

the void

narking off the state since 2005

Simon Chapman, A Very Distinguished Fucking Anarchist

Posted on [February 14, 2017](#) by [johnny void](#) | [17 comments](#)



Over the last couple of days the strangest thought has plagued me. Two simple ugly words have kept emerging, only for me to lock them out and ridicule them as bizarre. Simon's dead. Just to write it down feels like treachery. Part of me looks forward to seeing him, to sharing a drink and dispelling this nonsense. He'd say something wry, and witty and that would be that. He was good like that. Was. Sometimes the shittiest word to ever have to use about a friend.

As part of a (temporary, and self-imposed) exile from all politics, I didn't know his health had deteriorated so much. We weren't the kind of friends who lived out of each other's pockets. There are many who were closer to him than me and I wish them all my love. But for almost 15 years he was always there. At crap protests and good ones, festivals and parties, we'd find each other and we'd usually end up drinking together. We shared a love of getting proper twatted and so we did that a lot.

The London anarchist movement would have looked very different without Simon Chapman. From the Movement Against The Monarchy to the Wombles, to May Day, several squatted social centres and finally Class War, Simon was an active presence both on the streets and behind the scenes. Countless flyers were produced by him over the years. He helped organise dozens of gigs, parties, campaigns and demonstrations and I was lucky enough to work with him on several of them. Up until very recently he was still updating the [Class War website](#).

It was the streets where his heart lay though and he was no passive peaceful protester. He got nicked all the time when he was younger. He fucking hated capitalism, was never afraid to get his hands dirty and despised the police. And he had good reason.

In 2003 Simon was arrested during a vicious police tear gas attack at a particularly fruity anti-capitalist protest in Thessaloniki, Greece. It was claimed he was carrying petrol bombs in his rucksack and he was held on remand with charges hanging over him that could have seen him spend the next 20 years in prison. Six other people were arrested and charged in similar circumstances. All denied the allegations against them. Photographic evidence soon emerged that showed the rucksack the police claimed Simon was carrying was not the rucksack he was arrested with. It was a transparent fit up.

The treatment of those arrested was obscene. All were beaten savagely following their arrest. For the first few days of his incarceration Simon was left virtually blind after the police smashed his glasses. He couldn't see a fucking thing without his glasses. Despite these abuses the UK's Labour government did not lift a finger to help. Neither did any other state. So the prisoners took the only action left available to them and began a hunger strike.

A militant Europe-wide campaign fast emerged demanding that all seven prisoners be released. Greek embassies were picketed across the continent and in some cases attacked and occupied. In Barcelona the Metro system was shut down during an international day of action in solidarity with the prisoners. In the UK a relentless campaign targeted the Greek Embassy and Tourist Board. Parts of Athen's University were repeatedly occupied, whilst fierce demonstrations throughout Greece resulted in more arrests.

In the end Simon didn't eat for almost seven weeks. All the hunger-strikers were repeatedly hospitalised, such was the strain on their health. In the final days the prisoners stopped accepting fluids. By now the solidarity campaign was at fever pitch as the risk that someone might die grew ever closer. Mainstream media across Europe began to take an interest, lured by sensationalism and smelling blood. Faced with international embarrassment, and concerned about creating seven martyrs who would shine a light on the corrupt Greek police, [all the prisoners were released](#) on November 6th 2003 and the charges against them dropped. Simon came home.

Then, five years later, the bastards came for him again. After repeated appeals from the Greek state prosecutor the charges against four of the original seven were re-instated. In 2008 Simon was found guilty of a string of exotic sounding and terrifying charges including Distinguished Riot and the creation, possession and explosion of bombs. He was sentenced in his absence to eight and a half years in prison.

Under the threat of a European Police Warrant, which was likely to see him dragged from his home by our own filth and handed over to the Greek authorities, Simon was forced to return to Thessaloniki in 2010 to appeal the conviction. In the ensuing trial the police evidence was repeatedly demolished by the defence teams. The case ended in humiliation for the Prosecutor with all charges thrown out for all four defendants except for a hastily cobbled together guilty verdict of “minor defiance of authority”. This misdemeanor was enough to justify the time those accused had spent in prison, although the six month sentence was suspended and Simon once again returned home.

Simon was much, much more than just one of the Thessaloniki Seven. But I suspect none who knew him well would deny the shadow these events cast over his life, and the impact they had on his health. Of course our own state also put the boot in, subjecting him to years of benefit cuts, Atos assessments and at the mercy of London’s fucked private sector rental market.

Throughout all this Simon stayed strong, never stopping fighting, or laughing and never losing his faith that a better world would one day be possible. He was kind, and clever and both ruefully cynical and enthusiastically hopeful at the same time. He was also more than just an anarchist. As well as raising his fist, he also raised his daughter who he regularly spoke of with loving pride*. His loss will leave a big hole in many lives. The last thing he would want is tears, but he will get them.

For myself, if you find me hassling you to come and find an off-licence with me at some boring, stale protest then sorry, but it’s because Simon isn’t there anymore. And those are hard words to write, to accept as real. I will fucking miss you mate. I’m sorry I didn’t see you whilst you were so sick but glad my last memories of you are happy ones. At least the bastards will never take you alive again. Rest well Simon, you deserve it. Love and rage.

Johnny Void x

**If you’d like to contribute to a fund for Simon’s daughter please contact [Freedom Bookshop](#).*

The above pic was sent to me by someone, I hope whoever took it doesn’t mind me using it.

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17 Comments

They Are Coming For The Internet – New Porn and Copyright Laws Could Criminalise Millions

Posted on [October 19, 2016](#) by [johnny void](#) | [1,778 comments](#)

If you ever needed confirmation that the UK is not run by a shadowy cabal of sinister plotters but a bunch of chinless fucking idiots then the upcoming Digital Economy Bill is a good place to start.

As well as massively increasing [personal information sharing amongst government departments](#), the proposed new laws will seek to ensure that all pornographic content available on the internet in the UK carries an age verification system. The bill will also introduce new copyright legislation which could mean that simply sharing or retweeting an internet meme, such as the one that accompanies this post, could mean prosecution with a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment. Really.



According to the government age-verification is necessary to protect children from the danger of online porn. And wouldn't it be nice if it were that easy. The reality is that this bill will do nothing to stop teenagers accessing porn but will create a potentially chilling effect on all creators of online material which could be said to be adult in nature. If this legislation is successfully implemented then it is unlikely to end there. If seeing sex on the internet is banned for under 18s then why not violence, or swearing, or anything else that government censors decide is unfit for young minds?

Of course this legislation will not be successful because it was drafted by a bunch of dickheads who don't appear to have ever used the internet. They can't even decide what internet pornography is, insisting that anything which would normally carry an 18 certificate, and which is designed to sexually stimulate, should be covered by the law. So content creators will not even know that they need to provide age verification until some state-appointed literal wanker decides that they are pornographers. The new laws will also apply to content which is sound only, ominously bringing the written word under censorship laws. Sites hosting ebooks with erotic content may find themselves falling foul of the legislation. We could be heading back to the days when someone faces legal sanctions for publishing Lady Chatterley's Lover in an audio format.

At a protest this week outside parliament, feminist and queer porn producers [warned this law will shut them down](#) leaving only the big mainstream porn companies able to afford the age verification software that will be necessary to comply with the law. And astonishingly this software does not yet exist – the government has decided that the market will somehow invent a solution. Anti-privacy campaigners have warned this will lead to [the creation of giant databases detailing the UK's porn watching habits](#), with all the risk that entails of that information being released to the public. Of equal concern is that there is a shitload of adult content on sites like twitter, tumblr and wordpress, potentially meaning that social media and blogs may also be required to implement age verification.

None of this will have any impact on the availability of online porn, most of which is not produced in the UK. These sites will only face the possibility of the government asking credit card companies to refuse to process payments from the UK. They may well tell the government to fuck off. And it is unlikely that the large number of youtube style porn sites, who are largely funded by advertising, will give a shit either. All this legislation is likely to achieve is the annihilation of an industry catering to sexual minorities and massive insecurity for anyone making edgy or erotic content who could face sanctions if they accidentally give a government censor a hard-on.

The new copyright laws are equally draconian. The Open Rights Group, who campaign to protect free speech and privacy online, warn that simply sharing a well known image online could lead to prosecution, [using the archetypal image of the Vietnamese child suffering napalm burns as an example](#). Millions of social media users may soon find

that many of their posts are technically illegal. The group also caution that these new laws could affect teenage file sharers, with a new threat of prosecution for anyone uploading to torrent sites. The same government that wants to protect young people from seeing sex is quite happy to terrify them with the threat of prosecution and jail if they impact even in the slightest way on the profits of the giant entertainment corporations.

What these laws are attempting to do is change the culture of the internet in the UK. Most of the internet is not in the UK though and will carry on as normal. Meanwhile those of us here will face complex censorship rules and petty legal action – such as the recent attempt by police to [prosecute a man for having a video of someone dressed up in a tiger suit having sex](#). A government which introduces laws which will affect millions of its citizens is a dangerous thing. That they seem to be doing it by accident is even more chilling. Much like the police, don't assume that just because they are stupid it means they aren't dangerous.

You can sign a petition aimed at stopping this bill at: <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/ensuring-personal-privacy-and-sexual-freedom>

I'm back by the way, but will be some time before I'm up to full speed. DWP/benefits stuff is coming up.

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Sanction Low Paid Worker's Benefits To #solveukpoverty Say The Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Posted on [September 6, 2016](#) by [johnny void](#) | [772 comments](#)

Nowhere in the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation's latest stupid report](#) do they acknowledge the real cause of poverty – which is the relentless theft of our labour and land by a capitalist class whose wealth and power grows ever greater.

In fact this atrocity, which condemns us to a lifetime of drudgery, servitude, poverty and need, is presented as a perfectly natural, and even desirable state. Which of course it is if you're some chinless wonder paid a fat salary to toss yourself off at some liberal think-tank all day whilst the people you write reports about do the work that makes your lifestyle possible.

If JRF were serious about ending poverty they would not asking employers to try not to use zero hour contracts quite so much, or pay the living wage – just if they can afford it of course. They would be throwing every resource they have into supporting those working class people fighting back, whether that was the recent [Deliveroo strikes](#), or the bold, and successful actions taken by grassroots union [United Voices of the World](#).

- City regions and groups of local authorities to trial different approaches to supporting progression at work to help deliver on the ambitions of in-work conditionality in Universal Credit. Trials should combine coaching and support from advisers able to foster links with employers, well-targeted training linked to realistic career progression, and financial incentive payments. This could mostly be achieved by reorienting existing budgets.

They would not be asking faith groups, and social entrepreneurs, and housing associations to all have a big think about how to help the poor. They would be calling for rent strikes, and occupations, and mass direct action to force concessions from the parasitic rich. Because it is only through determined, collective and bold acts that the poor have ever won any significant changes in their lives.

Of course you're not going to get that from the bunch of Ned Flanders wannabes at the JRF. But you might have hoped, at the very fucking least, that they would not support solutions which will make people even poorer.

The support for 'in-work conditionality' is perhaps their biggest treachery. This means the lowest paid workers facing brutal benefit sanctions if they do not constantly search for more or better paid work in the hours they are not working. JRF may say that non-financial sanctions should be used first, whatever that means, and that they should be less severe. But they are fully behind using poverty as punishment to incentivise low paid workers to try harder to stop being so poor.

It is no longer acceptable to be a part-time cleaner, care worker or labourer and to expect decent pay for that work, even if that is the only work available. You must now work "as much as society expects" according to the JRF. How much that is they don't tell us. The working class weren't invited to that meeting. But you must do it, and more importantly you must constantly compete and be punished if you don't. And if the jobs you are competing for don't even really exist it doesn't matter. Benefit sanctions and enforced competition are the method, the object is to change the soul.

It is these toxic assumptions that have created the conditions where ever more poverty – where hungry children and suicidal disabled people – are normalised and accepted. The belief endures that it is the poor, really, who are to blame. That if everyone just passed their GCSE's and tidied up their CV then low pay, exploitation, slum landlords and criminal bosses would all disappear. The poor would have enough to eat, the rich would keep getting richer, everyone would know their place and the people running the JRF could stop feeling so guilty next time they shell out the price of a normal family's annual food budget on some voluntary sector vol-au-vent munching piss up. Or a conference as they are known in the industry.

Astonishingly the JRF do not even call for the scrapping of many of the recent social security cuts that have created such a crisis amongst those with the lowest incomes. Instead they demand some minor changes, such as an exemption from the Bedroom Tax for those with special housing needs who want to move but cannot due to a lack of suitable properties. And whilst there are calls to reverse cuts to Universal Credit, slightly raise Jobseeker's Allowance rates and delay the upcoming slashing of sickness benefits, there is no substantial objection to many of even Iain Duncan Smith's most vicious welfare reforms. What a difference five years makes. The Bedroom Tax and Benefit Cap are the new normal, even the UK's leading anti-poverty think-tank is too craven to call for them to be scrapped.

Instead what we are left with in this report is the usual tinkering round the edges backed by a delusion that these recommendations will fix poverty at a time of cut-throat capitalism. That a prosperous neo-liberal paradise is just around the corner, we just need to upskill, work hard, and do the right thing. And if we all do our bit then surely bosses, bankers and landlords will agree to do the same. Because that is how capitalism works in the minds of those at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. All of us working together to help the rich stay rich, in the hope of a pat on the head one day from the powerful. It's just like a big cuddle really, now stop complaining and fill out those job applications. You fucking mug.

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Hunger, Homelessness and Despair, The Stark Reality of the Benefit Cap

Posted on [August 29, 2016](#) by [johnny void](#) | [192 comments](#)

'My children are like: "Why are you not eating mam?" and I'm like: "well I don't have enough food to give mammy food as well so mammy just has to wait until morning", and brush it off as well as I could... you don't want to tell a child; you don't want them to worry.'

It is hard to imagine a more poisonous piece of legislation than the lowered Benefit Cap, set to be introduced this Autumn, which will plunge quarter of a million children into desperate housing insecurity and possible homelessness.

This will be the third time that the Benefit Cap – which limits the weekly amount that can be received in benefits – has been lowered in just five years. In 2011 George Osborne capped Housing Benefit in a sweeping move which made much of central London unaffordable for those unable to work due to childcare responsibilities, sickness or unemployment. Then in 2013 benefits were capped further, at £500 a week for a family with children, extending the problem of unaffordability out to Greater London, the Home Counties and beyond, with many large cities seeing families affected. And now the cap is to be lowered again, to around £440 a week in London and £384 elsewhere.

On average this means families set to lose £60 a week according to an [Impact Assessment published by the DWP last week](#) and it will no longer be just a London problem. Leeds, Cardiff, Manchester, Glasgow and Bradford are all likely to have at least 1000 households affected whilst in Birmingham 3,900 households will face an abrupt cut in housing benefits. It is not the fault of struggling families that rents in the UK have soared out of reach in many areas which has led to the growing Housing Benefit bill. It is the result a failure to build enough low cost housing. But it is the poor who will pay.

'Every time I phoned [the council] they made me feel like an idiot and like: "Well you should be doing more. You know you should try downsizing". I said: "Well I'm trying to, the fact is that I can't get anywhere that will accept Housing Benefit ...". But all they kept saying was: "you need to downsize you need to be looking for something smaller".'

The government claim the Benefit Cap has been a huge success, pointing to a [series of evaluations](#) that showed a small rise in the number of people subject to the cap who found work. But behind these celebratory statistics lies a bitter truth. It has become common, in evaluations of DWP policy, to use 'job outcomes' to justify any atrocity. Someone hangs themselves after being found fit for work and having their benefits stopped – well this is just fine because someone else got a job in Poundland. No other social policies would be evaluated this way. It is like testing a new drug and completely ignoring deadly side effects on the basis that a handful of people's health had slightly improved.

'When I was on this Cap I was not sleeping and my blood pressure was very high – I took the tablets but it didn't come down – and my kids were not eating.'

With families facing eviction due to the Benefit Cap it has indeed forced many to desperately look for any job they can find. Those able to find between work, of between 16 and 30 hours a week depending on their circumstances, become exempt from the cap leading many to hound their employers for more hours, often unsuccessfully.

'I say, if you don't give me more than 16 hours then tell me and I can look for another job. Still I am applying. Some jobs involve travelling and it is difficult to manage We had a meeting about increasing my hours or my rate and he says he will think about it. I am looking for other employment and when I find it will give notice.'

For the 18% of claimants affected by the Benefit Cap who are long term sick or disabled this of course has not been an option. Despite repeated lies from DWP ministers that disabled people are not affected by the cap this only applies to those with the most serious health conditions or disabilities. Claimants of the sickness and disability benefit Employment Support Allowance are not exempt from the cap if health assessors decide their condition may improve in the future. Many claimants are battling ill health as well as facing the prospect of losing their homes.

'Being in hospital we weren't keeping on top of everything. We got eviction [papers delivered] And I were like: "I've got too much on me plate for them" ... so it were just a big nightmare.'

Neither is simply finding a job a realistic solution for those with very young children, or even babies. This hasn't stopped many local councils simply shrugging off the upcoming trauma faced by those with young children who face losing their homes.

'The advice was go back to work ... At that time my baby was I think she was about two months, so I said that is the plan but it's not gonna be for now.'

What the interviews with claimants do seem to suggest is that if the cap has had any impact at all, it has been to encourage lone parents to seek work before they felt their children were ready to be left alone.

'I'd already planned to return to work when my youngest started school, which will be this September ... Things did get quite bad for a while. It was quite desperate. It was quite tough to find the money to feed the children, keep on top of the bills. I didn't want to get into debt or into arrears. I did have to borrow from my parents a little bit and I just wanted better for the family. I wanted to do better for the children really, so the only choice is to go back to work a year earlier and just hopefully find something that fitted in with the with children.'

These were parents who intended to go back to work anyway. Others have had dreams of furthering their education shattered by the cap.

'I'm there, right ready for Uni, and they're trying to sabotage what I'm doing.'

Sometimes it has not been the claimant themselves who was affected.

one person had asked her adult son to leave as she could not afford to keep him. The son gave up college, got a job, and rented his own bedsit as a result;

Rarely has government policy had such a devastating impact on children's lives. Behind the lauded 'job outcomes' lies a trail of destitution. Countless families have reported being left without enough money for food. Huge numbers are in rent arrears. Many have been forced to move – at the time of the most recent evaluation 10% of households had moved house due to the cap. These evaluations were carried in 2014 however, meaning many families covered by the reports would have only been subject to the cap for a short period. The growing rise in homeless families, especially in London, points to the devastating long term impact of the Benefit Cap.

'It really distressed me. She [DWP adviser] said: "If you can't afford your rent the next option is to move you to another area". Hearing that, everything just fell apart, there and then.'

Punishing children with homelessness because of the eye-watering rents demanded by landlords is a new low for even the Tory Party, but it is the upcoming lowering of the cap which will perhaps inflict the greatest cruelty. According to last week's impact assessment, "those already capped at £26,000 will have the new, lower, cap applied to them." This is estimated to be around 22,000 households. These are families that may have already moved to a cheaper area and are just starting to get their lives back on track. They are the families featured in the quotes that accompany this piece. Some of the poorest people in the UK, already struggling to survive and raise their children.

'I need to find £100 a week – not a month; a month would be fine, I could manage, but a week! All the time I am worrying, worrying, what will happen, how will I manage? I don't get a job. I have been trying for a long time now.'

And now the government is coming for them again. Imagine explaining to a young child just settling into a new school, who may have recently faced a spell in temporary housing that they now have to go through it all again. A child just starting to make friends to replace the ones they lost due to the last forced relocation will now be looking at a future in yet another new school, or even another new city.

'My daughter, she was quite cross, you know she's a teenager anyway so found it difficult to change the school. She had the friends there, because we live there more than three years and she was quite settled ... She says she misses being there and she doesn't like this school very much. We had to accept that place because we didn't get any place in the schools we asked for. Most of the schools around here are oversubscribed.'

Most of those facing the Benefit Cap are women, usually lone parents. Black and Ethnic Minority families are hugely over-represented amongst those affected, as are disabled people. For those unable to find work or increase their hours their options are stark. Many have only been able to stay in their homes due to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) paid by local authorities to families facing imminent homelessness. These payments will not last forever and are increasingly being used to meet the cost of housing families in temporary accommodation. A recent homelessness update from Westminster Council (H/t [@nearlylegal](#)) showed that around half of the borough's spend on DHP's is paying for temporary accommodation for those made homeless due to the benefit cap. It is only now that Local Authorities are starting to feel the impact of the Benefit Cap introduced in 2013. With a new further cut set to pile on the pressure even further homelessness amongst those with children could soar to levels not seen in generations in the UK.

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DPAC Week of Action – September 4th-10th. #RightsNotGames

Posted on [August 23, 2016](#) by [johnny void](#) | [162 comments](#)

Apologies for the lack of posts recently. Back very soon, in the meantime this is from [Disabled People Against Cuts \(DPAC\)](#) and gives details of the upcoming week of action to coincide with the Paralympic Games. Please spread the word and get involved if you can.

DPAC WEEK OF ACTION- SEPTEMBER 4TH-10TH

Sunday September 4th pop-up art action – if anyone wants to take part in this please email us at mail@dpac.uk.net as further information will not be made public. This will go live on-line at 2pm

Monday September 5th Independent Living Day. Lobby and report in parliament following the horrendous cuts to care and support funding for personal assistance following the closure of the Independent Living Fund in 2015. Committee Room 21 from 2-4pm. Please allow about 20- 30 minutes to get through security

Afterwards 5pm at College Green opposite parliament for fun and festivities DPAC-style.

Tuesday September 6th National Day of Action against cumulative cuts faced by disabled people. Around the country. Please send us details of anything you're organising. [See this page for more information, including a list of locations where protests are being held.](#)

Wednesday September 7th meet for noon opposite Downing Street for 'No More Claimant Deaths' protest.

Thursday September 8th An online day of action for all. More details will be published on website nearer the time.

Saturday September 10th International Conference, Resistance:Beyond Borders from 10.30am-4.30 pm at Resource for London, 356 Holloway Rd, London N7 6PA.

Speakers from Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, Greece, Ireland and Germany.

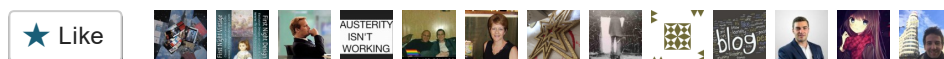
See [Conference 10th Sept Disabled Peoples' Resistance: building beyond borders](#)

To book a place please email us at mail@dpac.uk.net and give details of any access and dietary needs. Limited places available.

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The Working Class Is Back In The Game, Let's Make Sure We Fucking Stay There

Posted on July 9, 2016 by [johnny void](#) | [749 comments](#)

I was fucking angry [when I wrote this post](#) in the early aftermath of the referendum and I'm sorry if I offended anyone. Of course not everyone who voted Remain was part of the pampered middle class and some of the racism from the Leave campaign was as vile as anything we have seen in decades. I should have mentioned that, and equally that Remain were all too happy to exploit racism when it suited them. And I forgot to mention that Nigel Farage is a cunt.



I was angry though, at the sneering abuse from a metropolitan elite that assumed working class communities were racist, thick or uneducated because they refused to vote in the interests of the privileged. I was furious, and astonished, that a vote for an institution that would rather non-Europeans fleeing war drown in the sea than cross its hallowed borders was presented as the anti-racist choice. And I was dismayed that EU imposed austerity, that has brought such devastation to so many lives, was air-brushed away in favour of some sentimental notion of harmony that is apparently so flimsy it will fall apart unless it is imposed by an authoritarian neo-liberal superstate.

As ever, there was little thought for the poorest in the EU referendum, wherever they came from. No cares at all for the EU migrants set to face a four year freeze on benefits in the event of Remain winning. A wilful ignorance of EU rules that were already leading to the deportation of homeless migrants and which [are soon to be used](#) to attack those who have come from Europe and can't find a job – [or who don't earn enough money](#). And of course these rules are set by an EU Parliament that has little more than a handful of Black or ethnic minority MEPs but dozens from the far right. Fortress Europe as a force for anti-racism? Don't make me fucking laugh.

It is clear that class, and perhaps more precisely income, was one of the largest drivers of the vote to leave the European union. [As voices from the forgotten North have pointed out](#), there are many communities that have nothing left to lose and who hope, as we should all hope, that any significant change could be a change for the better. That just for once the powerless could seize some control and inflict a crushing blow on the bankers and bureaucrats that have driven so many into destitution.

Of course many of these voices were drowned out as television crews scoured the poorest parts of the UK looking for the most racist person they could find and giving them unprecedented air time in a bid to smear the entire working class. Yes, immigration was a factor in some people's vote, but rarely the only factor. The Remain campaign though, and the media that supported them, were intent on portraying this as the sole reason anyone could possibly want to leave the decaying monstrous European Union.

It is true that immigration often leads to economic growth and that this can increase jobs. There is ample evidence to support this. But to claim that these benefits are felt uniformly across society is a deception. The sad fact is that austerity plus the current neoliberal management of migration has impacted on housing, wages and services in some areas, and in particular in places that were already desperately poor to begin with. These impacts may be relatively small in economic terms, but when you've got fuck all then relatively small can be the difference between keeping a roof over your head or not.

This may be an uncomfortable truth for the left, which is rightly committed to anti-racism, but it is a truth. To insist that people are liars or racists when they describe what is happening in their lives is a path that will divorce the left from the poorest members of the working class completely. In many cases it is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic communities that are raising these concerns, places far more diverse than the latte-slurping metropolitan enclaves

where white middle class self-styled anti-racists only ever speak to a migrant when they are at the check-out in Waitrose. It is time to listen, without pre-judging, to what many working class people in the poorest parts of the country are saying.

That does not mean pandering to racists, in fact the opposite urgently needs to take place. More than ever racism must be confronted, whether that's organised fascists or loud mouthed dickheads who've deluded themselves that just because the UK voted out of the EU it means we all agree with their spiteful bigotry. But it does mean having difficult conversations, and thinking difficult thoughts and recognising that having concerns about immigration policies, at a time of savage austerity, does not mean someone is automatically a closet nazi or swivel-eyed extremist.

There has been no attempt by the government to mitigate the scarcity caused by austerity in deprived areas that have also seen high levels of migration. In fact they have done the opposite with vicious cuts to benefits and vital services. If that causes divisions in our class then that is all the better for their neoliberal aims. Migration – a normal human phenomena – has been weaponised by capital across Europe to drive down the living standards of the working class. Free movement was not granted so we could all have nicer holidays, but to create a flexible, mobile, precarious workforce to allow the continent to compete with China, India, Brazil, or whoever this week's scary foreign bogeyman is.

That doesn't mean free movement is automatically bad just because it has been imposed by capitalists – the ability to live, visit and work in any European country is truly a wonderful thing. It is a freedom that is certain to continue even with the UK outside of the EU. But it costs over seventy quid these days just for a fucking passport. That's a week's money for someone on the dole before they even step on a boat. And if they do get on a boat they'll lose their benefits because you aren't allowed to go abroad if you're claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. At a time of such rampant inequality this freedom to travel across the continent is invisible to the poor. Many who voted Leave will have never set foot in another European country – not because they are racists, not because they don't want to, but because they can't afford it.

The dream of a truly integrated Europe, or indeed world, will never be anything but a middle-class fantasy under current economic policies and whilst the poorest are suffering like never before. Fascism is stalking many countries despite their membership of the European Union. If there is one thing that is certain it is that they are organising here as well. The political chaos that has ensued in the wake of the referendum is creating a vacuum at the heart of the UK's political system. That is a fucking opportunity. The far right know this and the more the liberal left sneers at the thick racists who didn't do what they wanted then the stronger fascism becomes. There seem some who will almost relish any increase in far right activity, as an opportunity to say 'I told you so'. This is a truly treacherous position. There is no excuse for standing on the sidelines now, whichever way you voted.

The UK is facing a period of political instability that has not been seen in generations. There is barely even a government at the moment and the Tory party are just as split as Labour. We are about to see an unelected, inexperienced Prime Minister trying to hold onto power during a period of enormous turbulence. Meanwhile austerity continues apace with the introduction of Universal Credit set to cut the incomes of the poorest even further. It is easy to generalise, and I have done, there were many subtleties at play during the EU referendum. But what can't be ignored is that a large proportion of the working class demanded change and politicians are terrified. The working class is back in the game, let's make sure we stay there.

And that means taking real action, not just shouting slogans or marching pointlessly behind ever more irrelevant leaders. It means those that may have concerns about immigration policies standing side by side with immigrants themselves against racism and benefit cuts because we are always stronger together – and there is a difference

between policies and people. It also means those from more affluent areas listening to and trying to understand what many people in the North, Wales and parts of the South, have been saying – despite being ignored – for over three decades.

It will require doing the hard work, the boring stuff, and an anti-fascism that not just engages in set piece punch ups with the far right but addresses the reason those cunts even exist. Most of all it means a class united, whatever people's race, colour or creed- with no tolerance for bigotry, including the elite, liberal sneering at the poor that has been all too evident the last few weeks. Because then we might actually start to fucking win some stuff. And that will mean another Europe really is possible.

Here's some things coming up that are taking place in London and elsewhere over the next few days. Support [DPAC's national day of action against disability assessors Capita](#) this Wednesday (13th July), in person if you can or online – events have been organised around the UK. Groups organising under the Black Lives Matter banner are also holding protests this week against racist policing, [including one in London tomorrow \(10/7/16\) beginning at Oxford Circus at 10am](#). There's another [solidarity protest with the migrant cleaners](#) currently on indefinite strike due to the shit wages paid by property vultures CBRE being held on Wednesday 13th July from 5pm at 100 Wood Street, EC2V. On Friday 15th July [Class War will be marching on Boris Johnson's house in Islington](#) because why should that wanker get away scot-free after the chaos he has caused in the capital and beyond. Then there's a boring as we make it [People's Assembly demo](#) in central London next Saturday 16th July. Get along to everything you can and let's seize the initiative. Our time is now if we choose to live it.

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What A Shambles, Lord Fraud's Budgeting Support Trials An Embarrassing, Expensive Flop

Posted on [July 6, 2016](#) by [johnny void](#) | [89 comments](#)

Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Fraud could do with some budgeting support himself after his recent trial to help benefit claimants manage their money proved to be an embarrassing flop that squandered £4 million of tax payer's money.

Under Universal Credit all benefits will have to be claimed online, despite many claimants having no access to the internet and some having no experience of using computers. Benefit payments are also to be made monthly and there is a minimum five week waiting period for new claims. For the small group of claimants transferred onto the new system this in particular is already causing desperate suffering – a recent evaluation found that [almost half of Universal Credit claimants were in rent arrears.](#)



This was not supposed to be a problem according to comedy toff Lord Fraud who is over-seeing much of the introduction of Universal Credit. A new budgeting support scheme would be set up to help the so-called vulnerable manage their money and teach them to use a computer. Several trials were established to test how this scheme, named Universal Support, would be supplied. These trials cost just over £4 million and the results are bleak. An evaluation of the pilots published today found that Universal Support had *“no statistically significant impact on either digital or financial capability.”*

Perhaps the biggest flaw in this scheme to help those on Universal Credit manage their finances was that those involved in the trial were not on Universal Credit. The areas in which the pilots were carried out did not include those places where Universal Credit has been introduced. So what these trials really tested was the impact of Universal Support on people claiming benefits that are being phased out such as Jobseeker’s Allowance. This meant that the pilots had to sort of pretend that participants were about to claim Universal Credit when they weren’t. According to the evaluation this presented a significant barrier to people wishing to take up the support, which was offered by local councils, advice agencies and Jobcentres. As one support workers involved in the trial said *“Trying to get them to understand a system that’s not in place that may or may not apply to them at any given time is not very easy to do .”*

Some Jobcentres of course managed to find a way round this reluctance amongst claimants to take part in the trials. In a chilling example of how Jobcentre Work Coaches mislead and coerce claimants the evaluation reported that *“Carmarthenshire and Dundee both reported that it was easier to encourage claimants to engage through Jobcentre Plus because they thought that the support was part of their Claimant Commitment.”* Several participants in the trials said they only took part because they thought it was mandatory. In truth it was only in Islington that those carrying out the trial had the power to mandate claimants to attend under the threat of benefit sanction.

In the end just over half of those (51%) referred to Universal Support chose not to take it up. Amongst those that did two key problems emerged which point to a worrying future. The first impacted on those requiring help with using computers. Both staff and participants involved in the trials said that many claimants depend on mobile phone for internet access, with one reporting *“I would say the majority of the people we see have a mobile but many of them (a) can’t use it or (b) can’t pay for their broadband connection or (c) can’t pay it, don’t have the money to pay for a call or don’t have one at all.”* A further problem was that in more rural areas internet access is still limited and superfast broadband is rare. Universal Credit is set to be ‘digital by default’. If claimants cannot access the internet then they will not be able to manage their claim.

The second problem emerged amongst claimants accessing budgeting support. The evaluation found that the most significant problem facing this group was not that they needed help learning to budget but simply that they didn’t have enough money. As one person involved in managing the scheme said *“It’s not a capacity issue in terms of actually being able to do the sums or being able to understand when to pay what when...what comes out is actually they just don’t have enough money to get from one of the months to the other.”*

The evaluation does report that there were some 'soft outcomes' as a result of attending the scheme, with some claimants reporting a positive impact in areas of their lives which were unconnected to budgeting or computer skills. This may reflect the fact many of the scheme were run as part of a wider package of support which also looked into areas such as housing, health, and of course employability. The results of the overall evaluation of the scheme however found it made no difference in people's ability to access IT or manage their money – although the researchers caution that only the short term effects of the scheme could be studied so far. A cost/benefit analysis of the trial therefore showed that the £4 million spent on Universal Support was squandered, with no demonstrable benefits either to the public or the claimants themselves.

Just over 4000 people were referred onto Universal Support and actually took up the offer and engaged with services. Many of them faced significant financial hardship and debt. If Lord Freud had better budgeting skills then he could have used that £4 million to chuck everybody a grand and actually give them some real help for a change. But help is the last thing you can expect from a social security system devised by a former banker who has never been elected to anything. Of course this will never affect Lord Freud himself, who is a very rich man. So the next time he wants to inflict a half-baked vanity scheme on benefit claimants he should fucking pay for it himself.

You can read the evaluation at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-universal-support-delivered-locally-trials>

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Do Not Support Newly Disabled Claimants Hit By Benefit Cap To Stay In Their Homes Recommends DWP

Posted on [September 21, 2013](#) by [johnny void](#) | [208 comments](#)



The DWP has issued guidance to local authorities suggesting that newly sick or disabled claimants affected by the Benefit Cap should go into arrears rather than be awarded Discretionary Housing Payments to cover a shortfall in their rent whilst they await or appeal a benefit decision.

In a further callous move, the Department recommends that the most seriously sick and disabled claimants – who are appealing a decision made by the notorious Atos Work Capability Assessment not to place them in the Support Group – should not be provided with emergency housing payments to top up their rent whilst the appeal takes place.

Around 50,000 households, including 200,000 children, are currently staring homelessness in the face due to the cap on benefits which has made much of the South East of England unaffordable for families out of work. The Government have claimed sick and disabled people will not be affected by the cap, however only those in the Support Group of Employment Support Allowance (ESA), or those with a current claim for Disability Living Allowance (or its replacement PIP) are exempt.

Most claimants on out of work sickness benefits are in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) of ESA – meaning they have been assessed as being able to do some work, at some point, in the future. Unless this group of claimants qualify for DLA, which means they have specific costs associated with care or mobility, they are likely to have to leave their homes if they live in an area affected by the cap.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are an ever shrinking pot of money which has been given to Local Authorities to support some of those facing homelessness due to the Bedroom Tax, Benefit Cap or other cuts to

benefits.

According to [the latest guidance \(PDF\) from the DWP on how they should be used:](#)

“Where an appeal against a decision not to award an exempting benefit is pending, the LA should bear in mind that a decision on entitlement has been made and that the circumstances are not the same as a case where a decision on entitlement is due. We would not recommend making a DHP award unless there are mitigating circumstances.”

This means that newly sick and disabled people, such as someone recently diagnosed with cancer or other chronic illness and forced to leave work, will now also face losing their homes if their claim for ESA is wrongly assessed by the notorious IT company Atos. Meanwhile should councils follow the DWP’s suggestions newly disabled people who have had to give up their jobs will be plunged into rent arrears whilst an application for DLA is made. This process usually takes around six weeks – but can take longer. So those who are coping with not just a recent disability or serious illness, but having to give up work as well, can now add the threat of homelessness to the things they have to worry about.

There is no requirement on Local Authorities to follow this nasty guidance from the DWP and they are free to spend Discretionary Housing Payments any way they choose. With the paltry amount of money available shrinking year on year, many will be only too happy to follow these suggestions and socially cleanse newly sick and disabled people from their areas. They may even choose to go one step further. As the recommendations point out, the exemption to the Benefit Cap does not apply during the period of time whilst a claim for ESA is pending. Many councils are likely to interpret this guidance to avoid paying DHPs to anyone at all whilst they are awaiting an assessment for ESA – which can take months.

ESA claims for those with terminal illnesses are fast tracked in some cases, but claims for many other chronic and life changing conditions are not. If you live in London, or another high rent area, then do not expect what’s left of the welfare state to support you to stay in your home should you become seriously ill or disabled.

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International Climate Protest

Posted on [November 17, 2005](#) by [johnny void](#) | [Leave a comment](#)



Saturday December 3rd sees a demonstration in London to mark the International Day of Climate Protest. That's right folks, if you're pissed off with the weather, and it is fucking cold, then get marching from Lincoln's Inn fields at midday.

A host of boring (Friends of the Earth, Green Party) or downright dodgy (SWP, Globalise Resistance, Respect – you're all the same people – just admit it won't you) organisations have come together to walk through London in the cold. Bring hats, scarves, mittens, maybe a placard or two for a bonfire.

The march finishes up at the US embassy, with the usual suspects unleashing their pent up egos to the masses (sic) such as Michael Meacher (MP, that's **MP**), and a host of obscure Green Party types (not MP's of course).

This is to be the UK's largest ever climate demo (so they say), so is surely not to be missed

unless it's raining of course

A bike ride stating at Thames Barrier 9am may be more interesting

but probably not much

There's a march in Edinburgh as well, where it'll be even more cold

for more info go to <http://http://www.campaigncc.org/>

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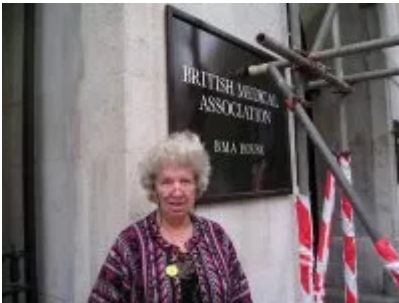
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Cannabis Grandma faces 6 months jail and eviction from her home

Posted on [November 16, 2005](#) by [johnny void](#) | [Leave a comment](#)



MRS. PATRICIA TABRAM, otherwise known as 'The Grandma Who Eats Cannabis' visited her local police station today, but it was not for a cup of 'tea'. Instead she got an invitation to appear in Hexham Magistrates Court, Northumberland on 22nd November, for what could lead to one of the cannabis trials of the century.

Today police charged the 'Cannabis Grandma' with one of the most serious cannabis 'offences' you can get prosecuted for; "Production" which comes under 'trafficking' in Section 4 of the Misuse of Drugs Act, maximum penalty 14 years.

The Cannabis Grandma, 67, has also been warned by her Housing Association that she faces eviction from her home after police contacted housing officials to inform them of her arrest. Her housing officer has officially informed her that if she is found guilty she will face eviction from her bungalow home in Humshaugh, near Newcastle. The house was allocated to her due to her severe arthritis which made it impossible for her to use stairs.

taken from newssoftheweed.com

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Violent Eviction in Columbia

Posted on [November 16, 2005](#) by [johnny void](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

2000 riot police and army units are currently outside of a land occupation held by 500 people, mostly poor indigenous families, in Cauca, Colombia.

Over the past few days, 1 person has been killed and 37 people have been injured by police beatings and bullets.

The situation is tense and they are calling for solidarity emails, letter-writing and publicity because they are worried that without this the police and army will attack.

Communications can be addressed to:

The Embassy of Colombia
3 Hans Crescent
London
SW1X OLR

Telephone: 009 44 171 5899177

Fax: 009 44 171 5811529

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Is it Because I is White?

Posted on [November 15, 2005](#) by [johnny void](#) | [Leave a comment](#)



Sacha Baron Cohen, creator of infamous comedy character Ali G has once again been drawn into a race row over his character Borat, the spoof journalist from the central Asian country of Kazakhstan.

After his latest appearance at the MTV awards, where Borat, in broken English, claims that the country's wine is made from fermented horse urine and the top four activities are disco dancing, archery, rape and table tennis.

This has led the Kazakhstan government to threaten him with legal action. Foreign Ministry spokesman, Yerzhan Ashybayev said "We reserve the right to legal action to prevent pranks of this kind and view Mr Baron Cohen's behaviour as utterly unacceptable."

Ali G caused a storm of controversy on his launch at the tail end of the 90's with his depiction of a young, urban man. The jury was out as to his intended ethnicity (and in fact even his real ethnicity was not initially generally known), with various theories, is he a white man pretending to be a white boy pretending to be black or just a white man pretending to be black.

Initially the ruse was used to dupe unsuspecting politicians and the like into being drawn into increasingly bizarre interviews and highlighting the ignorance and embarrassment with which many of those in power approach race and young people generally. His targets were not always obvious choices however and included Tony Benn and the Crystal Palace Road Protest site.

It was, it has to be said, often very funny.

In early 2000 seven leading black UK comedians accused Ali G of racism. This was largely due to the fact that his act seemed to mock young black culture, although his defenders pointed out that it was actually mocking the aping of black culture by young working class white kids. Sacha Baron Cohen himself chose not to comment.

It did seem, particularly in the later released Ali G movie 'Inda House' that the character was moving away from being a device to puncture pomposity and ignorance into, what frankly seemed an excuse for lots of sexist, homophobic and racist jokes, all carried out under a cloak of acceptable 'irony'.

In any event the joke wore stale and Ali G disappeared from the screens to be replaced by the above mentioned Borat.

Borat's humour is also used expose racist attitudes, particularly in his recent series made in the States where he caused a near riot by leading a bar of redneck types in an anti-semitic song (Baron Cohen himself is Jewish). In this implication that the Kazakhstan people are anti-semitic one has to question whether this is helpful or funny given the perilous state of global relations and the fact the Kazakhstan is a largely Muslim country.

Baron Cohen himself has been seen on anti-racist marches and does not appear to be an active racist, however as an Oxbridge ex-public schoolboy it may be that he is somewhat naïve about the offence that his 'comedy' has caused, and also the effect that this may have on the viewer in re-enforcing negative racial stereotypes about both young black men and Eastern Europeans. They are not, after all communities with which he seems to have much experience.

He must have no shortage of experience of various chinless wonders, or luvvie media types on which he could base his future comic creations, and may be wise to reflect on his need to use (other people's) ethnicity as a device in his comedy.

Racism is serious charge for any entertainer and the further into Baron Cohen's career you look the more it starts to look like a description that fits.

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Greenpeace action and press release

Posted on [November 14, 2005](#) by [johnny void](#) | [Leave a comment](#)



This morning we sent a reminder to Tony Blair of his commitment to tackle climate change – several tonnes of coal.

Greenpeace volunteers blockaded three entrances to Downing Street as Tony Blair rows back on his commitment to the Kyoto Protocol. In a series of statements in recent weeks the Prime Minister has cast doubt on his long-term support for the global agreement, while British emissions of carbon-dioxide have risen since he came to power.

At 7.30am a truck emblazoned with the slogan 'Blair – Climate Failure' arrived at the Horse Guard's Road entrance to Mr Blair's residence. Greenpeace representatives informed police officers what they were about to do before the vehicle tipped several tonnes of coal in front of the gates. Simultaneously 50 Greenpeace volunteers emptied sacks of the polluting fuel across the King Charles Street entrance and the access point on Horse Guards parade. A tipper truck with 14 tonnes of coal, emblazoned with the slogan 'Things Can Only Get Wetter' which was destined for the Whitehall entrance was stopped by police.

One of the volunteers, Stephen Tindale, a former environment advisor to New Labour and now the executive director of Greenpeace, said:

"We've blockaded Downing Street with coal because Tony Blair has failed on climate change. We hope he clears his diary and spends the day in his office working to strengthen Kyoto and cut British emissions, because so far all he's done is make speeches. They told us things can only get better, but Blair's burning more coal than ever, our CO₂

emissions have gone up, he's set to miss his own global warming targets and now it seems he's trying to kill off the Kyoto Protocol."

Tony Blair's climate crimes include:

Failed to reduce CO₂ emissions – carbon-dioxide emissions have gone up since Blair became PM in 1997

Sacrificed the climate in the face of industry lobbying – Blair is taking the EU to court after it prevented him from increasing the amount of CO₂ British industry is allowed to emit

Subsidised and supported coal, the most polluting of all fuels – Britain burns 7.5% more coal now than it did in 1997, simply because it is cheaper than (less polluting) gas

Failed to stem the flow of wasted energy haemorrhaging from UK buildings

Failed to end the scandalous waste of energy from the UK electricity generation and distribution system

Instructed airports to expand despite the facts that aviation is a major contributor to climate change

Failed to halt the growth in greenhouse gas emissions from traffic and embarked on a new road building program – while Ken Livingstone tackles emissions from transport the PM encourages car use

Weakened international policies to tackle climate change – opponents of tough global emissions targets have welcomed Blair's recent statements

Negotiations for the second phase of Kyoto are set to begin in Montreal this month, but the Prime Minister has indicated he doesn't support the tough new climate change targets the agreement is designed to eventually deliver. In a speech this month Blair said: "The blunt truth about the politics of climate change is that no country will want to sacrifice its economy in order to meet this challenge."

Lord May, President of the Royal Society, responded last week by saying: "The blunt truth about the politics of climate change is that countries are not doing enough to adapt their economies so that they reduce their greenhouse gas emissions."

The United Kingdom is one of those countries. Greenpeace's Stephen Tindale said:

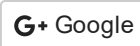
"Climate change is already killing 150,000 people a year, hundreds of species are threatened with extinction and entire island states could disappear under water. We're facing a climate catastrophe, but Blair's back-tracking. He needs to act, and soon. He could cut emissions by burning less coal, getting right behind renewable energy schemes, dropping airport expansion plans, making cars use less fuel and making Britain's buildings more energy efficient."

Take Action!

[Write to your MP](#) and urge them to ask Tony Blair to publicly state his support for legally binding targets to cut greenhouse gases, both at home and internationally.

For more information

Download the [dossier detailing Blair's failures](#) as a pdf.

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Annual Scuffle with the Met Marred by Successful Bookfair

Posted on [November 14, 2005](#) by [johnny void](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Originally Posted by [schnews](#)

Last Saturday's successful 22nd annual scuffle with the Met was sadly marred by the outbreak of a Bookfair. This year's events were attended by thousands, who while they waited for the scuffles to kick off became impatient and began swapping information, making links and selling each other t-shirts and books.

Hundreds of refugees from the bookish jamboree crammed into Wetherspoons in Holloway Road for the 22nd annual London Anarchist Scuffle. A misguided attempt to play pisspoor techno on some duff portable speakers gave the staff the excuse to stop serving (well they never did like music in Wetherspoons) – leading to the only grievance which really motivates anarchists these days: turning off the beer.

As trustafarians hid under the tables the atmosphere was ripe for a full and frank airing of ideological differences. Quotes from Kropotkin's "Turn that shit off!" were batted aside with references to John Jordan's seminal "It's my party and I'll dance down the fires of capital if I want to".

Luckily entertainment soon arrived in the form of the macho idiocy of the Met. Swaggering into the pub, three coppers nicked someone for saying "Shut up". This rapidly led to a scuffle, which "bordered on a fracas at times" according to one eyewitness sat on the pavement eating chips.

The Bill were then chased out onto a busy Holloway road by dozens of well read anarchists. As more and more arrived, the traffic blocked street was a mass of panicky coppers swinging truncheons at anyone who came too close as the growing crowd chanted and engaged in the traditional light scuffling with the boys in blue.

Police in riot gear ended up shoving local Waitrose customers down the road (leaving a trail of marinated tofu and sun dried tomatoes spilled in the gutter) Waitrose customers don't expect this sort of treatment – it's only at Lidl or Kwik-Save where it's par for the course. Ultimately seven were nicked for violent disorder.

An eye-linered skate punk there for the first time described the Annual Scuffle as 'very informative about the state of anarchist politics today'.

Disclaimer: SchNEWS warns all readers... you can't take our freedom but we can't take our beer!

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test

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