undecided)
- Of those respondents who had already established works councils (76% of the survey base), 60% said they had made a 'positive contribution to the business', with only 7% regarding works councils as a negative feature of business.

Management generally is increasingly embracing Works Councils, UK legislation on European Works Councils is on the way, and an EU Directive making them compulsory in all member states is a distinct possibility. So why are Works Councils so right for the bosses and wrong for you – quite simply, they provide a new role for unions in side-tracking them into supporting bosses instead of workers.

If you want to know more about Works Councils, how they operate, how they have been received in France, and a real alternative – get "Out of the Frying Pan: A critical look at Works Councils". For a copy, send £1.50 to SolFed, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.

Last summer, the westcountry shoemaking firm Clarks International trumpeted the establishment of a "ground-breaking workers' council" (note the slip-up by the Wells Journal sub-editor) as being the first in the area, with 19 delegates, some from Portugal and Ireland participating.

Discussions with union representatives have been going on for some time to enable this agreement, said PR

manager, John Keery. The chief executive, Tim Parker, added that Clarks were looking for a 50% increase in overseas sales. Presumably the two are connected.

A good thing, you might think, workers actually having some input into decision-making. Industrial democracy at last – and not before time. Not quite.

As a Europe-wide body, the Works Council will be representing Clarks workers in Spain, Germany and Copenhagen. In Britain, it indicates the ongoing implementation of the

Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty that Labour signed up to in order to offer a show of democracy in the workplace, and to defuse any actions by workers that might hinder the continuation of the exploitation process. So, by a simple rule of thumb, if management is happy with this agreement, it cannot be in the interests of the workforce.

Works Councils (as opposed to workers' councils/assemblies) are not meant to usher in an era of industrial democracy. They are merely passive, consultative bodies

German lessons

On the face of it, the German unions have much to be happy about. The Schroder government has already demonstrated its union friendly credentials. Walter Riestler, deputy chairman of Germany's biggest union, IG Metall, has landed the job of Minister of Labour.

Tripartite talks are taking place between unions, employers, and the government. The labour reforms of the last government (mild by UK standards), like reductions in sick pay, have been scrapped. No wonder Engelen-Kefer, deputy head of the German union federation (DGB), recently said, "under the last government the employers got the upper hand; now that the politics have changed, we are entering a new era".

But not all is as rosy as the union leaders are trying to make out. What with global 'realities', union membership has been steadily falling and, whereas in better times, Germany's centralised negotiations procedures meant unions could negotiate at

most two to three different contracts for all the companies in their industry, things have changed. As Peter Senft (board member at IG Metall) points out, now there are hundreds of different versions of the unions' basic contracts, and individual firms no longer have to 'put up' with industry-wide agreements.

German employers are now negotiating pay and conditions at the local level through the works council system. Hence, individual workplaces are accepting "hardship agreements" left, right and centre, allowing firms to freeze wages and cut conditions. Instead of challenging this attempt to bypass collective organisation, the unions are increasingly accepting factory-based agreements, in a desperate bid to regain their role in the workplace. The union bosses are trying to lead workers into greater "flexibility" and less pay in an attempt to retain negotiating rights - the key to their own status.

Have they 'Sold out the workers?', as the typical left poster claims? In short, no, they haven't – they were never acting


in our interest in the first place. Anyone 'surprised' by German or British union leaderships embracing Works Councils – get yourself a reality check. The German unions, like their counterparts in Britain, accepted the logic of capitalism long ago, and so they have no real alternative to the problems capitalism creates. With 4 million unemployed, the German unions' resistance has been confined to making loud noises. Indeed, in recent years, even these have been growing quieter and quieter. The announcement by Siemens that they were about to shed 60,000 jobs last November drew hardly a whimper of union protest.

The German unions staked everything on the election of a sympathetic government. If, no, when the Schroder government sides with market capitalism, perhaps the idea that workers should place their faith in political parties and co-operation with capitalism instead of confronting it, will finally be discredited in Germany. Ditto, Blair's Britain.

Country Slums

that meet to debate issues arising from management proposals. The bosses remain firmly in control. Far from being a step on the road to workers' control or self-management, it is the opposite. Like everything New Labour, the talk sounds 'progressive', the reality is market capitalism with a flimsy "social inclusion" façade. The general idea is that Works Councils will eventually replace the orthodox trade unions which can, on occasion, be bothersome to management, or even (occasionally) a real threat to profits.

For trade unions, the Works Council system offers the bureaucrats a role where their influence, and membership, continues to wane. This is an alternative to being adjuncts to finance houses, offering credit cards and other capitalist goodies. In short, trade unions are inevitably being sucked in, because they long ago declared support for capitalism and the political status quo. Hence, they will always be running to keep up with capitalist 'innovation' in the workplace.

Genuine industrial democracy, integrated into a wider libertarian social movement, demands that workers run all aspects of the workplace collectively. The choice is stark - forget democracy and keep management, or remove management and capitalism from the workplace. Democracy means workers' assemblies making all policy decisions and delegates mandated from the assembly to perform specific, time-limited, tasks. It has been done before, it can and will be done again. 

For more info. on Clarks and westcountry solidarity generally, contact: South-West Solidarity (SWS), PO Box 741, Swindon, SN1 3UG.

Poverty in Britain - the first thing to spring to mind is probably the desperate blight of many inner city areas. But recent research in Wiltshire has highlighted the fact that poverty in Britain now 'officially' extends to what have previously been portrayed as some of Britain's most affluent areas. In Wiltshire, the county of wealthy week-enders and London commuters, wealth exists side by side with widespread poverty.

This epitome of rural middle England, has an unemployment rate of just 2.4%. However, unemployment figures can be deceptive. While they may be at work in Wiltshire, many people survive on low-paid "odd-jobs", supplemented by income support and family credit. In Pewsey, regarded as typical, a quarter of households are "living in, or on the margins of poverty".

Perhaps the most striking statistics are those on the gap between rich commuter and poor villager. In one village in the south of the county, 40% of households have an annual income of over £40,000, while 40% get less than £8,000.

The reality behind the enduring romanticised myth of

rural life in England is that farming now employs so few people, the state of the agricultural industry no longer makes much difference to the economic health of the countryside. Modern English village life is typified by a large section of the population excluded from the 'conventional' economy, scratching a living with virtually no support or access to social facilities.

The inquiry into fox hunting which is currently underway is not going to find any evidence for an economic case to keep this so-called 'sport'. It is



industry and no transport to commute to work, these people are forced to survive by doing casual jobs for the well-off Londoners who flood the area,

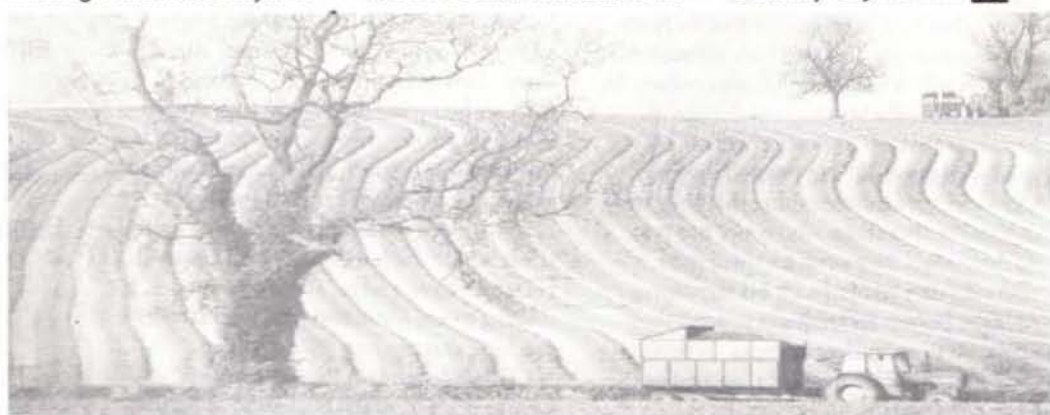
the English countryside is fast becoming little more than a vast theme park for rich city dwellers to play out their fantasy of weekend leisure-time country living

farming, not hunting, which supported much of the rural economy, and this has already been bought up and downsized by city investors and agri-corporations. For the average rural dweller, unless you are lucky enough to live where the views are nice or some 18th Century author once lived (or worse, some dreadful TV series was filmed), you can forget getting even a reasonable tourism-related job.

80% of villages no longer have a daily bus service, even though 20% of households do not have a car. With little local

escaping the rigours of city life to play country living in their weekend cottages.

Nor is Wiltshire an isolated case. Hampshire has just published a report with similar findings. The English countryside is fast becoming little more than a vast theme park for rich city dwellers to play out their fantasy of weekend leisure-time country living. Meanwhile, the local rural population faces a life of permanent poverty and social exclusion, while property prices soar around them in response to the boom in 'loads-a-money' city retreats. 



Uncle Sam on the warpath

Despite the winter, the temperature is rising on the Hopi-Navajo Indian Lands (HPL), as the full force of the US State is brought down on those who are refusing to give in to 'forced relocation' - i.e. eviction from their homes and lands.

The area in Arizona known as the HPL was designated for Hopi by congress in 1974. The United States Office of Navajo-Hopi Indian Relocation maintain the reason for forced relocation is that the two tribes are in a dispute over the land, which traditionals from both tribes deny, saying removal of the Dine'h (Navajo) is to clear the land for expanded strip mining by Peabody Coal Company.

The day after massive coal mine leases were approved by the US Department of Interior in 1966, the so-called 'Bennett Freeze' on construction and repairs also came into effect. Since then, any construction or repairs on the HPL have been forbidden. Dine'h have recently been given notices that repairs they have made to their houses are illegal, and served with orders to dismantle or risk demolition.

The Black Mesa and Kayenta coal mines have been in operation since 1966, and the US Government now needs to force out the remaining Dine'h to allow expansion of the


strip mining operations. This means finding somewhere else for them, and the "New Lands" were appropriated for relocation by Congress in 1980. However, the previous year, a uranium mill dam broke and United Nuclear Corporation released 1,100 tons of sludge and 94 million gallons of mining effluent into the Rio Puerco, which travelled downstream from New Mexico into Arizona, past the relocation sites and into the Little Colorado River. Polluted and of little value for anything else, Congress clearly decided this would make an ideal dumping ground on which to forcibly relocate the Dine'h.

Traditional Dine'h remaining on the HPL are enduring increased harassment and hardship as their livestock are impounded. Wood and wood cutting tools are confiscated on sight, and harvesting is restricted by permits that are rarely granted, even for ceremonial use. Those Dine'h who refuse to sign "AA" leases or relocate are being targeted for forced eviction by the US Government.

Eviction hearings will start in Phoenix sometime after February 1, 2000 but, in the meantime, harsh living conditions make staying on the HPL difficult.

Workers are needed to stay at Dine'h



homesites to serve as witnesses. After February 1st, the Department of Justice will seek court orders to evict Dine'h non-signers to be enforced by the police. Dine'h non-signers challenging evictions in Court in Phoenix need travel, room and board resources and arrangements, and legal funds for hearings. 

Protest to your nearest US Embassy. Send help, support, funds and get more information: Indigenous Support Coalition of Oregon ("ISCO"), PO Box 11715, Eugene, OR 97440, USA. Tel. (541) 683-2789, Email isco@efn.org

Israel


The hardship and frustration of jobless workers from the Arab village of Ein Mahel burst out in fury in October, as hundreds of people demonstrated in Upper Nazareth, calling for an end to segregation and discrimination by the Employment Bureau. Ein Mahel stands at the top of the list of blighted towns in Israel, with an official jobless rate of 17.7%.

When the Bureau sends an applicant to a job, the employer has to sign a form stating that he accepts you or that he finds you unsuitable or that you have refused the work (in which case your benefits cease). In a recent case, the bureau sent dozens of people to an Arab contractor who did not need workers at all. He insisted they pay him in return for him signing that they were unsuitable. For those who could not pay, he demanded they work for three days without salary in return for his signature. Another Bureau technique is to send the applicant to an unclear address. When you can't find the place, you get classified as having refused.

Using such methods, the Bureau has reclassified several hundred people from Ein Mahel as refusers in a single month. Its aim is to discourage them to the point that they will cease applying for work, thus lowering the official number of the unemployed.

The discrimination has intensified since the 470 Ein Mahel unemployed were transferred from the Employment Bureau in Arab Nazareth to that of Upper Nazareth, a Jewish city. On the face of it, this might seem an insignificant bureaucratic adjustment. However, instead of Ein Mahel workers being handled along with everyone else, they are separated, and registration is carried out in a small, stifling room, without a faucet or toilet facilities. The villagers have to queue for long hours outside on the street, while the Jewish jobless of Upper Nazareth have a large, air-conditioned waiting room, furnished with a cold-water machine and modern toilet facilities.

The independent Workers Advice Centre (WAC), which is co-ordinating the

campaign, rejects such attempts to blur the severity of the unemployment crisis by deceitful methods. The demonstration of October 13th was the first step in a campaign that will not end until discrimination against these workers ends. 

Send e-mail messages or faxes of protest to:

**Moshe Dimri, head of the
Employment Authority
972-2-5617548**

**Eli Yishai, Minister of Labour and
Welfare - 972-2-5666385
Prime Minister Ehud Barak
972-2-6233388**


**Please send WAC a copy Fax:
+972-6-6462152**

E-mail: wacnas@internet-zahav.net

Nigeria

Following massive, sustained direct action, Shell, the Anglo-Dutch oil group has announced that it "has shut down its flow stations in the Bonny export terminal in Nigeria's Niger delta region because of persistent community unrest".

The demands and protests from well-organised local communities seriously affected production and loading of crude oil over recent months, as they called for compensation, jobs and social amenities from the company. According to a Shell official, the shut down of flow stations was "necessitated by community-related production deferrals". The official, who would not give his name, said the company had declared a force majeure to notify importers of its inability to meet delivery schedules. The closure was expected to cause losses of about 100,000 barrels per day at the Bonny export terminal, an oil industry official said.

Shell, a major oil producing company in oil-rich Nigeria, produces about half of the country's output of 1.8 million barrels per day. This latest shutdown was about the sixth in three months. 




Shell - you can be sure they'll cause hell. Shell "welcomes your input" - contact them at www.shell.com and tell them about your millenium resolution.

Burma

9.9.99 was the date set to follow up on the August 8, 1988 (8.8.88) uprising in Burma, which was brutally crushed by the junta in a bloody crackdown.

Although the junta claimed they were not concerned about 9.9.99, in the days leading up to it, curfews were declared and military officials with blow horns warned people in the streets not to take action. Seven military officers, along with two rank-and-file soldiers, were arrested on 27th August in Papun township, Karen state, for distributing pro-democracy posters and pamphlets. On the same day, relatives of military personnel were warned not to wear anything yellow, since that colour was declared the symbol of the 9.9.99 movement. The Rangoon War Office cancelled all officers' leave, and the UN Special Envoy Alvaro de Soto's visit to Burma in early September, just before the UN General Assembly's 54th session, was cancelled by the regime at the last moment - "confirmation that the 9.9.99 Day of Protest has rattled the regime", said an observer.

Despite the tight measures, pro-democracy advocates managed to carry out several protests in cities across the country. In Prome, over 1,000 demonstrators gathered around the statue of General Aung San for half an hour until troops arrived and dispersed the crowd. Over 500 people were arrested throughout Burma for "creating disturbances". In a show of support, activists in over 30 countries held solidarity events. 




Canada

Over a hundred Psychiatric Survivors and other human rights advocates braved icy west winds to protest against Government plans to vastly increase the power and scope of the Mental Health Act in Ontario.

The No Force! Coalition co-ordinated the Toronto protest - a grassroots body of nearly two dozen survivor organisations and local agencies working with survivors and the homeless.

At the heart of the Government plans are CTOs (Community Treatment Orders, also known as outpatient committal or 'leash laws'). These can be used to compel discharged psychiatric inmates to comply with prescribed treatments and medical appointments while living in the community, with the constant threat of re-incarceration in a psychiatric facility being used for enforcement. 40 US states already have such laws, and New Labour is currently considering similar legislation.


Systematic demonising of targeted groups (in this instance psychiatrically labelled persons) in the mainstream media, along with lobbying efforts from powerful interests like the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, the Coalition of Ontario Psychiatrists and pharmaceutical corporate giants Eli Lilly, mean successful opposition is going to be a long hard battle.

From a wider perspective, the planned changes to the Mental Health Act represent just one more aspect of the effort to drive unwanted ('poor') people from the public view. Legislation which will essentially outlaw panhandling or squeegeeing was introduced in the same week as the Mental Health changes. Bills are in the works that will compel welfare recipients suspected of substance use to submit to testing and compulsory 'treatment', and see every person resident in Ontario being issued with electronic 'smart' ID cards that would allow authorities access to personal details with a single swipe through a reader (which could well include medical/psychiatric records). 

Global Transport Workers' Action

Thousands of bus and truck drivers in countries across the globe (Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, France, Spain, Italy, UK, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, Honduras, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Bostwana and Mozambique, among others) joined together on 5th October in a massive international protest against the excessive hours that many of them are forced to work. Action ranged from leafleting at key transport arteries, mass rallies and

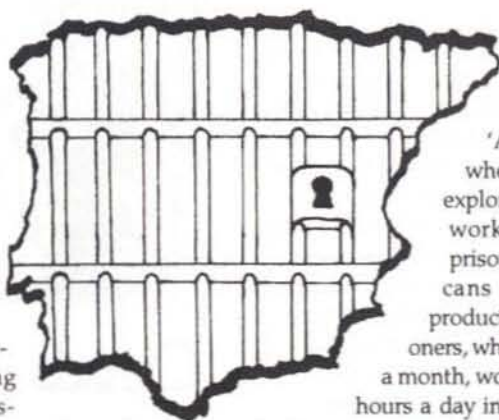
demonstrations, to slow-moving truck convoys and blockades of important ports.

The world-wide day of action was co-ordinated by international and European transport workers' organisations, as part of a long-term campaign to highlight the poor working conditions that the world's professional drivers endure, and in particular to drive home the message that 'fatigue - brought on by working 60, 80 or even 100 hours a week - kills'. 



Spain

On 2nd November, over 300 people gathered in front of the newly built prison of Aranjuez to protest against the penitentiary system. The participants set up a small bar and a stage, and spent 6 hours playing music and shouting their support to the prisoners inside, who confirmed afterwards they could hear the solidarity action and messages.



is the first one in Spain to adopt the so-called 'American model', whereby prisoners are exploited in production workshops inside the prison (what the Americans call 'industrial production prisons'). Prisoners, who earn less than £90 a month, work from six to eight hours a day in workshops set up by big companies, including multinationals, which make outstanding profits from their work, carried out in unspeakable conditions (see also SickSystem in this DA).

The prison in Aranjuez was chosen as it

US2

Even before contract negotiators had announced a tentative agreement in September this year, 1,500 flight attendants at Northwest Airlines had received an e-mail headlined "Anger".



GET SICK
ON YOUR OWN TIME
"PARTNER"

Jose Arturo Ibarra had inside information on what the deal contained and let the cat out of the bag about the unacceptable deal on the table. A bulk e-mail crusade followed, which spawned a grassroots campaign that led to overwhelming rejection of the proposed deal.

"Technology has changed all the fundamental ground rules", said a Northwest flight attendant from Detroit who participated in the campaign against ratification. "It's no longer all about pounding the pavement and waving strike signs around".

Internet forums and bulk e-mail distributions are ideal communication tools for geographically scattered airline employees. They are inexpensive and can put a small number of activists on equal footing with a powerful organisation when it comes to passing information around and coordinating responses and action.

Bangladesh

The Domestic Workers Association in Bangladesh held a Protest Day on 15th November, "against rape, killing, kidnapping, murder, burning, forced prostitution, and torture of domestic workers".

Demonstrators carried black flags and moved in a silent mass through the streets of Dhaka. Between June and early November the following crimes were reported to have taken place against domestic workers; 36 rapes, 25 murders, 7 combined murder-rapes, 5 burnings, 13 kidnaps, 31 forced prostitution cases, not to mention 3,000 unwarranted sackings and 15,000 made homeless. There are over 5 million domestic workers in inhu-



mane conditions in Bangladesh – they are on very low income, neglected, helpless and unorganised, unrecognised and deprived legal rights.

Financial support and solidarity messages to:
Domestic Workers Association,
G.P.O.BOX 864, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Phone :88-019 340268, Fax :88 02 9562562, E-Mail; unity@bdmail.net.

West Papua

After the political and military defeat in East Timor, Indonesia has stepped up brutality against anything that remotely threatens the integrity of the Indonesian state. The current President of Indonesia, Abdulrahman Wahid (alias Gus Dur) and his vice president Ms Megawati Sukarnoputri are claiming their position is united with the people, however, they have made their politics clear - they will crush any struggle that expresses cultural identity. It was Megawati Sukarnoputri who strongly criticised Habibie's approval of a democratic referendum in East Timor this year. She shares the 'same mind' as her deceased father 'Sukarno', who was the first Indonesian dictator.

Numerous incidents of resistance and state brutality have occurred in West Papua that cannot be fully reported on because of the sheer isolation of the area. Exploitation of natural resources and the people continues, justified as economic development.

There have been a number of Papuan flag-raising and demonstrations in both West Papua and Jakarta. In Jayapura, the capital of West Papua, over a thousand participated. The people are demanding that the government listens to and accommodates the aspiration of Papuans. In response, some have been killed, some are in prison and others have been severely injured.





Standstill Mystics on the Move

Falun Gong, the Chinese spiritual movement (or cult) has escalated its campaign of civil disobedience in Beijing, Hong Kong and other major cities across China. In Beijing, members have been mounting daily silent protests outside the National People's Congress. A nationwide persecution began when the Chinese Government banned the movement in July 1999. At least 3,000 Falun Gong members were subsequently arrested.

The movement combines Taoism and Buddhist teachings with meditation and exercises. It claims between 70-100 million members worldwide, and it is said to be the fastest growing spiritual movement in the world. The Chinese become increasingly paranoid about this rapid expansion, which has spread out of China and across the United States. Many of those arrested to date in China include high ranking party officials, academics, and military staff officers. Falun Gong say 10 people have died in police custody, and many have been tortured. The Government has admitted to only one death in custody – someone who apparently fell from a train in rather strange circumstances.

The Blair Government did not raise civil rights issues with President Jiang Zemin on his recent visit to Britain. Instead, the police were heavy-handed with pro-Tibetan and pro-democracy demonstrators, not letting them unfurl banners, and generally harassing them and hemming them in with police so the bloodthirsty president could not get sight of them. Blair was not prepared to use any of his influence with the Chinese President – further evidence of the sham that is New Labour's much trumpeted 'ethical' foreign policy.

In China, the 'Communist' Party has taken fright because, although the Party is thought to

have some 60 million members, most have joined to further their careers. On the other hand, Falun Gong's members are voluntarily joining. It is going to be extremely difficult for the Chinese government to eradicate Falun Gong. This is because it has been able to penetrate most areas of Chinese society, including the professional classes and especially, users of the Internet in China.

The Internet has weakened the Party's monopoly on propaganda and information across China. While access is not as wide as in the West, it is already significant, and the ease and cheapness of Internet information is rapidly reducing the Party's physical and economic control over the Chinese media.

After almost 5 decades of power, the party's commitment to socialism and revolution is gone, though the rhetoric remains. The lip-service to socialism is now pure hypocrisy, and so is vulnerable to any challenge – no matter which quarter it comes from. The challenge now is Falun Gong's, and it has the added advantages of being non-Western, and drawing on traditional beliefs and attitudes. It could be that, with the growth of Falun Gong, we are seeing the start of the ideological decomposition of Maoism/Marxism in China. Here, Falun Gong may play a similar role to that played by dissidents and literary figures in the collapse of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The economic restructuring of China along capitalist lines continues at breathtaking speed, and it will soon be one of the major capitalist powers in the world.

The real economic situation in China is increasingly at variance with the official dogma. Eventually, the ideology will have to change. However, there is, as yet, little sign of this. One thing the Party has become is strongly nationalistic, and it would seem that most of the former Soviet bloc ruling parties have also found it advantageous to assume a nationalist posture. Generally, nationalism, in


its quest for power and legitimacy, had found it useful to draw on traditional social attitudes and indigenous ideas. Consequently, through verbal hostility to Western colonialism and its attendant ideas, the plan is that existing state structures and institutions will be maintained.

Falun Gong's ideas are traditional, conservative and, with regards to sex, downright reactionary. While these ideas would not normally cause concern to the establishment in a modern market economy, the Chinese government will not tolerate opposition in any shape or form and, with its hegemony under

Falun Gong's ideas are traditional, conservative and, with regards to sex, downright reactionary

threat, the last thing they want is ordinary people constructing a philosophy out of old beliefs without their say-so.

Falun Gong has the appearance of lacking a centralised structure or 'priesthood'. This is apparently true of many emerging cults and religious movements. The 'tyranny of structurelessness' can still reign, with the real hierarchy disguised by informality.

It doesn't take a crystal ball to predict how the situation in China will develop in the first years of the new Western millennium. Questions are being asked which have been buried in fear for five decades. They are not going to go away. China is living in a pressure cooker society. Perhaps the greatest threat, as the Party's grip loosens, will come from the forces of reaction seeking to capitalise on the inevitable. Falun Gong has already proved it can comfortably co-exist within the world's largest capitalist power, the US. It is already prepared to benefit from China's future role as a major capitalist power. 



Somegrown

If you believe the capitalist press reports ...

Chris Brain was an 'evil hypnotic genius' megalomaniac, complex, secretive, manipulating, persuasive, with psychic powers' who lived in luxury, surrounded by dozens of youngish women who waited on him and performed sexual favours in exchange for his approval. Carefully, he picked out the most easily manipulated for his 'inner circle'.

For the first time in print, Rebecca gives her own account of life in the centre of the NOS cult phenomenon.*

I first came across the Nine O'clock Service (NOS) in 1986, but I didn't join until 1989. Soon after, NOS had become my life. My father, previously a Baptist Minister, was very strict, and was also heavily involved in the House Church movement in Sheffield. The fear of God (and fear of my dad) was instilled in me from the earliest age I can remember.

From my early teens, I found myself living a double life. The whole family attended Church – it was an unspoken rule in our house – then I would go out and get pissed whenever I thought I could get away with it. Needless to say, I wasn't happy and I didn't relish going to the House Church.

One day, I bumped into a friend and she was full of excitement, telling me I ought to check out this new church with music services – "it's amazing – I won't tell you any more, just go", she said.

So me and my friend went along and we were blown away by it – I was 18 and here were these real people like me, having a good time – and they all believed in God like me. After that, I started going regularly – despite my dad's disapproval – and soon after, one of the leaders asked us if we wanted to join.

He came round to my house, told us the rules, and asked us some questions. The rules included things like 'no sex before marriage' and 'don't do drugs', and they didn't seem odd to me, as I was used to these sorts of church rules. Nevertheless, it seemed so good a thing

that I could live with the rules, and anyway, I had major guilt complexes about these things and, deep down, I believed they were 'wrong'. He also asked us out of 10, how much we wanted to join. I scored high, but Sarah was much lower. She hadn't had as strict an upbringing as me, so she wasn't so happy with the rules. We didn't join in the end.

About 3 years later, I was living with my boyfriend - he was nothing to do with NOS. I found myself unhappy and feeling guilty all the time, and one day, I bumped into a friend who told me she was joining NOS, so I went along to the communion. During the service, I suddenly decided I couldn't take communion because I felt too guilty. It was a really emotional situation - I just cried. Someone prayed for me, then said "you know what you have to do, don't you". I did. I went home and told my boyfriend I couldn't live with him any more. I moved out, and joined NOS. After a while, he joined too, and about 9 months later we got married, the main reason being this was the only way we could get back to how we were before, which was what we wanted.

I found myself being brought rapidly into the centre of things at NOS. Winnie (Chris Brain's wife) was pregnant. She was head of music and the keyboard player in the NOS band. As she left to have the baby, I was brought in because I was a keyboard player in the band I was in before NOS.

The first months were really exciting. Like being in a band really, except there were values which you picked up as you went along – everyone was helping each other out. People were in 'groups', and each week your group leader decided the topic for the evening meeting. People discussed, chatted, and prayed. The main emphasis was always on

getting values from the Bible and making them relevant to people and life today. There was a mix of people; some were from stricter Christian backgrounds like me, some not, it was pretty interesting.

After a while, I got to know who Chris was. He was apparently very busy, and really mysterious, striking, charismatic and intelligent. He never had time for anything because he was so busy working for NOS. Everyone was in awe of him for having brought NOS into being and for giving us this great thing.

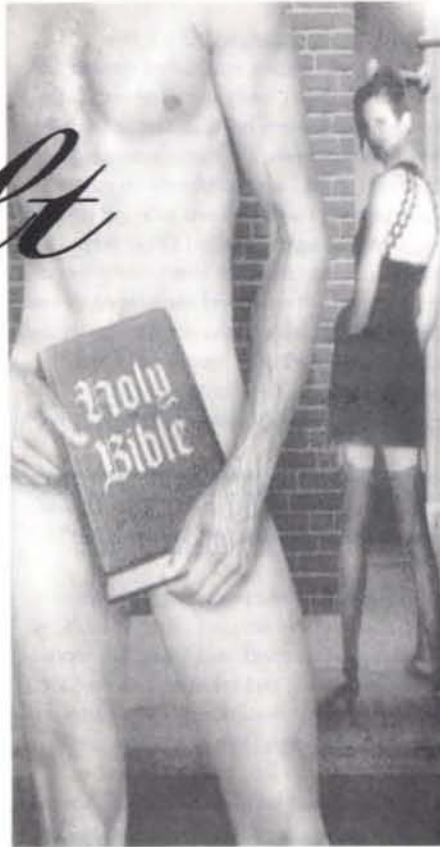
centre of intention

Then, quite suddenly, Chris decided he wanted to get to know me, and I found another side to him. In conversation, face to face, he showed lots of understanding, and could get into really deep subjects very quickly and sometimes, surprisingly abruptly. With my Christian background, I naturally saw him as a direct link to God and, as such, I felt amazed and privileged to be picked out by him.

I was invited to a 'Staff Team' social event, where there were lots of heads of departments (NOS had a considerable bureaucracy). I was really nervous and didn't say much. Chris was animated and loud, and I remember being struck by how different everyone became in his presence – everyone was full of reverence. At some point, the conversation turned to me, and Chris said I looked rebellious, and cynical about what he was saying. He said I had a problem with authority, which was understandable given my upbringing (my two sisters had joined by this time, so he had found out about our past). He said 'you need to deal with this'. This sort of phrasing of Chris' was adopted throughout NOS – 'get it sorted' and so on. Everyone had their 'issues' – things

*to protect anonymity, the names of people have been changed - except that of Chris Brain, the cult leader and his wife. For short snippets on NOS, see also the CULT interview with Rebecca on Page 21.

Cult



about themselves they had to work on to sort out. Anyway, he also asked me about my past there and then, and I told him my dad had told me I had got a gift of prophecy. He said I needed to get it back – and I should speak to one of the leaders. I did, and then I started having weekly sessions with this guy, much like counselling.

The main starting point was that, from about age 6, sometimes, when my dad really shouted at me for doing something 'wrong' I

I couldn't tell my husband what was going on, I was back to being a teenager, leading a double life again

would pass out. Now, as an adult, whenever anyone started ranting or shouting, I would go really red, which was itself embarrassing and just made me feel worse. Another issue that came up was that I am generally inquisitive and have opinions, but I would not offer them (again, because my dad would come down on me for this). My 'counsellor' said I had to express a deliberate opinion at least 5 times every day, while I was in the recording studio. I did and, almost overnight, I felt myself changing and feeling better about myself.

cruising habit

Soon after, I started getting messages from Chris that he wanted to see me. Messages always came via people, which seemed normal as he was apparently so busy. Also, one of his secretaries (he had a lot of women always around him helping him out in various roles) told me 'he likes it if you initiate things', so I approached him after a Staff Team meeting

and invited him to meet me – but this never happened because he was busy or something.

However, I did start to see more of Chris. He always seemed to be driving around in his car, and often, apparently by chance, he would drive past me and stop to pick me up and take me wherever I was going. The short in-car conversations were sometimes a bit bizarre. Out of the blue, he would ask what I desired, and things like that – he was very direct and had a penetrating style of conversation. Afterwards, I'd feel a bit strange, and try to work out what it was all about. One day, he suddenly referred to a previous conversation about 'desire' and said, "about what you were saying about fancying me, well, I fancy you too". This totally confused me, I hadn't thought or said anything like this, yet I believed he knew what I was thinking, and equally, I knew he knew what was 'right'. After a couple of troubled days, I decided he must be right.

character studies

He was often quite unsettling to be with – his conversation style was so direct, and he repeatedly said things like "relax, be yourself" and "what's going on with you?".

We went for a meal. At one point, he said "I sense something about your past – you've been abandoned. What are you thinking?" I had quickly realised the latter question was a classic of his – he often asked it and you had to tell the truth, otherwise he would know. I said I was thinking about passing out as a child. He said "I knew you were". He had a way of

getting right through to you – he could easily churn up all your feelings and "find out how unhappy you have been". Anyway, I was soon really crying, really upset, and full of anger. I realised my dad was not infallible. Chris had opened my eyes – and I think in retrospect that was when I really started transferring my father-God-icon to Chris.

After the meal, we went back to the office, and he gave me a massage. I felt really uncomfortable – after all, I was married, so this couldn't be right, could it? I told myself that Chris knew best. I also reasoned that he was really getting through to me, so overall, it was worth it if I could sort my 'issues' out. His typical line whenever my doubts about our 'special relationship' came up, was "it's up to you – only you and God know what to do and what is right". This made me feel like it was me that was instigating it, and me that was doing it. So, since I couldn't tell my husband what was going on, I was back to being a teenager and leading a double life again!

A couple of weeks after the massage, I got a message to go and see the pastor. She asked, "how is it going with you and Chris? Because you know Rebecca, the sort of relationship you are having, you can't really talk to a lot of people about it, can you?" She finished the meeting by saying "so, if you ever have to talk about it, come and see me". After that, I started to believe that, being in a 'special relationship', I was really, well, special. Chris was really busy – we were all there to support him and help him in any way.

shock tactics

The next real shock was when Chris scolded me the first time. We were at a summer garden party with 'key people' and, during the conversation, I pointed out to this bloke how gorgeous some flowers were in the border. As I turned back to the group, I saw Chris, slowly shaking his head and staring right through me. He told me to come with him, and took me round to the front garden (the party was at the back). As I recall, the conversation went basically as follows.

(him) "What do you think you are doing?"
(me – incredulous and confused) "What?"
"Flirting like that."
"What?!"

"You took his attention away from the conversation to yourself, by turning away and pointing to those flowers."

"I wasn't flirting."

"You were competing with Jane and trying to get his attention. You were doing it and you know it, and if you can't see that now, then I really don't think we should be having our special relationship... You need to talk to Tracy and sort it out. Get it sorted."

By this point, I was crying like mad, and felt extremely frightened and confused. I was

apparently doing something really wrong and I didn't even know I was doing it. Nagging at me was the feeling that I might lose everything – if I lost the special relationship, I would be lost forever. Was I really flirting? Why was I only allowed to flirt with Chris?

Tracy was a key NOS person, in partnership with Chris. She advised me, "this is a common problem with people near to Chris – you have to be really careful what signs you are giving off to people". I was still thinking, "what is flirting anyway?" She said, "it is safe to do it with Chris, but not others, because they aren't as disciplined" (disciplined was a NOS word, meaning 'sorted

us had a 'power issue', we all got this.

A pattern became established around this time – one I didn't really work out until later. See-sawing between being in favour the next, inevitable put down, I became increasingly frightened, until I was constantly on edge. I was becoming the frightened little girl my dad made me into again, terrified to say what I felt, because it would be taken that I was guilty of something. I felt stuck and abandoned. I was a terrible, bad person, who couldn't be trusted not to exert power over people and I just couldn't get away from myself or change myself. Lots of people started 'dropping' me

others started asking more questions.

One day, Clare (Nigel's wife) suddenly started telling me all sorts of personal stuff (I remember thinking, 'why is she telling me, I'm power-crazy and can't be trusted'). She was having a relationship with a male pastor, and she had been told she couldn't carry on. At the same time (we later discovered), Nigel was sleeping with another woman unopposed. By this time, especially in the 'inner circle', there was increasing sleeping around going on – it was often pretty much encouraged, and loads of problems happened as a result. Anyway, then Clare dropped Chris into the conversation, saying "about Chris – did you ever feel abused? Chris was making us compete with each other." It turned out Clare was one of the first NOS people and one of the first to be abused by him.

Chris justified his sexual behaviour by talk of "redefining the boundaries between sex and affection" and "creating post-modern relationships"

out' – there was a whole NOS 'language'. Later, whenever it came up, Chris used to justify his 'inappropriate' sexual behaviour by talk of "redefining the boundaries between sex and affection" and "creating post-modern relationships".

When I first started 'seeing' Chris, I was in the design team for Greenbelt (a big Christian festival), and he said I was very supportive. We were working all hours on writing music, putting links together, writing monologues and spoken word sections, then more music. One meeting, Chris said, "right, just have a think, what images and words we can use to describe Jesus as he would be today". We all had a think, and I thought of the well-known passage 'come to me, all you who are heavily burdened...' I looked across at what Chris was jotting down, and it was the same passage! When I said this, he grinned and said "that's good isn't it, because you are often cynical about these sorts of things". Basically, I took this as a message from God... We used the quote in the set and it really worked well.

cult culture

After Greenbelt, he started backing off and saying he didn't trust my motives – and I really had to 'sort my power issue'. It was now common knowledge among the central clique that one of my biggest 'issues' was power. In fact, most women in my status, and especially in and around the stage shows, had a 'power issue'. We were told it came from being in key positions – there was temptation to take and enjoy power. I was in overall charge of the music-based communion service. Chris' advice was that, to be a powerful person, you have to give power away – then I would have more power to resist the power urge (this type of logic was really common in NOS analysis). I was told I had to be really careful and continuously examine my motives. Chris was constantly pointing out things I was apparently doing to get power over people. Since lots of

(stopping talking or associating with me).

We had 'ministries' (set roles) in NOS, so everything was unpaid, and I spent all week writing, preparing and rehearsing the set for the next week's communion – I was often up until the early hours. We were expected to devote our lives to 'our calling'. I had to prepare a new set for a one and a half hour service each week. When we moved to Ponds Forge (the major Leisure Centre in Sheffield), it got bigger and we had more equipment, lighting, sound, as well as the creative side to work on. We all really believed we were doing our best to bring heaven to earth. We wanted to replace original sin with original blessing.

Trust was crucial in NOS. Chris controlled everything, and he would spend ages shouting really loudly at people, then other times, he would seem like a very vulnerable, lost little boy. Even now, contemplating whether he was 'knowingly' devious or genuinely unaware of his abusive behaviour, on balance, I would tend towards the latter. He must have really believed he was genuine, because so many other intelligent, successful people thought he was too. Could he have got away with it unless he 'believed'?

get sorted

Things were getting pretty big in Sheffield, and Chris started to look into setting up NOS in San Francisco, starting with a big launch event. By this time, I was beginning to crack under the strain of Chris constantly telling me I had power problems and to 'get sorted'. I was effectively demoted – I ended up as tape operator backstage in San Francisco.

So Chris handed over Sheffield leadership to Nigel about 10 months before the big finale in August 1995. Nigel didn't have the charisma or the person-control skills Chris had, and numbers started dwindling. People in the 'lower ministries', who often had full-time jobs and spent the rest of their waking hours lugging gear for NOS, started leaving, while


the awakening

It was like I had suddenly woken up, or come out of a trance or something. Lucidity hit. Clare's silence had allowed him to carry on – he knew he could use Clare to help him because she couldn't bring herself to tell anyone. The spell was broken. Next day, we talked again. Clare was reserved, saying "we need to take this carefully", but I was fuming by now. I was angry and bold, but above all, I felt free. Above all, I'd been treated like shit and I couldn't believe I'd fallen for it.

Next day, I told my boyfriend – he was concerned but supportive and we decided to talk to someone else who had left NOS, who'd gone to the Bishop of Sheffield about it but had got nowhere because he had demanded evidence. We got there and told her, and she burst out crying, saying she knew all this had been going on.

Some of the NOS leadership team got together to decide what to do. I thought, 'it's NOS management that got us into this' and I started phoning around people and telling them, to get it out in the open. NOS management then held a big meeting and tried to say they had initiated an inquiry – but they were just trying to control the situation after it blew up on them.

The whole thing imploded. For my husband and I, it was suddenly like the honeymoon we never had – I had been so tied up with NOS that I hadn't given him any attention for months at a time, now we were free to be there for each other again. Eventually, last year, we split up amicably and we are still good friends, but it's only about now that I am beginning to feel free of the whole religion thing.

I still feel I am on a journey of discovering who I really am – what I would call a spiritual quest. But I have no interest in the church or God. 

Cult Characteristics

- A cult is a system of religious beliefs and ritual.
- The dictionary defines a cult as "A group of followers."
- Psychologists define a cult "as a group which deviates from cultural norms."
- Establishment religions do not like cults because they are often more successful.

Some things cults do

HYPNOSIS - Inducing a state of high suggestibility by hypnosis, often thinly disguised as relaxation or meditation.

PEER GROUP PRESSURE - Suppressing doubt and resistance to new ideas by exploiting the need to belong.

LOVE BOMBING - Creating a sense of family and belonging through hugging, kissing, touching and flattery.

REJECTION OF OLD VALUES - Accelerating acceptance of new life style by constantly denouncing former values and beliefs.

CONFUSING DOCTRINE - Encouraging blind acceptance and rejection of logic through complex lectures on an incomprehensible doctrine.

METACOMMUNICATION - Implanting subliminal messages by stressing certain key words or phrases in long, confusing lectures.

REMOVAL OF PRIVACY - Achieving loss of ability to evaluate logically by preventing private contemplation.

VERBAL ABUSE - Desensitizing through bombardment with foul and abusive language.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION AND FATIGUE - Creating disorientation and vulnerability by prolonging mental and physical activity and withholding adequate rest and sleep.

DRESS CODES - Removing individuality by demanding conformity to the group dress code.

CHANTING AND SINGING - Eliminating non-cult ideas through group repetition of mind-narrowing chants or phrases.

CONFESSION - Encouraging the destruction of individual ego through confession of personal weaknesses and innermost feelings or doubts.

FINANCIAL COMMITMENT - Achieving increased dependence on the group by 'burning bridges' to the past, through the donation of assets.

FINGER POINTING - Creating a false sense of righteousness by pointing to the shortcomings of the outside world and other cults.

ISOLATION - Inducing loss of reality by physical separation from family, friends, society and rational references.

CONTROLLED APPROVAL - Maintaining vulnerability and confusion by alternately rewarding and punishing similar actions.

GUILT - Reinforcing the need for 'salvation' by exaggerating the sins of the former lifestyles.

FEAR - Maintaining loyalty and obedience to the group by threatening soul, life or limb for the slightest 'negative' thought, word or deed.

Friend caught up in a cult?

TRY: CULT INFORMATION CENTRE, BCM CULTS, LONDON WC1N 3XX Telephone: (01689) 833 800. Web Site: www.xenu.net/cic

FAQs

CULTURE



NOS the church | NOS the cult

DA: Describe key features of a NOS service – what made it a success?

Rebecca: The phrase used to describe the style was 'post-modern'. There were lots of lighting effects, music and links between spoken word sections and so on. People danced, got really into it. We kept up with the latest trends, so the events were always on the edge and current.

DA: What else did NOS do?

Rebecca: NOS was basically only about services – it was only a message, no actual practical action. The message was based around music, liturgy and art.

DA: What sort of people did NOS attract?

Rebecca: Most people were young -about 30 average – and a mix of religions, and different sorts, backgrounds and so on. Generally, people who were already vulnerable because of religious guilt.

DA: How did NOS work, how did it attract you?

Rebecca: Initially, I suppose it worked because I really wanted to find out why we are here and I really believed in the idea of creating a better world here, now.

DA: What were the key things at the core of NOS' mission?

Rebecca: To 'modernise' and make the Christian message current, to help bring heaven to earth.

DA: What were the messages to the congregation?

Rebecca: There was a different topic for service each week. Underlying it always was rejecting consumerism for peaceful environmental co-existences.



DA: Was NOS an oppressive cult?

Rebecca: Yes.

DA: What is a cult?

A group of people in a community where you are drawn in so you lose a sense of who you are and what you feel – you only know what you are told to feel. You lose friends and you lose yourself, and you disappear into the cult identity.

DA: Was Chris really a power-crazed, devious megalomaniac who sexually and psychologically abused dozens of women?

Rebecca: He was very manipulative and he did abuse a lot of people. He knew exactly how far he could take people and what he could get away with. His real power came from the fact that we allowed him to do things, and we followed everything he said.

DA: Why didn't people just leave?

Rebecca: A lot of people did. But when you joined, you were told "this is your family now" and you automatically cut off your ties with friends and family, since they weren't committed. Everything centred around NOS. There was nothing to go back to. Also, if you left, you would lose all the comradeship within NOS, because everyone would cut you off and not speak to you any more. The fear of what I would lose if I left was greater than what I was unhappy about if I stayed.

DA: How did you leave?

Rebecca: At some point I realised I had become like everyone else. The next stage was, I realised I had lost who I was and I had to be me again – then the spell was broken. (see main story)

NOS - Nine O'clock Service (see also Rebecca's full account - p.18-20)

Rage against the (monotheistic) machine

Organised religion has a world-wide influence stretching back into recorded history. Variations have occurred from time to time and from society to society, but the underlying basics have remained unchanged.

The divisive character of organised religion ensures the passivity of its followers – “believers are superior to non believers”. They are egged on to persecute the latter, and always in the face of their own oppression and exploitation by their masters (sic). Historically, religious division is a part of the means of persuasion to accept exploitation; sometimes, it is the main means, e.g. Medieval Europe, the Iran of the Ayatollah, and present-day Taliban-dominated Afghanistan. This is theocracy – where the clerics dominate the State apparatus. Ultimately, division is the enemy of a self-emancipating working class. We pay the

it is no surprise that Joseph Stalin was educated in a seminary

highest price in the conflicts created by the self-interest of the clerical/political/economic establishment.

There is never a shortage of clerics declaring the death vows of the world. The notion of the “just war” (the crusade of the Islamic Jihad, the Fatwah, the Catholic Inquisition, the mass crusades, the burnings of witches by protestants, etc.) is just that. The promotion of inhumane practices (e.g. circumcision), the rejection of common sense practices (e.g. artificial contraception), and the spreading of absurd myths (three-day resurrections, virgin births, etc.) are all central. No matter how illogical or fantastic, the gods have done it all in their time.

submit yourself

Myths and practices are used to promote submission to a supreme being which exists on a separate spiritual plane but which, nonetheless, has dominion over the entire material universe, including humans (whether they are believers or not). This ultimate “boss of bosses” can only be experienced fully by our own physical extinction, i.e. death. A partial experience is offered by submitting to God’s official earthly representatives, the clerics, priests, imams, etc. Thus, our world is reduced to a second class waiting room, where we demonstrate our “fitness”, or lack of it, to

die and enter Heaven and fully experience God. If one can believe in and obey a boss you won’t see until Heaven, then it is easy to believe in and obey a flesh and blood boss in this world.

Organised religions share the same hierarchical structures as capitalism. All parties and States share with religion an unquestionable “profit figure” – Jesus Christ, Mohamed, Marx, Lenin, etc. It is no surprise that Joseph Stalin was educated in a seminary. There is a common interest. Like the political/commercial authorities, the clerical class requires a cowed and acquiescent working class population and, thus, the maintenance of class society. Common interests have produced similar organisational forms, which have evolved to achieve the common purpose. Religions cannot only influence or even dominate a State apparatus, they also share control of capitalism, own banks, invest, speculate and have great tracts of land the world over.

People are not stupid. We know when we are being duped. To deal with us, various elaborate means of control are needed. These are the ‘persuaders’. In our own and other societies, the role of control is played by such agencies as the media, the education system and organised religion. Unsurprisingly, the latter owns and controls sections of the other two.

the project

To effectively resist and undermine the efforts of the persuaders, organisational forms must be created whose structures, beliefs and ultimate aims are diametrically opposed to those of every organised religion, political party and capitalist enterprise. These organisations must be “bottom up” rather than “top down” – free agreement between equals rather than command and obey, master and slave. This is the anarchosyndicalist project.

Self-education must strip away the veneer of benevolence (“God is love”), which the religions of the world operate within. Islam enjoins people to free slaves to gain merit but it must be pointed out that

such merit cannot be obtained unless slavery as an institution continues to thrive. Christianity enjoins us to visit the imprisoned and thus gain spiritual merit; this cannot be obtained unless prisons persist.

jam tomorrow


The main theme of the deception is “jam tomorrow”; sacrifice and suffer now to achieve a better life in the hereafter. This idea has also been harnessed by the parties of the left. Marxists, reformists, social-democrats and trade unions inform us that there will be “jam tomorrow” but right here in this world, once we have made the sacrifices and suffered.

For organised religion, the historic success of this theme perpetuates death worship. For centuries, millions of people have sacrificed themselves, their neighbours and others. Empires have been acquired and fortunes made while the same millions have been starved, enslaved and murdered. Again and again, God’s blessings are sought and evoked by the hierarchies of organ-

ised religion (the clerics) and showered upon the ruling class. Charlemagne becomes holy Roman emperor at the hands of a grateful Pope. The blessings and approval of God are retroactively guaranteed (“it was the will of God”).

going critical

In obeying God’s commandments through practising religious faith, we renounce our own critical faculties. In accepting rule by an invisible and universal boss, we make more acceptable the use of what is left of those faculties in obedience to the earthly boss.

In renouncing organised religion, we begin to retrieve our critical faculties. We see the connection between belief in God and submission to State and capital. In educating ourselves and others to these realities, we begin to lose the habit of a mind ingrained by religious doctrine – the habit of blind, unquestioning obedience to our supposed superiors; we begin to take control of our lives. 



Anarchosyndicalism: eco-cred or cynical sell?

It is now clear that capitalist mass production cannot be reconciled with ecological sustenance. The links between hierarchy, industrialism and ecological destruction are recognised by anarchosyndicalists.

There are more than passing similarities between anarchosyndicalism and some sections of the green movement. Among these similarities are decentralisation, regionalism, direct action, sabotage, autonomy, and pluralism and diversity. The works of Graham Purchase and the late Judi Bari have gone a long way towards outlining the theoretical and practical implications of anarchosyndicalism for ecology, and vice versa.

Anarchosyndicalists reject the ideas that ecology is external to questions of production and that it is a distraction from the essential task of organising workers. The workplace is but one of the sites of social resistance. Given its prominence as a realm of capitalist discipline and hegemony, environmental activists must appreciate the significance of struggles about everyday workplace relations. In turn, those social realms which some radical greens typically counter-pose to the workplace are also influenced by matters of class, profit and accumulation.

work but not as we know it

Anarchosyndicalism seeks a radical alteration of the structure and meaning of work. Production within an anarchosyndicalist vision must include the provision of ecologically sensitive foods, energy or transportation. Work, newly organised along decentralised and democratic lines, could involve materials and practices with a diminished impact upon the local environment or "bioregion". Anarchosyndicalism addresses the undermining influences of the way contemporary work is organised and calls for the replacement of rapacious profit-driven capitalist production with production that is socially necessary and organised around human and ecologically sensible considerations. Anarchosyndicalists are interested neither in profit nor in growth, and their conception of industry has nothing to do with capitalist consumerism. For anarchosyndicalists, overcoming ecological devastation depends upon developing ways of living that involve relations based on mutual respect.

In addition, the re-integration of production with consumption, so that members of a community contribute what they can to social production, will allow a decisive break with the

mass hysterics of capitalist-style consumerism. People might consume that which they've had a hand in producing; they might use free time for more creative activities rather than tedious, unnecessary production of luxuries. Thus, much of society could be freed from requirements of growth and mass consumption.

While anarchosyndicalism opposes large-scale, centralised, mass-production, unlike the lingering fundamentalism of some quarters of the green movement, it does not call for a complete, immediate break with industrialism. Such calls contradict radical eco-philosophical emphases upon interconnectedness, mutualism and continuity. They are not only utopian, but also ignore questions concerning the continued impact of the toxic remains of capitalist industry. Society can't be simply disconnected from impacts on nature, such as global warming or ozone depletion. Where does toxic waste get put? What of the abandoned factories? How will decommissioning occur? Workers, when controlling such industries, will offer insights into such problems.

Anarchosyndicalism envisages the dismantling of the factory system, its work, hierarchies, and regimentation. This may involve a literal dismantling of factories alongside conversion towards "soft" forms of localised production. Likewise, productive activity can be conceived in terms of restoration, including research into a region's natural history. Reconstruction might be understood in terms of food and energy provision or recovery monitoring. Certain industrial processes will, of course, still be necessary - how would bikes or windmills be produced, for example? The failure to develop democratic workers' associations would then seem to render even the most well considered ecology scenarios untenable. Not engaging such possibilities restricts green radicalism to mere utopia building.

Finally, anarchosyndicalists argue for the construction of "place" around the contours of geographical regions, in opposition to the boundaries of nation states which show contempt for ecological boundaries as marked by topography, climate, species distribution or drainage. Nation states will be replaced by decentralised federations of "bioregional" communities.

Local community is therefore the context of social/ecological identification. Eco-defence, then, begins at local levels - in homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods - through industrial and agricultural practices, developed and adapted to specific ecological characteristics. This is a reflection of an anarchosyndicalist perspective which encourages people to broaden

and unite small and/or individual actions, such as saving a park or cleaning up a river, towards regional efforts of self-determination, protecting local and regional ecosystems. The point here, however, is not to draw plans for the future. Specific questions about the status of cities, organisation of labour, means of production, or methods of distribution can only be addressed through the outcome of active practice and participation.


free labour, save resources

Human relations with nature pose crucial and difficult questions. These relations, under capitalism, have taken the form of "jobs", where nature and labour both become commodified. Indeed, nature as "resources", and work as "jobs", are the twin commodities necessary for capitalist expansion. Thus, capitalist notions of growth, accumulation and commodification are crucial concerns for ecological politics. To take

strikes are unmatched in their capacity to confront corporate greed

ecology seriously means that these notions must be confronted in a radical manner.

All this raises interesting questions regarding the possibilities for a radical convergence of social movements. While most attempts to form labour and environmentalist alliances have pursued Marxian approaches, we might suggest that more compelling alternatives could be expected from anarchists and libertarian socialists. Perhaps radical greens should pay more attention to anarchosyndicalist ideas which might shake up the contemporary green movement just as syndicalism shook up the labour movement earlier this century. Confronting "jobs versus environment" blackmail requires nothing less than militant labour-based organisations arguing from a position of strength, and arming workers with the necessary weapons to confront capital and strike over ecological concerns.

Of course, strikes are unmatched in their capacity to confront corporate greed. There is no more effective counter-force to capital accumulation and the pursuit of profit than the power of workers to stop work to achieve their demands. Ecological protection, as with work conditions, benefits or wages, must be fought for, and this inevitably means, within the current context, that they must be struck for. 



Letters

Send letters to:
DA-SF (letters), PO Box 1095,
Sheffield, S2 4YR.
All letters are welcome, but space is
always very short. Make yours
concise, brief and questioning if you
want it printed.

Dear DA,

Congratulations, I found your recent 'Education' issue thought-provoking. As a teacher in Higher Education (HE), like any job, you acquire a 'view' of what education means. This certainly helped broaden my horizons and (re)evaluate the concept. One small point - there was plenty on education ideas, but how might education be 'rationed' in a post-revolutionary society? ('revolutionary education economics?')

I am particularly disturbed by New Labour's attitude to education. HE access may be expanding - but what exactly are all these students getting access to? In my place, typical of the red brick sector, resources and actual conditions for students are plummeting, while we direct more of our efforts to paperwork to meet targets to *prove* that standards are the same. It is like doing tricks with mirrors in the fading light.

New Labour may talk against selection, streaming and elitism, but the reality is that you can only go to university now if you have a few grand in the bank. They are even streaming teachers themselves, with the new 'superteacher' pay bracket. I can't wait for that to hit HE, we'll all be falling over ourselves to do the bosses bidding and spend long days filling in those quality forms so we can have a chance at the big pay rise (sod the students).

Recently, I was handed down an edict to check students have paid fees and not let them in classes if they haven't. The buck gets passed for chasing 'non-payment' all the way from Tony Blair (who made it) to me (who could be sacked for not obeying). Not wanting to ignore orders, I'm now informing my students that they may want to consider strikes, sabotage, or non-payment campaigns as a way of fighting back. That should help the 'self-managed learning' process Tony keeps wittering on about. DW

"dockers" and the media

Dear DA,

I'm always a bit uneasy when bitter and personal experiences get turned into "entertainment" by the established media. Remember "Dockers", shown on Channel 4? It was a well-intentioned and powerful drama that couldn't fail to move the viewer, especially anyone with similar experiences. However, the reviews in the "quality" press, while praising the writing and acting, carried a more sinister undertone.

The Guardian is typical in that the reviewer found time to write off the dockers as "relics of a bygone era". Their struggle may have been just but they are patronised as "naïve", and their tactics as "old fashioned".

Compare this with the case of the Crichtley Labels dispute. 31 workers won one of the longest running industrial struggles in Britain. They were sacked in February 1997 for striking over derecognition of their union, the CWU. After two and a half years on strike, all staff were eventually offered new jobs and £325,000 in compensation. And what did the Guardian have to say about this? - er, approximately nothing.

It seems to me that, as far as the media are concerned, if you lose a strike, then you are a loser and otherwise ignored. If you win, you can't be called a "relic of a bygone era", so it's easier to just ignore you completely. TL

Dear DA,

We are writing to correct an omission from our reports on the Michal Patera case in DAs 11 and 12. As well as thanking all those who made donations to Michal's defence fund, we should also have thanked those who helped organise the May Day benefit. Therefore, we would like to thank everyone who made a positive contribution to the successful event, including the Dole Claimers and the North London Anarcho-Syndicalist Choir. Members of London Class War and the Anarchist Black Cross also helped with organisation, but we'd especially like to thank London ACF (now AF) for their efforts, which were crucial to the event. Thanks also to all those who've supported our pickets. In solidarity, SolFed International Secretariat.

Dear DA,

In the article entitled "After Kosova: what the papers don't say" (DA12), you print "...Without the cover of war, the Serb forces would have been unable to commit the atrocities they did against the Albanian Kosovars." Now, I may be mistaken, but weren't these atrocities being done BEFORE 'our', er, 'heroic' bombing of trains, etc. from 30-60,000ft? Perhaps it wasn't quite on the same scale as during the NATO attack, but to blame NATO for the kidnappings, tortures, rapes and murders done by the Serbian forces is ridiculous. People must be blamed/credited for the things they themselves do. I just hope the author doesn't stop blaming the deaths of six million Jews, etc. on the Nazis and their collaborators, and start blaming it all on the Allies because they bombed Germany!

I was wondering why it is DA's policy to not credit contributions? I personally would like to see each article marked as to its origin (from a member of DA/SF, SWP, ICC, etc.) and status (DA/SF policy/theory, etc.)

Several years ago, while running the ANL half of a joint ANL/SWP stall, I formed the opinion that the SWP's line was that it's possible to get rid of capitalism while allowing small businesses to remain in the hands of their capitalist owners, and that we could get rid of money while retaining wages and prices. Also, because they would be the biggest party/group, they would be the ones to say what happens during/after the revolution, rather than the 'Soviets'/workers' councils. Because the SWP 'represents' the workers' vanguard, and are thus more politically aware than the ordinary members of the 'Soviets'/workers' councils. And anybody who disagreed with these ideas would be called counter-revolutionary and be 'looked after' by the workers' militia (controlled by the SWP, of course).

I've mentioned all this because I think it would make an interesting set of articles if you print noted only what the SF thinks but also what other parties/groups think. After all, if we are to win and defend the revolution successfully, we have to actually know what we are fighting for and against, we cannot just say "we'll leave all that until afterwards!", because we won't really know what we are fighting for! I would suggest you get this info from the other parties/groups by interviewing them or sending them questionnaires, rather than spending weeks reading everything they've ever published! DP.

ed: The DA Collective opposes personality cults, and we think signing articles encourages them. The ideas are important - not the authorship. We certainly never said or would say politics can be left for after the revolution. DA column inches are precious, and we do print a wide range of ideas (including from various 'groups'). Articles on why parliamentary parties (however 'revolutionary') are bankrupt have appeared in previous DAs - and no doubt will again. For more on revolutionary politics and tactics, try the SelfEd Collective - see *DAresources*, p.35.



Extended offer - now available for the over 50s

Bare-Faced Messiah: The true story of L. Ron Hubbard.

Russell Miller. Sphere Books, 1988.

This classic of anti-cult literature remains one of the most accessible accounts of cult culture. Don't be put off by the 500 referenced pages of biography, the easy style and endless plot will ensure you go through them like a hot knife through a tub of marg. Nevertheless, for those who can't be bothered to go and get it from the library, here is the full story, condensed just for you.

Hubbard was born in 1911, and grew up into a likeable rogue, mad genius, manic depressive and paranoid - but with a powerful 'presence' and ability to 'transfix' some people and hold their attentions into the bargain. He was capable of huge volumes of work output - he made his living primarily as a science fiction writer. After 'launching' Scientology in the 1940s, he produced over 60 books on it in the period 1948-57, at which point he was churning out new revelation-based books at about one every two months.

The key to his financial fortune was his idea to change his salary from Scientology from a flat rate to a proportional pay scheme in 1957. His salary immediately leapt into millions and then rose exponentially. The same year, he decided to change his pseudo-psycho-science called 'Scientology' into a religion, which involved large tax credits and calling various parts of the growing Scientology Inc bureaucracy after church-sounding names like 'ministries', etc. This timed perfectly with the post-war religion boom in the US - no coincidence, since he had incorporated paranoid anti-communism too, at the time of McCarthyism.

An excellent speaker, full of charisma and bold as brass, Hubbard had a knack of mixing enough truth to be almost believable, and on a one-to-one basis, he was an empowering conversant. A favourite saying he had was 'if it's not true for you, it's not true' - believe only what you want to believe. And he did - he had an amazing talent for lying and apparently deluding himself.

At the heart of Scientology is therapy, using basic hypnosis/regression methods, and every day, Scientologists would spend time 'running' (or 'processing') each other.

Regression often apparently went beyond birth, and even conception, to past lives - competition was rife on who could 'find' the most extraordinary past life. Jesus of Nazareth was a predictably popular past life, as were various prominent queens and conquerors - though no-one ever admitted to having been Attila the Hun, Pontious Pilate or Gengis Khan.

Paranoia was built-in. Aside from communists, the US state and the medical profession were 'after' Scientology - the latter because it threatened to break their monopoly on healing, the former because it exposed state plots all over the place. Scientologist paranoia reached new heights of hysteria when the FBI actually did start pursuing Scientology (or rather Hubbard, because of his countless dodgy activities).

Anyone who 'blew' (left) was cut off, shunned, branded a faker and a 'lost cause'. As joining usually meant severing all links with friends and family and 'pooling' possessions to Scientology, no-one 'blew' lightly. As everyone was in a 'ministry', even senior figures were penniless (except Hubbard, who was the opposite). If you broke the 'rule' - or if anyone senior suspected you of being disloyal, slacking, etc., you would get a 'condition' - a penal sentence involving anything from wearing a grey rag on your arm to being ruthlessly sued, chased and harassed by Hubbard or his Texan

conservative zealot wife, Mary Sue. When she pronounced her dogs 'clear' (free of earthly weakness), they thereafter barked every time someone came near who had committed crimes against the Hubbards in some lifetime or other. Baffled luckless newcomers spent hours in purgatory, soul-searching over deep, dark crimes they didn't even know they had committed.


Hubbard was the con man's dream package of keen interpersonal skills, complete lack of ideological baggage (such as desire to tell the truth), and apparent lack of any emotional attachment (he hardly noticed his many children) - all in all, a streamlined, highly effective con machine. At a time when sci-fi was in, he could juxtapose the unbelievable with the incredible, and create spellbinding stories rather like a magician

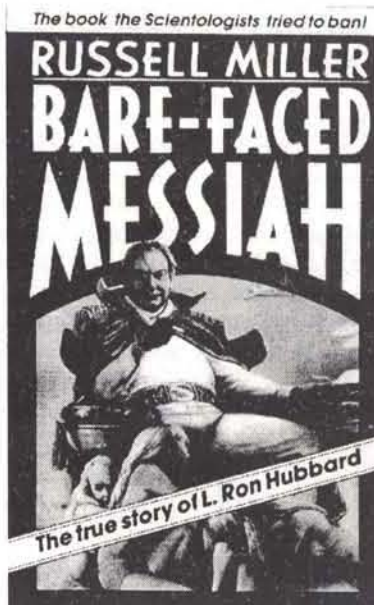
Shortened summary of Scientology (and cults generally):
 Key methods - oppression, bullying, hierarchy, blackmail/threats.
 Key marketing tools - 'belonging', escape (from a very real big bad world), new confidence/security, and awe/worship.

uses mirrors. On top of all his, as he said himself, he had an overriding "insatiable urge for power and money".

Around the mid 1960s, Scientology (and Hubbard) was being exposed world-wide, and he took to the seas, along with his elite entourage of nubile pubescent leotard-clad power-wielding girls ('messengers'). From then on, Hubbard's slow decline to paranoid, tantrum-driven, manic, unkempt, salivating, wild-staring fat old man with rotten teeth.

Scientology was (and is) certainly capable of causing mental derangement and enslavement through fear, delusion and debilitation, from which some people find it almost impossible to escape. The idea that your files of innermost secrets (people's notes on your regression sessions and daily E-meter tests - a kind of lie detector) could be used against you at any time is understandably a powerful tool - especially when you must never know what is in them (so you don't know what others know about you).

But the book leaves many questions unanswered. Who were the 'vulnerable' people Scientology targeted? How did Hubbard 'work' on people? No doubt he was an 'excellent' hypnotist and perfected his mind control techniques. What Miller fails to touch on is that it was only people who were looking for a real alternative, and therefore who were drawn to (not sucked in, at least not at first) Scientology, who became involved. These were real people, like you and me. And why did they stay? - Presumably they were getting something out of it - there must have been some pluses to outweigh the 'obvious' minuses? Miller gets the facts and the storyline, but fails to get 'into' his characters - at the end, you feel you have read an entertaining book, but you don't feel you have been in the minds of the Scientologists. One is left fearing that Miller refuses (or can't) see the obvious - that people were and are attracted to cults because modern capitalism is so crap (it is surely no coincidence that Scientology and its ilk is concentrated in the US and the West). The reality is that Scientology worked by using oppression and bullying, corruption and heavy-handed blackmail - much like your average capitalist employer or Plc. But that's another story. 



Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, delusion and the appetite for wonder

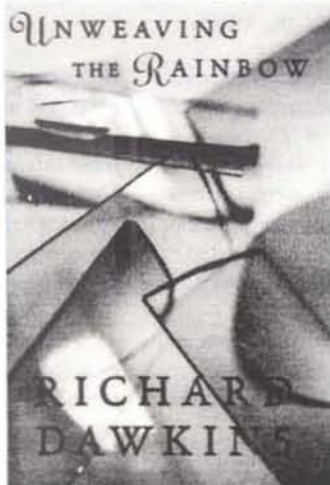
Richard Dawkins.
Penguin, 1999, ISBN 0-14-026408-6, £8.99

The Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University explores a wide variety of themes. Taking a poem by Keats, who believed that Newton had destroyed the poetry and beauty of the rainbow by breaking it down into the prismatic colours, Dawkins intends to show that far from being destructive of poetry and wonder, science, when written well, can be both beautiful and poetic. Much of the book is devoted to seeking out what Dawkins calls 'bad poetic science' and contrasting it to scientific material that is written well, enabling public understanding and progress of knowledge.

Also, what Dawkins wants to do is to counter the poetic fear or antipathy towards science as well as incorporate some good poetry into what scientists write about. He says: "It is my thesis that poets could better use the inspiration provided by science and that, at the same time, scientists must reach out to the constituency that I am identifying with, for want of a better word, poets". Dawkins tries hard throughout the book to write poetically but, at the end, one really wonders if poetry is best left to poets. What is really at the base of this book is the rejection of what Dawkins sees as mysticism in science, anti-science and a host of current theories on the place of science in today's world. He explains his preoccupations in these terms: "Hijacking by


pseudo-scientists is not the only threat to our sense of wonder. Populist 'dumbing down' is another... A third is hostility from academics sophisticated in fashionable disciplines. A voguish fad sees science as only one of many cultural myths, no more true or valid than the myths of any other culture".

A whole raft of activities, from horoscopes to futurologists, comes under fire in what follows. It seems perfectly legitimate to this reviewer to do so; much of which passes for science and most of New Ageism seem to be based on very dubious fanciful foundations. But Dawkins' way of showing the fictitious nature of many of these practices should also be turned on the practice of science itself, something that Dawkins is utterly unwilling to do. He rejects a lot of theories which have called science into question, which have, for example, applied feminist theories to the ways in which science is performed, its objectives and results. Many of these so-called post-modern theories may be flawed and some may be downright absurd (as he does show in this book), but rather than considering the more cogent theories, he just rejects the




whole lot as an attack on the integrity of science and its performers. Within his account, there does not seem to be much room for the criticism of science or scientists; what there can be, however, is either 'bad' or 'good' poetry about science. Surely science and what it presents itself to us as is made up of a number of aspects: experimentation, cultural and

financial influences, the personal biases of the scientists themselves, and many other factors. What is disappointing about Dawkins' book is that he does not engage with the criticism that science in the West has undergone since the post-war, in the light of scientists involvement in atomic programmes or in racist genetics, for example. A more robust and convincing book would have been written if he had at least tried to do this.

While some of the post-modern theories on science are a bit wacky (and some are ludicrous), Dawkins could have contributed a lot more to the public understanding of science if he himself had kept off the poetry and showed in a less self-interested way that critiques of science can be valid, can improve the way science is done and can inform our choices in a technological world. 

The Prawn Cocktail Party:
The Hidden Power behind New Labour.
C. Ramsey.
Vision Paperbacks, 1998. £9.99

Generally a 'socialist' perspective from a Labour Party member, this is an accessible account of British post-war politics. Subscribes to the 'poor investment, City dominated' view of Britain and illustrates how far socialism has drifted from its original intentions.


Solutions, such as unions and management joining forces against the City, reveals a lack of any class struggle perspective. If you want a good exposé of the 3rd Way and where it leads, look no further; if you are looking for real alternatives, leave it on the shelf. 



Do Or Die No. 8 £3.80

(£5 incl. from Do or Die, c/o 6 Tilbury Pl, Brighton, E Sussex, BN2 2GY, England.)

Do or Die has gone chunkier with this 350 page epic annual crammed with reports and commentary from the world-wide ecological front lines. The contacts and reviews listings are numerous and helpful, but the real strength lies in the direct action reportage format. Dozens of in-depth articles from literally around the world make for an ideal travelling companion, dip in and out coffee table book, and all-round indispensable confidence, optimism and morale booster.


It does not set out to be too analytical (some of the attempts are a bit patchy) - the best bits stick mostly to good solid accounts of direct actions. Within the wide environmental action movement, which meanders from the woolly jumpers to the back to caveman (sic) types, certainly a reasonable proportion of people who claim membership of Earth First! must be the most together, organised and promising of all. Uncompromising - at least this far, the politics are sound - and above all, active - and you can read about them for cheap - who could ask for more? I could titillate you with tidbits from some of the best articles on struggles from Kenya, Papua, India, etc... But what the hell, you're going to have to get your own copy, anyway. Essential. 

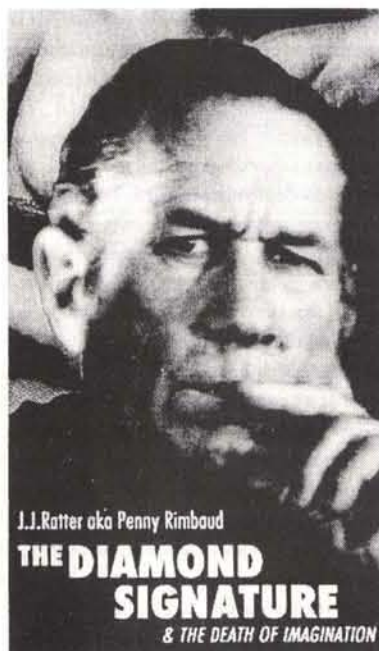


The Diamond Signature
J. J. Ratter aka Penny Rimbaud
 Published by AK Press

The name Penny Rimbaud will be familiar to those of you who, like me, spent their teenage years listening to Crass and probably, for many present day anarchists, he is the man primarily responsible for condemning us to lifetime membership of the awkward squad. It comes as something of a disappointment then to read this book, described in fittingly pretentious style on the back cover as, "An enormous-ly Ambitious + sonorous work of the Eye-magination"-Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Rather than some of the half-remembered glory of the Crass days, we get a sad and pathetic ramble through the tortured psyche of the author.

Lots of J. J.'s "hard cock rising", beating women, plenty of self-loathing and, if all else fails, chuck in a few sex/death references and the odd nod towards concentration camp/naked body confusion. Apparently, this book was originally begun 25 years ago. I guess we all write crap now and again (some of us still do!), but most of us manage to put it into perspective. Maybe this is what is called "cutting edge" in the literary world and maybe I'd have a different opinion of this book if it was 1979 and I wasn't such an old cynic. I went back and listened to some old Crass albums for the first time in years and, you know what? They don't sound all that good either.

Wasn't it Crass who warned us about having heroes? 



**CRASS ART AND OTHER
 PRE POST-MODERNIST MONSTERS**




GEE VAUCHER

Crass Art And Other Pre Post-Modernist Monsters

Gee Vaucher


Published by AK Press

By contrast, the artwork that went with Crass albums still looks good. Gee Vaucher was responsible for the brilliantly unsettling photomontages that accompanied such legendary works as, "Christ the Album", "Yes Sir, I Will" and that classic singalong anti-war single, "How does it feel to be the Mother of a Thousand Dead". All the greatest hits are here and even the odd bit of Rimbaud/Ratter ranting, which comes over far better than the dire "Diamond Signature". Much of this stuff is from the late 70s/early 80s, so it's heavy on the Thatcher Government critique. Pictures of dead children being served up at rich bastards' tables,

politicians heads superimposed on odd bodies, war, death and destruction by the shovel full. Sometimes humorous, but mostly unremittingly bleak and savage, like the music. A welcome contrast is provided by some of Gee's pre and post Crass work, although not enough in my opinion. The book and magazine illustrations are, in some ways, the most satisfying. Given a strict brief, the illustrations for New Yorker magazine and Rolling Stone are much tighter and, in many ways, more powerful for it. Post Crass work is mainly portraits done in a freer, more painterly style than the in-your-face political stuff for Crass. Something for everyone. 

20 year Millenium Wildcat
Donald Rooum

ISBN 0900 384972. £1.95. Freedom Press.

Donald Rooum's Wildcat comic strip has been appearing in the fortnightly Freedom forever (since 1980, in fact). Despite this, the ideas just keep on coming... Actually, rather surprisingly, and despite a total lack of sense of humour, some of the strip had me, well, almost smirking out loud. It's a matter of taste, I guess. 

THE LUGANO REPORT: ON PRESERVING CAPITALISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Susan George - Pluto Press - £9.99

The managers of Capitalism are facing a dilemma; the 'free-market' system is becoming unsustainable and in danger of collapse due to overpopulation, civil wars, and environmental decay. Something has to be done to protect their long-term profits.

A 'Working-Party' is commissioned to consider the solutions. A decision is made by the 'Party' that Capitalism can only survive globally with a population of no more than four billion people. Therefore, by the year 2020, this figure must be achieved. The Southern Hemisphere will fall victim to most of the reductions. Because of the extremely unpopular decisions being made, the identities of the group must be protected. Consequently pseudonyms are used in the form of meadow flowers, i.e. - Edelweiss, Foxglove, Dill and Snowbell. They proceed to administer operations that will "win the hearts and minds of men", which include, military enforcement, political and economic subordination and Population Reduction Strategies (PRS).


The proposals for PRS are particularly unsavoury. A plan of action is devised and named 'The Four Horsemen of the Apoca-

lypse', whose tactics include; War, Conquest, Pestilence and Famine. All of which the 'Party' plan to use by stealth and with the manipulation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and any other tool of the 'free-market' system. The 'Working Party' see the eventual outcome as a world of plenty for all, with peace, freedom and happiness in a Capitalist Utopia.

Sound scary, eh? Well, don't worry yourselves, because this report is only a hoax. A bit of self-indulgence by the author. A bit of fun.

The only problem is, as you read this excellent piece of work, which is well researched and backed up by factual information, you begin to realise that there could well be a 'Working Party' that has already contrived recommendations such as the above. Anybody with any knowledge of world current affairs will be well aware of the draconian economic measures being placed on 'Third World' countries by the likes of the IMF and the WTO, such as

the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). After bailing out a country of its debts, and enforcing the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the Government of that country must then open its borders to 'foreign investment', which must have no restrictions placed upon it. This 'investment', no doubt, comes with all the horrors of the 'free market' (non-union cheap/slave labour, pollution, unemployment, poverty, disease, etc.)

To a certain extent, this book has been written as a 'worse case scenario', but the 'Lugano Report' can also be seen as a real possibility. For confirmation, check out the role of the World Bank, the IMF and the G7 'Working Parties'. Now, they are scary. The lesson from this book is that the Capitalist system will always find a way to profit from any situation, however horrendous it may seem, especially when controlled by unaccountable transnational corporations interested only in financial gain. 

periodicals

The Freethinker.

Vol. 119 No. 8 £1

Published by the Secular Humanist Society

12-month sub £10 or £7 unwaged
Write to G.W. Foote & Co, 25 Red Lion Square,
London WC1R 4RL, England

Founded in 1881, The Freethinker is a slim monthly, which, as you might guess, covers all things religious. Now, I'm as anti-religious as the next atheist, but I have to say I found this magazine rather boring. By the end of it, I was left with little desire to search out another copy and the reason is simple. Despite going to a Catholic school and having a fairly "christian" upbringing, I have now moved on. I no longer feel the need to constantly be reminded of the iniquities of the various churches. I feel I've got more important things to do (like building the new society within the shell of the old, staying optimistic, oh, and writing reviews for DA.)


The Freethinker, however, seems to waste an inordinate amount of time sniping at the stupidity of religious types. Now, we all have the occasional titter at the god-botherers' expense but, after a while, it gets just a tad tiresome, and that's why you'll only find one issue of DA devoted to the subject. Where is

the substance to the arguments against organised religion? Where is the debate about alternative ethical philosophy? What is left when the 6th form common room sniggering ends? It seems you'll find few answers in *The Freethinker*, which seems more concerned with simply removing religious privilege from society rather than its wholesale reorganisation. For many of us, atheism is simply a part of personal politics and not the overriding reason for being politically active. This may seem a little harsh on *The Freethinker* but, without putting atheism into some sort of context, you are left to argue for a fairer form of capitalism and little more. The separation of church and state is something many capitalist, fascists and socialists have been arguing for for... well, at least since 1881. By all means, have a pop at the religious establishment, but then move on and look at how real and lasting liberation can be achieved. 

Fortean Times. The Journal of Strange Phenomena.

No. 126, September 1999.

The Fortean Times has been going for a number of years, since 1973, to be exact. As is explained in every issue, it derives its name from Charles Fort (1874-1932), who was interested in 'strange phenomena' and the 'paranormal'. Each issue contains articles on diverse weird happenings or supposed happenings around the world. For example, the September issue has articles on Spanish 'werewolves', remote viewing, penis vanishing panics... You get the picture. What is less obvious to any reader who judges the mag by its skin is that the content is fact of good honest quality, and the reviews section, as well as the main articles, are highly sceptical and even reassuringly satirical of whatever is supposed to have happened in the twilight zone.

The garish front covers may catch the eye, but they seriously lack cred. Not only that, aliens with big eyes carrying away fainted women doesn't fill you with much confidence about the content. Am I taking all this too seriously? It's mainly a bit of fun, and interesting fun at that. If you like collecting stories about werewolves, UFOs, elephants that die of grief... it's all here. 

I was born a slave

'It is degrading to human nature to petition your oppressors'

Robert Wedderburn, black preacher, propagandist & revolutionary

I was born a slave - Yuval Taylor, 1999

Vol. 1: 1770-1847 *An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives.*

Edinburgh: Payback Press ISBN 0-86421-904-1

Vol. 2: 1849-91. Edinburgh: Payback Press ISBN 0-86421-904-2

Britain's Slave Trade - S. I. Martin, 1999

London: Channel 4 Books ISBN 0-7522-1785-2

& Accompanying Channel 4 series first shown in October 1999.

It is a singularly sobering task to read the narratives set out in Yuval Taylor's two large volumes. To do this is to be forced to contemplate the complete barbarity of western society.

From the start, Charles Johnson's introductions put the question of slavery in the United States into stark context. He states that slavery was not a new phenomenon and that it had been practised by almost all societies at some point. Slavery was not something that Europeans imposed upon Africans, in common with the rest of the world. Slavery was common in Africa (usually as a set-term punishment for criminals or for prisoners of conflicts). African rulers, merchants and elites partici-

British involvement in the triangular trade was integral to the events which led to the Industrial Revolution

pated actively in the North Atlantic slave trade. What Charles does seek to do is to point out that there was something qualitatively and quantitatively different about the practice of slavery in the Americas and in the transatlantic trade. He highlights the sheer extent and depth of the horrific nature of that 'peculiar institution'. In the United States it took countless insurrections, and as the last narrative by William Parker shows, physical resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law by ex-slaves and free blacks to spark a civil war to end the legal denial of human existence of a whole section of the population.

Many of the narratives are written by slaves who, at one time or another, were house slaves, or who lived in the northern slaves states such as Maryland, for such slaves had the greatest chance to escape successfully. It is clear that these slaves' lives were not as assaulted as those in the southern slave states, but they were by no means comfortable and, most of all, they were still not considered their own.

Whilst not shying away from the physi-

cal torture associated with slavery, the narratives address the pains of the lack of liberty, the removal of freedom to have a personality and the mental torture of being considered nothing more than chattel. In so doing, they get to the heart of the basic horrors of the institution rather than simply being a potential voyeuristic journey into a sadistic world.

A look at Martin's book, and more so the four part television series on Channel 4, help put even more context on the slave trade and to put the Britain of the sixteenth century onwards at the centre of exploiting this trade. The book itself is a fairly light (and over priced) read. It is however clearly argued and paced acting as a good introduction and reminder to Britain's key role in the slave trade to the Americas, and crucially the impact that the slave trade had on Africa and Britain, as well as the Caribbean and North America. In Africa, the transatlantic slave trade (and it was seen as trade) caused massive depopulation. Over 350 years from 1500, an estimated ten to fifteen million Africans arrived in the new world as slaves, with four to six million dying before arrival (additional to the seventeen million thought to have been taken via the trans-Saharan trade). This from a starting population of about forty seven million for the whole of Africa. It was not only the massive numbers involved, but also the methods of the slave trade that deeply undermined and scarred the societies in West Africa. At the start of the trade - initiated by the Spanish and Portuguese, Britain being a late starter but fast learner - it was a trade amongst equals. The European merchants provided the African merchants with goods they wanted, and the African merchants provided the slaves. The British moved in and upped the scale of activities, firstly from the port of London with Royal monopoly, then Bristol breaking that monopoly and then Liverpool taking over. The Europeans set up garrison forts along the coast, rarely venturing inland to gather slaves themselves. They promoted and escalated the low-level warfare between various African societies. It was



I Was Born a Slave

An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives

EDITED BY YUVAL TAYLOR
FOREWORD BY CHARLES JOHNSON

VOLUME ONE
1772-1849

James Albert
Olaudah Equiano
(Ottobah Cadee)
William Gates
Nat Turner
Charles Bull
Moses Roper
Frederick Douglass
Levi & Maria
Clark
William Wells Brown
Joseph Hemm

often the captives from such battles as well as criminals who in the pre-existing African system were taken into slavery.

Martin argues, convincingly, that development of the British involvement in the triangular trade was integral to the events which led to the British Industrial Revolution. It is undoubtedly true that much of the money to finance development in southwest England came from the establishment of the copper manufacturing industry to provide cheaper, better quality copper for the discerning African traders. British merchants invested the huge amounts of money they made in further industrialisation. Further fortunes were made on the plantation of the Caribbean and these were further invested back into the industrialisation in Britain, long after the slave trade itself had been abolished. Thus, investment and early purchases from plantation owners supported the development of the steam engine, that investment of merchants as well as the cotton from the plantations developed the mills of South Lancashire, that investment from the merchants helped finance the development

of improved iron production. Many families made their fortunes from slavery, and many large corporations owe no small amount to the millions of slaves who were stripped of their humanity, tortured, raped and murdered for profit. A quick look at high street banks would show Barclays, National Westminster and Midland (as examples) all with slaves' blood and misery in their ledgers - as has the Bank of England itself. Political power followed the money made from slave trade and slave plantations with the rich merchants buying themselves power and patronage in the Royal courts and in the Houses of Parliament. Even the Church, through the Bishop of London, financed its activities through slave holdings.

The role of religion and the religious is a central theme to both Taylor's and Martin's books. Certainly the Church of England maintained an unhealthy attachment to slavery up to the bitter end. It is the non-conformists, however, who swap sides the earliest. Many of the merchants who made fortunes from slavery were non-conformists, as were the slave holders in the slave states of America. Indeed initially a number of the large Quaker families made much money from the trade, seeing it as a way to bring Christianity to the heathens!! However, many soon changed their minds and began to see slavery as actually detrimental to the souls of the slaves (it's not too clear if at the time the body was considered remotely important by such high thinkers) and, as such, they became abolitionists. In

who could read or write had to keep it a secret for fear of punishment. To be a slave was to live in constant fear of punishment, for whatever whim or reason the person who claimed to own you had.

To read the narratives is to descend into a land of terrible cruelty, licentiousness, idleness, hypocrisy, superstition and base barbarity. The slaveholding classes saw manual labour as beneath the dignity of whites, they therefore did nothing but torture and plot. It is noteworthy that, if you look at the list of words that start the paragraph, they were all used by

the organised power of slaves and help explain their obsession in keeping them uneducated and disparate.

The tendency to push their faults on to those they oppress is something slavers hold in common with all oppressors. The same thing is found in the justifications for patriarchy, racism, homophobia, the class system, etc.

The narratives' style is a bit 'spiritual' in places, and the mass of information and feelings are difficult to manage if read consecutively. But these are the voices of the slaves themselves; they speak of cour-

these are the voices of the slaves; they speak of courage, ingenuity, compassion and hope in the face of tyrannical and brutal adversity

slaveholders to describe slaves and to justify their own exploitation of them. The slaveholder who only got into a sweat when whipping a slave accused slaves who did all their work for them of idleness. The slaveholder who raped women slaves, forced slaves into relationships and broke slave families, in turn accused slaves of licentiousness and lack of morals. The same slaveholders who invented laws making the condition of a child of a slave follow the mother (thus they could rape without fear of loss of heredity), then accused slaves of hypocrisy and cunning. Numerous narratives refer to the rape of women slaves by slavers and their families. Harriet Jacob's (Linda Brent) is the story of one such slave's attempts to resist the

age, ingenuity, compassion and hope in the face of tyrannical and brutal adversity. Martin's book is also a very informative read, written in an easy style, but detailed and well argued. It is a good accompaniment to the narratives, since it dispels the myth that Britain and the British colony of Canada were the lands of freedom. It would be all too easy to slip into the idea that slavery was just a problem of the United States. But to do this would ignore the role of others, and the long term effects across three continents.

Needless to say there is a lot in both works which is important to remember and to comprehend. The fight against slavery should be seen as merely the start of the fight against injustice and oppression. Its victims and its perpetrators need to be remembered; both these works do something towards that process of remembering.

The legacy of slavery in Britain is still with us; there is the political humbug, where, after fighting the abolition of slavery and still making money out of it around the world, the British establishment went on a moral crusade for human rights (Tony Blair would have fitted right in there). On the positive side, and in an attempt to find anything positive to end on, the anti-slavery movement in Britain was a genuine nationwide mass movement, where the volume of people taking an active, direct interest in an issue got things changed for the better. Despite the fact they were not legally entitled to any political opinion, vote or to sign petitions, the anti-slave movement activated many women (much to the annoyance of the establishment), and it sparked militant working class activity both in the cause of slavery abolition and for wider social change. 

the fight against slavery should be seen as merely the start of the fight against injustice and oppression

the narratives, religion and the spiritual journey away from slavery is a key role of many of the works included, especially in volume one covering the earliest period. There is much reflection on the religion of the slaveholders and those of the abolitionists, many of whom were in the same churches not only as each other but also as those slaves permitted any religious activity. All sides used the same religion to justify their stance and their actions. Slavers and their apologist ministers must have spent many hours digging through the grimy backwaters of the Old Testament for any old quote to use for justifications of their barbarity. One of the key concerns of slaveholders was to keep the slaves as ill educated and ill informed as possible. Few slaveholders would permit slaves to learn to read or write, and in fact, in many states, it was a criminal act to teach a slave. Slaves

demand of a slaver. Slaveholders who would whip, paddle, slash, cut, burn, lynch and experiment on slaves in addition to forcing hours of hard labour accused slaves of barbarism and violence. There was, as both narratives and the book by Martin show, violence from slaves. At no point was there merely passive resistance to slavery - mutinies and uprisings occurred from as soon as slaves were caught, whilst they were on the ships (with insurrection every eight to ten journeys) and in the plantations.

Slaves were constantly running away or fighting back; most were caught and severely punished. There were also organised revolts; one of the narratives is by Nat Turner, who was instrumental in one of these failed revolts. The reprisals throughout the slave states and beyond clearly show how scared the slaveholders were of



The Nation of Islam has made itself relevant to everyday life in institutionally racist Britain. It charms the underbelly of a disaffected black working class generation. Politics is limited to replacing a white Christian autocracy with a black muslim one, but plenty of people feel the appeal.

Nation of Islam: Charmed & dangerous

Since the 1970s, the historical "left-right" division of political theory and practice has been rendered more complex by the upsurge of movements committed to a political reading of Islam, and to the Islamisation of modern societies. Political Islam is, obviously, a phenomenon of Muslim communities; but it is as real a force in Bethnal Green or Harlesden, within the Islamic diaspora and the UK Afro-Caribbean communities, as within the Middle East. Groups adhering to Qur'anic texts and hadiths as the ideological basis for their practice can be both socially conservative and militantly anti-imperialist.

In his book *Re-Enchanting Humanity*, the American anarchist writer Murray Bookchin refers to "a loss of self-certainty" in political life, which has given rise to "an inwardly oriented - often misanthropic - spiritualism and a privatistic withdrawal from public life into mystical or quasi-mystical belief systems. "This generalised retreat from "reason" is also an explanation for the phenomenon of political Islam, but only partly - not least because it allows us to let ourselves off the hook. Political Islam has grown, both

here and in the Middle East and Africa, at a time when the political ideologies most associated with the values of the Enlightenment, Marxism, anarchism, and reformist socialism, have faced both fundamental crises (for the first and last of these) and numerical decline.

If political ideologies are tools by which we try to comprehend and actively change our world, then it is clear that for substantial numbers of Muslim peoples, the ideas of political Islam appear to provide a more coherent account

of the world than the analyses we proffer. The US right wing political theorist Samuel Huntington, writing in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, refers to a "Clash of Civilizations" and the "threat to Western interests" posed by "non-Western societies."

bombings

The popular press has picked up Huntington's portrayal of the "threat" from the East, and it has been used to justify the ongoing slaughter of the Iraqi people, and the bombings of Afghanistan and

the Sudan.

Equally, the West has happily turned a blind eye to the slaughter of the Chechnyan Muslims because it suited the interests of US capital to keep Boris Yeltsin's league of thieves in power, whatever the cost in Muslim lives. In "Political Islam", Joel Beinin and Joe Stork comment: "The conventional narrative of the origins of modern Islamic thought easily lends itself to the erroneous thesis that political Islam is the result of the failure of modern Muslims to assimilate European liberal ideas, such as the sepa-



ration of church and state, the rule of positive law, citizenship, and secular nationalism."

It is less the failure of modern Muslims to embrace the legacy of European liberalism that has led to the growth of militant Islam than the failure of the West to extend the privileges of liberal democracy to the non-Western world. The political freedom which Western secular academics love to posit as the humanist alternative to reactionary fundamentalism was denied by force to the Algerians by France, and the Egyptians by the British, while the West backed the reactionary Pahlavi regime regardless of the horrors it inflicted on the Iranian people. Moreover, Western

"politics of rage", we can only concede that the legacy of Western interventions in the Muslim world would provide ample justification for such rage, regardless of the vehicle chosen to express it. Lewis would have it that political Islam represents an irrational hatred of the "secular present".

That Islam as a monolithic theocracy does not exist appears to escape him. For most people, the promises of the "secular present" have been broken a thousand times over. Edward Said has noted that "in many - too many - Islamic societies, repression, the abrogation of personal freedoms, unrepresentative and often minority regimes, are either falsely legitimated or

organisations within your own community who reject entirely the "enlightened" world which has told you that you have no place, except as part of a reserve army of the poor, used to enable the enrichment of those who own the bricks and mortar all around you - which would you choose? Equally, the Nation of Islam tells black youth that the white man, "the number one hater, murderer, killer, liar, drunkard, homemonger hog-eater" is a "weak-blooded, weak-boned, weak-minded, pale-faced" devil, and that the black man is God. Which would you sooner be - "nigger" or "God"?

rules and realities

According to Anthony

celebrate as we chatter on the Net, looks from any vantage point other than the West, like the Americanisation of the world. Coca-Cola and MTV devour local cultures, and the share of the poorest fifth of the world's population in global income has dropped from 2.3

% to 1.4% between 1989 and 1998, while the income of the richest has risen. Political Islam is resistance through retreat. In an interview with Middle East Report (No. 153) the Muslim academic Shaikh Hamidal-Nayfar, editor of the journal 15/21 ("Fif-



teen stands for the 15th Century of the hijra, the beginning of the Islamic community; twenty-one signifies the fact that we are now living on the edge of the 21st Century"), describes the growth of political Islam in Tunisia following the fall of the Ben Salah government in Tunisia in 1970: "Young people saw that the government could strike a leftist pose and then switch to right-wing economic policies. Many were completely disorientated. We realised that this was proof that there was no fundamental policy orientation. (We) were uprooted. There was no longer any ideology (we) could connect with. A search for identity became characteristic of this period".

The Iranian revolution in 1979 gave focus to Al-Nayfar's search for definition, as it did to so many other Islamic intellectuals and groups, because of "the magnitude of the revolution, the participation of the entire Iranian population" and because it was seen as a revolt of the poor, a blow against

political Islam is a retreat from the future, but a retreat by people who no longer feel they can influence that future...

support for the state of Israel as the best guarantor of Western interests in the Middle East was predicated not on commitment to democracy but on its bloody suppression.

The 1975 alliance between the rightist Maronite Phalange and Israel (as US proxy) against the PLO-backed leftist Muslims in Lebanon buried the ideals of liberal democracy beneath mounds of corpses. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 made clear that self-determination might be a nice idea for Enlightenment scholars to toy with, but it had no place in the realpolitik of the Middle East. In 1992, the Algerian military intervened to suppress elections that would have brought the Islamic Salvation Front to power. Former US Secretary of State James Baker has acknowledged that "when I was at the state department, we pursued a policy of excluding the radical fundamentalists in Algeria, even though we recognised that this was somewhat at odds with our support for democracy. " If, as the conservative academic Bernard Lewis contends, political Islam is a

casuistically explained with reference to Islam (in a way that) also happens to correspond in many instances with the inordinate power and authority of the central state". Usually, as in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the West has no problem with such regimes. Political Islam is demonised only when its opposition to the "secular present" manifests itself in direct opposition to Western interests - the Chechnyans, Hizbollah, etc.

real life

If you're a Bengali growing up on the Isle of Dogs, told that you're blagging housing from the whites even though you live in an overcrowded shithole, seeing your kid brother get beaten up at school for being a Paki, watching Jack Straw on the TV ranting about "bogus asylum seekers", the "secular present" will seem a nightmare. If the political choices available to you were only a) a social democratic white left which wants to lobby the very politicians who determine the frontiers, the border controls of your world or b) political

Giddens, fundamentalism is a "call for a return to basic scriptures or texts, supposed to be read in a literal manner, (proposing) that the doctrines derived from such a reading be applied to social, economic or political life." Fundamentalism is a "refusal of dialogue in a world whose peace and continuity depend on it."

This is the same world where the US bombs Afghanistan after issuing a warning that all "non-Muslims" should leave the targeted area, and where Russia can bomb street markets in Grozny and fire on Chechen refugees heading for the Ingushetian border without rousing that ever-fickle "humanitarian concern" of the NATO powers. The question which remains is, simply, if there is this claimed refusal of dialogue - whose is the refusal, whose are the actions which constitute the threat to "peace and continuity"?

Political Islam is a retreat from the future, but a retreat by people who no longer feel they can influence that future. The "globalisation" we are urged to

imperialism. If, for us, the Iranian revolution was put to death by the consolidation of Islamic power, we have to remember that, for many, it remains a beacon of hope because it has held out for 20 years against the "great Satan."

enter NoI

The Nation of Islam is one of the fastest growing Islamic groups in the UK, particularly among disenfranchised black youth. Louis Farrakhan's group doesn't adhere to Qu'uranic authority in the way Islamic groups traditionally do - Farrakhanite Islam is a fusion of Garveyite black nationalism and Sufism. Farrakhan has, in the recent past, allowed the NoI to be linked with the National Front (in its Third Positionist phase), the Holocaust revisionist Arthur Butz, and Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance. The NoI paper, *The Final Call*, has carried articles by Gary Gallo, head of the US Third Positionist National Democratic Front, calling for the division of the US "into completely independent nations based on race." It is a fair bet that when people sign up for the NoI in Harlesden or Moss Side, they don't do so with the NoI's dubious past in mind.

The NoI in the UK is self-created - established by UK black Muslims drawn to its militant image, rather than by US outreach. Through its influence within hip-hop culture, Islamic black nationalism has become popular with urban black youth. The NoI



stands out because it has refused an urban culture that incorporates drug addiction and black on black violence. Farrakhan's explicit stance for self-respect and community pride has considerable resonance for activists who see their communities awash with crack, their friends brutalised by the police, and their fate in general of no concern to a predominantly white middle class left.

When Farrakhan says "You're dealing with death today, brothers and sisters, and you don't have time to play and party. You better put down your little drugs, the silly little reefer. You don't need to be high. You need to be more sober than the judge to get out of this condition. You need to

inequality and prejudice? Political Islam is in thrall to the past as a means of deferring the future. We have to show that our ideas are better tools for understanding and changing the world than the ideas put forward by Qu'uranic scholars. We have to be willing to challenge ideas that are obstacles to human emancipation wherever we encounter them. Whether it is white racism, black anti-semitism, Islamic oppression of women, we have to oppose it with a grasp of why such ideas take hold amongst groups of people with the least to gain from them. We're battling against the legacy of vanguardism on the left that used minority communities but offered nothing beyond lip

which is based around "mutual aid" is one we should seek to support and deepen. Simply put, we shouldn't wait for the NoI to take the initiative and then bemoan the fact, we should be setting up breakfast clubs, advice centres, street patrols, etc. ourselves. Anarchist involvement in day to day struggles should aim to show the extent to which we can determine the future by showing how we can wrest control of our lives today.

Political Islam in all its forms is a manifestation of a loss of belief in the possibility of social transformation other than that pursued in the favour of, and interests of, the rich. As we can't make the future, political Islam contends, we will

Farrakhan has recently allowed the Nation of Islam to be linked with the National Front, a Holocaust revisionist, and the White Aryan Resistance

wake up and see that your life is threatened", it makes sense in a way that the "Vote Labour", "General Strike" bullshit of the left never could. The NoI carries out street patrols to discourage drug dealers, monitor police activity and cut down street crime.

Much of their support and success comes from their advocacy of "do for self" - a belief that black communities should not be dependent on the state, which manifests itself in NoI restaurants, fishmarkets, farm land and the POWER (People Organized and Working for Economic Rebirth) programme, which is aimed at supporting black businesses. As one Chicago resident noted of the NoI inaction, "Police treat you like garbage... The Muslims treat you with respect, and the way they come to us is the way we come back to them."

exit strategy


So where does all this leave the prospect for building an anarchist movement committed to working class independence, and committed to the ending of

service to the real struggles against workplace racism, deportations, and race violence.

We have to recognise moreover that the idea of "do for self" is not automatically a call for black capitalism. Communities struggling to control their lives, tackle anti-social crime and drug abuse will seek out allies wherever they can find them, and part of what is being done in the name of Islam is no more than the re-forging of working class traditions of mutual aid, with a Farrakhanite gloss. Community schools, breakfast programmes and street patrols owe as much to the Panthers as the NoI, but the NoI has provided a focus at a time when the left is in disarray.

That aspect of "do for self"

control the past. There is no shortcut to winning people away from the false security of the past other than through demonstrating in practice how much power over our own fates we can wield, when we act collectively.

We also have to filter out and understand the progressive aspects of those ideologies which flee to the sanctuary of "tradition". We have to be better anti-imperialists than the advocates of Islam, and we have to be able to show that, through them, "do for self" will mean no more than a few black owned businesses in poor communities. Through us it will mean reclaiming every aspect of our lives from the State. 

For more information about issues raised in *CloserLook* articles, write to DA. Bargain sub. and contact details are on p.34

About Solidarity Federation...

Solidarity Federation is the new solidarity movement. Formed in March 1994, it consists of a federation of groups and individuals across England, Scotland & Wales. The basic foundation of Solidarity Federation is the Local.

down the local

People are getting together to form Locals - Solidarity Federation groups. Locals put solidarity into practice. In time, each Local will have a premises as a base for solidarity action in the local community. Locals are organising or getting involved in local campaigns across a wide range of issues - both in the community and in workplaces. Issues are wide-ranging: defending our natural and local environment and health; opposing racism, sexism and homophobia; in fact, anything which defends or contributes to our mutual quality of life. It is all part and parcel of building a solidarity movement.

direct action

Apart from being the name of this Quarterly, Direct Action is the tool which Locals use in all their work. At a basic level, this can be simply the spreading of information through leaflets, local bulletins and public meetings to raise awareness and involvement locally. However,

Direct Action is not limited to spreading information. It means a physical presence in defending and promoting a better quality of life. Fundamental to Direct Action is the reality that we can only rely on ourselves to achieve our goals. While we reserve the right to take opportunities to fight for improvements to our quality of life now, the solidarity movement must always remain independent from those we are demanding from. Solidarity Federation will accept neither leadership, charity, nor guidance from government or business - instead, we must couple our principle of solidarity with the practice of self-reliance.

networking

Solidarity Federation members who work in the same work sector have formed Networks. Their purpose is to promote solidarity amongst workers. Networks also use Direct Action to fight for better pay and conditions. Networks form the basis of a completely new labour movement, nothing like the Trade Unions, which are weakened by having to abide by ridiculous laws, and by hierarchical power structures and self-interested paid officials. The fundamentally different nature of Networks fits their fundamentally different aim.

where next?

As Locals and Networks grow, they practise community and workers' self-management. Eventually, industries will be run by producers and consumers. In other words, by workers (in Networks) and people in the wider community (Locals) who want the goods and services they provide. And this is no flight of fancy or text-book dream. As the solidarity movement grows in members and influence, so does the scope for action. Both the Locals and Networks have already established a reputation and are showing real results in membership and effectiveness.

global solidarity

Capitalism is international, so we need to be organised globally to oppose it and build a viable alternative. Nationalism and patriotism lead to pointless and false divisions, used as tools to fuel economic and bloody wars. Solidarity Federation opposes these in favour of a movement built on global solidarity. Solidarity Federation is the British section of the International Workers' Association (IWA), the anarcho-syndicalist association. This gives it essential international solidarity and experience from much larger

sections, such as the CNT (Spain) and USI (Italy). Founded in 1922, the IWA has a long history of solidarity in action; by the 2nd World War, over 5 million people worldwide were affiliated. A combination of war, fascism, and soviet 'communism' all but destroyed the movement, but after the Spanish CNT re-emerged in the late 70s, the IWA had a new lease of life. Today, there are sections ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members, and growth is rapid. At the last IWA Congress in Madrid, another 7 new sections were affiliated from South America, Africa, Europe and the former Soviet Union.

getting involved

A global solidarity movement can only gather strength as many more people who share the same aims get involved. Contacting Solidarity Federation offers the possibility of contributing to this growing momentum.

It is not like joining a club, union or political party - rather, it is an opportunity to channel your efforts for change and, at the same time, benefit yourself from the experience.

For more info, write to the SolFed Contact Point below.

**SF Contact Point: SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW
Tel. 0161 232 7889**

Email: manchesterSF@scandrac.demon.co.uk

Networks - make contact with others in your type of work -

Education Workers' Network, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.
Public Service Workers' Network, PO Box 1681, London N8 7DN.
Communication Workers' Network, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.


Locals - get involved locally in regular meetings and action -

North & East London SF, PO Box 1681, London N8 7LE.
Tel. 0181 374 5027
Red & Black Club, PO Box 17773, London SE8 4WX. Tel. 0171 358 1854
South-west Solidarity, PO Box 741, Swindon SN1 3UG
South Herts SF, PO Box 493, St Albans AL1 5TW.
West Midlands SF, PO Box 6705, Redditch, Worcs. B97 6SQ
Norfolk & Norwich SF, PO Box 487, Norwich MLO, NR2 3AL.
Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.
Tel. 0161 232 7889.
Sheffield SF, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR.
West Yorks Solidarity Federation, PO Box 5, Hebden Bridge,
W. Yorks HX7 8YN

SF has contacts across England, Scotland and Wales. Use the SF Contact Point above to make contact with groups and individuals near you.

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Events/Campaigns/Gatherings...

Solidarity Federation

Africa Solidarity Group

Supporting struggle in Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. More people always welcome - Red & Black Club, PO Box 17773, London SE8 4WX. Tel. 0171 358 1854.

Manchester SolFed

Support and Advice Sessions Drop in, last Tuesday of the month, 7pm, followed by Discussion Meeting, same day, 8.30pm. All sessions open & free at: The Brow House, 1 Mabfield Road, Fallowfield, Manchester. Or contact Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. 0161 232 7889

Education Workers' Network

For everyone in the education sector; from cleaners, teachers, students, lecturers, etc. Info from EVN, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.

Sheffield SolFed

Monthly Discussion Forums starting November 1999, contact us for 2000 topics, local activities, and copies of new local freesheet. PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR. da@directa.f9.net.uk

South-west Solidarity

Swindon-Bristol based but looking for contacts across SW England. Write for a free newsletter, visit the website! South-west Solidarity Federation, PO Box 741, Swindon, SN1 3UG. www.re-creation.ndirect.co.uk/sws.html

South Herts SolFed

Discussion Meetings 8pm, 2nd Wednesday of the month in St Albans (near main railway station). Contact South Herts SolFed, PO Box 493, St Albans, AL1 5TW.

North & East London SolFed

Socials: Last Thursday of the month, 8pm, near Camden Tube. We also hold advice surgeries and have regular discussion meetings. For details of times and places, contact: SF, PO Box 1681, London N8 7LE. Tel. 0181 374 5027.

Norwich and Norfolk SolFed

Regular meetings in Norwich - contact us at our new address: PO Box 487, Norwich MLO, NR2 3AL.

West Yorks SolFed

Members & contacts already in Hebden Bridge, Bradford, Leeds and York areas. Info: West Yorks SF, Box 5, Hebden Bridge, W. Yorks HX7 8YN.

Friends and Neighbours

[To get listed here, write to: DA (F&N), PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR, da@directa.force9.co.uk]

MayDay 2000

4 day gathering of revolutionaries to be held across London. Info: BM Mayday, London WC1N3XX. www.freespeech.org/mayday2k mayday2000-subscribe@egroups.com

Pride

Pride (London) Membership is open to anyone who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered. Membership is £10 (£5 concessions) for individuals, and straight people can join as Friends, but not vote. A working group has been formed to help reclaim Pride in 2000, and to re-establish the Pride March as a community event in 2001. To get involved contact: Pride (London), BCM Box 6097, LONDON, WC1N 3XX. Tel. 07071 781904. info@PrideLondon.org http://www.PrideLondon.org

Anarchist Trade Union Network

ATUN has an inclusive policy. It was set up to heighten the profile of anarchism in the unions (and in the workplace) by campaigning for the defence of workers' democracy. It also supports workers in dispute. To subscribe and get a bimonthly newsletter, Bread and Roses, send six stamps with your name and address and any union affiliation details to: Box EMAB (ATU), 88 Abbey Street, Derby DE22 3SQ. williamgodwin7@hotmail.com http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Parliament/2522

London Anarchist Forum

LAF Meets Fridays, 8pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London. Forthcoming talks include: 'Anonymity' 14th Jan.

Solidarity Magazine

Out soon, first issue - A publication for workers dedicated to workers' control and industrial unionism. Produced by Belfast Workers' Control Group. Donations still needed - all go to building a real revolutionary alternative to sectarianism and nationalism in Ireland. Solidarity Magazine, PO Box 505, Belfast BT1 1AE.

Corporate Watch

CW produces some excellent material through a variety of sources, including the magazine and a superb website at www.corpwatch.org. Contact: Corporate Watch, 16b Cherwell St, Oxford OX4 1BG. Tel. 01865 791391. mail@corporatwatch.org

Infoshops Network

A mailing list has been set up at: infoshops@tao.ca. Send the message 'subscribe infoshops' to majordomo@tao.ca. To make contact, email teapot@worthing.eco-action.org, or write to PO Box 4144, Worthing, West Sussex BN14 7NZ.

Andy Ward Benefit Fraud Campaign

Practising class solidarity, supporting victims of benefit fraud investigations. Campaigning for abolition of 'fraud hotlines', more control over investigators, and full legal rights for victims to pursue libel cases against grasses. Contact: AWBFC, c/o Brighton Against Benefit Cuts, PO Box 2536, Rottingdean, Brighton BN2 6LX.

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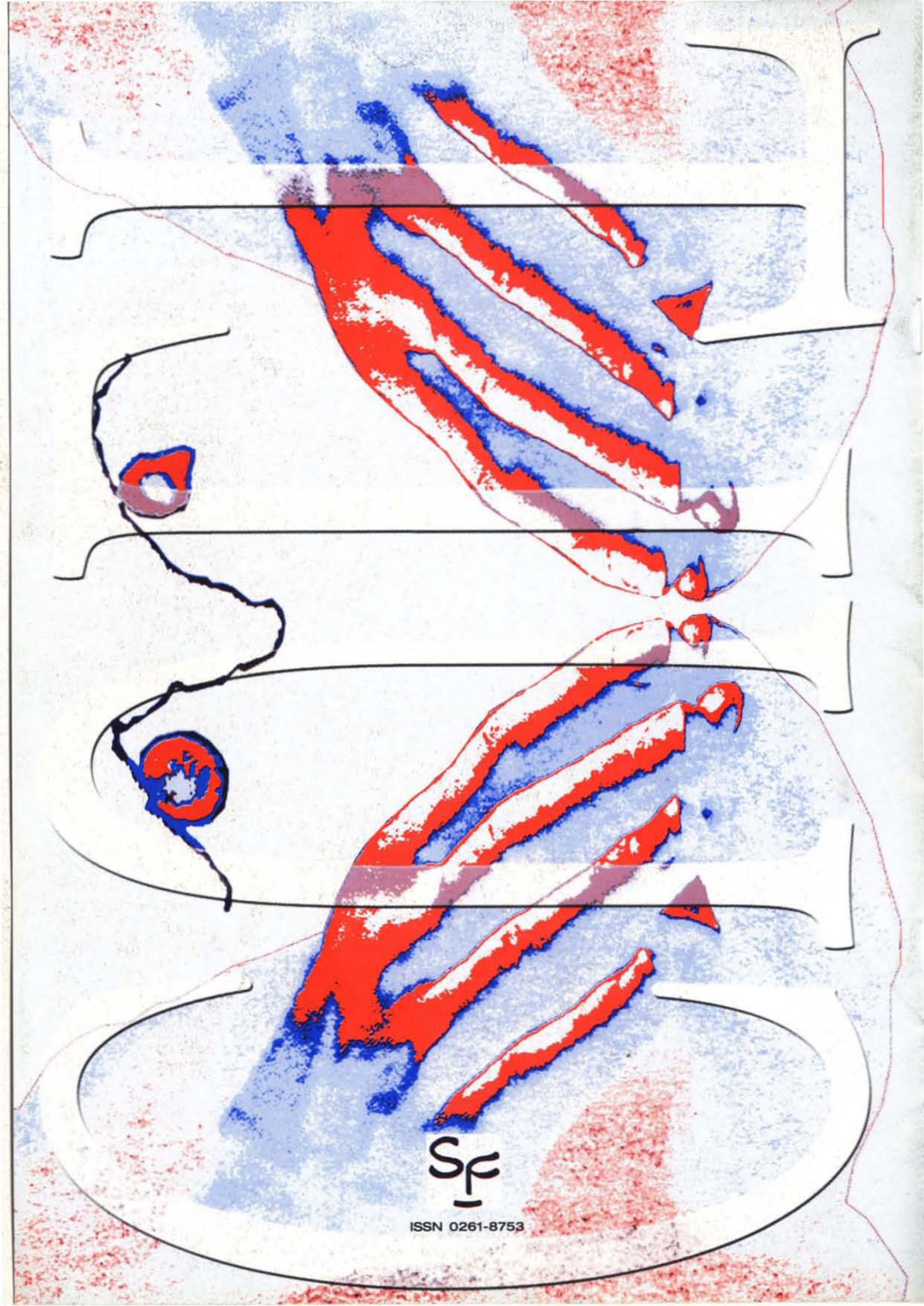
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