

FREEDOM

50P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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A WHITER SHADE OF WHITE

What a surprise. Blair's week of hell has turned out to be no such thing. Few anarchists would have been shocked by this.

The Labour backbenchers have shown their usual lack of guts, many undoubtedly preferring to rebel just enough to secure a future career in the party hierarchy than be bothered about a broken election manifesto promise (never mind such minor things as principles).

Lord Hutton's report has been even more beneficial. An appointed law lord, a classic representative of the British ruling establishment, has found the government not guilty. The word 'whitewash' springs to mind, particularly given what Hutton decided to ignore and what he concluded. For while his report bordered on the laughable on many occasions, it went well into farce territory when he pondered whether the "desire of the prime minister to have a dossier which, while consistent with the available intelligence, was as strong as possible in relation to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's WMD, may have subconsciously influenced Mr Scarlett and the other members of the JIC to make the wording of the dossier somewhat stronger than it would have been if it had been contained in a normal JIC assessment"! Blair has many qualities, but being able to 'subconsciously' influence people is more fitting to the realms of comic book superheroes than, say, a public enquiry.

It must have only been Hutton who failed to notice all those memos from Downing Street officials to Scarlett asking for multiple changes in wording. After all, how could those result in pressure to harden the dossier? A far better explanation is subconscious

influences, although that was merely a 'may have'. Yes, of course, these memos had no effect on the intelligence chief's concern to accurately report the intelligence available. It merely took numerous rewrites to do this. It was a mere coincidence that each one hardened the claims contained within.

So, when Blair's chief of staff warned that a preliminary version of the dossier contained no evidence that Saddam was a threat, 'let alone an imminent threat', and a mere week later another version was produced which included the claim that the Iraqi dictator had the capacity to launch WMDs in 45 minutes that was simply a product of good fortune. Or when Campbell asked Scarlett to change a claim that the Iraqi military 'may be able' to deploy WMD within 45 minutes to 'are able' that, too, simply shows that the subconscious works in mysterious ways.

Not that such redrafting amounts to the 'sexing up' BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan quoted Kelly as complaining about. No, not at all. Perhaps Blair's subconscious-influencing powers explains Hutton's failure to comment on how Blair could chair the meeting at which the strategy for outing Kelly was adopted and also later deny having anything to do with it?

But in Hutton's world there was no 'underhand strategy' to name Dr Kelly, so ignoring Campbell's diary entries in which he confessed his desperation to get the scientist's name out. It is one of the many 'awkward questions' that the Hutton report leaves unanswered.

Perhaps he was picked precisely on his ability to ignore what he, and all of us, heard at his inquiry? Subconsciously, of course.



Anti-war demonstrators outside the Hutton enquiry

So it appears that Campbell's strategy has paid off. By narrowing down everything dodgy about the Iraq war to the single question of what a BBC reporter said in a few seconds one early morning, Campbell has sidetracked the key issue. Namely, whether the war in Iraq was really necessary at all.

So, to summarise. Hutton attacked the BBC for allowing one of their journalists to criticise the government on the basis of one uncorroborated report from a source. Yet he failed to attack the government for making the 45-minute claim on the basis of a single uncorroborated report from within Iraq. We should never forget that while

Gilligan's report was wrong in one important respect, the rest of it was right. The 45-minute claim was inserted late, there was disquiet in the intelligence communities about the dossier and there was an anonymous, single source for the information. All of which Hutton strangely ignored. Sexed up? Fucked up, more like.

What is amazing is that Campbell could accuse the BBC of running an anti-war agenda. In fact, the BBC was the most pro-war of the five channels. Two things are true. Firstly, Hutton's report will ensure that it becomes even more subservient to the government, and secondly, it gave a clear message to

any civil servant thinking of becoming a whistleblower what to expect if they decide to follow their conscience.

What Hutton did not address is the simple fact that sixteen months after the publication of the government's dossier, not a single WMD has been found.

And on the basis of the Hutton report John Reid, the health secretary, asserted he wanted to see a shift from the culture of a general allegation that "all politicians are self-serving and prepared to lie even about the greatest and gravest matters like going to war"! And people wonder why we anarchists are revolutionaries ...

WORKERS ARMED STRIKE THREAT

Southern Oil Company workers in Iraq finally won their three-month long struggle over wages when they threatened an armed strike for higher and fairer salaries this month. The breakthrough follows weeks of negotiations and several walkouts by workers across the country.

The solidarity of oil sector workers in Kirkuk, Baaji and Baghdad's Daurra was key in achieving the victory. Coalition authorities are currently dependant on SOC - Iraq's biggest and most lucrative oil company - for supplies following the breakdown of Iraq's northern fields, which have suffered continuous attacks on their pipelines and stations.

In December last year, union represent-

atives told independent human rights group Occupation Watch that SOC workers were saving some of their wages



SOC workers

for the possibility of strike action. When these workers saw their wages being cut by the Coalition below even the emergency payments they were earning at the time, they responded, insisting on a new wage scale hooked to market prices.

The union reinforced their demands by warning that workers would take militant action if demands were not met. This prompted the Minister of Oil to travel to Basra himself to begin immediate negotiations with union reps.

In early January this was followed by full scale walk-outs by workers from five major power plants, with representatives citing poor wages and long hours as the biggest reason for the action. In Najiheeba this went even further, with

workers actually attacking Coalition buildings and officials in protest.

Two weeks later, oil workers in Basra joined the Electricity workers, threatening a total shut down of Iraq, infrastructure if demands weren't met.

The end result is that minimum wage has been set at 102,000 Iraqi Dinars per month - a rise of over 30% - though 102,000 is still barely enough. The lowest rent in Basra is 25,000 per month, leaving just under 20,000 per week (under £2 a day) to spend on food, school books, gas, fuel and clean water.

Other achievements included the introduction of risk and location payments to workers in hazardous or remote locations.

The Iraqi oil workers' direct action victory is the first step in the long journey. Life is still hand to mouth for the vast majority of Iraqi people and ten million are unemployed - a staggering 70% of the total population.

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Ewa Jasiewicz

Home and away

FREEDOM

Volume 65 Number 03

Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject all government and economic repression.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice.

In our building in Whitechapel we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host a social centre and meeting space, the Autonomy Club. We're currently developing open-access IT provision for activists to use.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that human freedom can only thrive when the institutions of state and capital have been abolished. Freedom's editors wish to present a broad range of anarchist thought, and as such the views expressed in the paper are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.

Stuff your boss

Issue 9 of Catalyst, the Solidarity Federation's freesheet, is now out. Articles include Casual Killing, Scab Union Scam, Flexibility in the Workplace, No More waiting for (London) Weighting. Also available are leaflets on rights at work. For free copies, contact SF, PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF, tel 07984 675281, email solfed@solfed.org.uk

Obituary

Kathleen Rantell, also known as Kathleen Beharrel, died on 11th January 2004 in Glasgow. During the 1950s in Lancashire she organised a highly successful anarchist group called Colne and Nelson Libertarian Discussion Group, and a confederation of local anarchist, syndicalist and pacifist groups, the Nelson and Colne Antimilitarist Committee, to campaign against conscription.

She set up a community in Kirkubrightshire with the Colne artist Leo Beharrel and others and, while her daughters were young, had connections with Kilquhanity House School. She remained an anarchist all her life, but in later years devoted her energy to the world campaign for clean water rather than the anarchist movement specifically.

Circulation

We would like to increase the readership of Freedom, and an important part of this is getting better circulation. If you would like to help by selling Freedom or asking bookshops, libraries or newsagents to stock it please write to us or email circ@freedompress.org.uk

Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 21st February 2004 and the last day for getting copy to us will be Thursday 12th February. You can send articles/letters to us at FreedomCopy@aol.com or by snail mail to 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

If you are interested in writing regularly for Freedom we want to hear from you!

News from inside

Payouts after assaults

Seven youths who were held in Portland young offenders' institution in Dorset have won a £120,000 payout after being assaulted by prison officers. They had been punched, slapped, kicked, and had their heads banged against the floor by the screws. The Prison Service agreed an out-of-court settlement just before a legal case was about to begin.

The solicitor for the youths said that this case was "only the tip of an iceberg" and that the police investigated 53 cases dating back to the 1980s. Despite this payout, no screws have faced criminal charges and there have only been two

dismissals.

Former prison Chaplain, Peter Tullert, accused the prison of covering up assaults on inmates by officers and an ex-screw at the Victorian jail in Dorset told the media that she had witnessed brutality and, after telling her employers, received threats that drove her into hiding.

A Prison Service spokesperson said that Portland had "improved considerably". Two further damages claims have yet to be settled.

Bad girls!

A High Court judge has ruled that teenage girls can now be kept in adult

prisons. Mr Justice Hooper rejected a test case put forward on behalf of a 16-year-old girl being kept at Eastwood Park women's prison. He said that he didn't see how it was in the girl's interest, but that the system was lawful because of our cramped prison system. Some 68 girls under 18 are being kept in adult prisons in the UK.

Part-time prisoners

Two 'weekend jails' should now be open to house prisoners who would normally be given a prison sentence but are not considered high enough risk to go into a regular jail, so their time will be split between being inside and their normal lives. Their will be facilities at Kirkham, Preston, and Morton Hall prisons.

When in their communities the offenders will be under the supervision of probation officers, either working, looking for a job, or doing unpaid work (in theory!). David Blunkett claims that this is an attempt to reduce the negative impact of short custodial sentences - nothing to do with the ridiculously over-crowded prisons then! Pilot magistrate courts will be able to impose a sentence of up to 26 weeks for a single offence, including up to 45

days inside. Crown courts will be able to give longer sentences of up to a year.

Some prisoners in need of support

• Sue Brackenbury - imprisoned for taking direct action against military targets: Sue Brackenbury HT 6792, HMP Eastwood Park, Worton-under-Edge, Falfield, Gloucestershire GL12 8DB

• John Bowden - long time prison resister and anti-authoritarian: John Bowden 6729, HMP Glenochil, King O' Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3AD

• Tomasz Wilkoszewski - imprisoned for killing a fascist in self-defence: Tomasz Wilkoszewski, Zaklad Karny, ul. Orzechowa 5, 98-200 Sieradz, POLAND

• Harold H. Thompson - US anarchist prisoner serving a long sentence: Harold H. Thompson 93992, Northwest Correctional Complex Site 1, Route 2, Box 660, Tiptonville, Tennessee, 38079, USA

Sadly we cannot list all the prisoners who need the support in the world. To find out about more prisoners we suggest you look at the Brighton Anarchist Black Cross website at www.brightonabc.org.uk



Portland YO1

LISTINGS

Aberystwyth

12th to 14th March Introduction to renewable energy at The Centre for Continuing Education, Laura Place. For info contact 01974 821564 or see www.greendragonenergy.co.uk

Brighton

7th and 8th February Organising meeting for the G8 summit in 2005. For info contact g8gathering@yahoo.co.uk

Bristol

21st February Festival for Peace and Justice - day of debates, workshops and stalls from 10am to 6 pm, Southville Centre, Beaulieu Road. Contact 0117 971 7784 for info

Buckinghamshire

27th to 29th February Living in Communities course at LILL, Redfield Community, Buckingham Road, Winslow. This course is offered by Redfield in association with Diggers and Dreamers. See www.lowimpact.org or contact lili@lowimpact.org or call 01296 714184

5th to 7th March How to make biodeisel - produce your own cheap, carbon-neutral diesel with no need for alternation to your engine. For more info see www.lowimpact.org or contact lili@lowimpact.org or call 01296 714184

19th to 21st March Self-build Geodesic Domes - build your own low-impact dwelling/storage/spare room/retreat ... from cheap, sustainable materials. For more info see www.lowimpact.org or contact lili@lowimpact.org or call 01296 714184

London

12th to 15th February Peace Not War benefit: four-night music festival at

Hackney Ocean, Mare Street, E8. For more info contact 020 7515 4702 or festival@peace-not-war.org

15th February Britain's Guantanamo: Internment without Trial in Belmarsh evening at Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, from 2pm to 4.30pm. For more info contact 07816 823437 or see www.peaceandprogress.org

14th February Sex for Peace. For more info see www.sacredsexrevival.com

20th February Cartoon Art and Anarchy talk by Donald Room (creator of the world famous Wildcat cartoon strip) at 8pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn. Organised by the London Anarchist Forum

21st February An African afternoon in memory of Malcolm X from 2pm to 8pm at Unity centre, 2-4 Ravenstone Street, Balham. For more info contact nkexplo@yahoo.com or Eki on 020 8347 7605

25th February Authors' reading night at Use Your Loaf Social Centre, 227 Deptford High Street, SE8, from 7.30pm. Bring stuff to read, or just listen ...

27th February Critical Mass Bike Ride, meet at 6pm under Waterloo Bridge by the NFT

Every Wednesday the LARC Library from 1pm at 62 Fieldgate Street, E1. Every Saturday Vigil for the release of Mordechai Vanunu from 12 noon to 2pm at Kensington High Street near the Israeli Embassy. For more info see www.vanunu.freeseve.co.uk or call 020 7378 9324

Manchester

27th February Benefit for Greater Manchester and District CND at the Star and Garter with Manchester Hooker, Politburo, Icons of Poundland, from 9pm to 1am. Call 0161 273 8283 or see www.gmdcnd.org.uk for info

Oxfordshire

28th February Demo at Campsfield Refugee Detention Centre between 12 noon and 2pm. For info call 01865 558145

Powys

14th February Challenging Militarism in Wales, a day organised by Cynefin y Werin / Common Ground, so groups and activists across Wales can meet to share ideas, co-ordinate actions and develop campaigns. From 10.30am to 4.30pm at the Methodist Church Hall, Back Lane, Newtown

Yorkshire

5th March Anti-fascist benefit with Random Hand at the 1in12 Club, 21-23 Albion Street, Bradford. Call 01274 734160 or see www.1in12.com

World

6th and 7th February Demo against NATO security conference in Munich, Germany. For more info contact con_action@no-nato.de

1st March Veggie Month. See www.animalaid.org.uk/veggie/month/contents.html or call 01732 364546, ext 29

5th March Women's Environmental Network Fifteenth Anniversary. See www.wen.org.uk

8th March International Womens' Day event - a special information and discussion website has been set up at www.enrager.net/m8

Groups

Anarchist Federation
c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street,
London E1 7QX
www.afed.org.uk

Class War Federation
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX
www.classwar.org

Industrial Workers of the World

PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ
www.iww.org.uk

Solidarity Federation
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
www.solfed.org.uk

For details of smaller and local groups see www.enrager.net/britain

Social Centres

Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE)

17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh
www.autonomous.org.uk

The Cowley Club

12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA
www.cowleyclub.org.uk

Freedom

84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 Kebele

14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY

www.kebele.org

Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)

The Basement, 78a Penny Street, Lancaster

www.eco-action.org/lancaster

London Action Resource Centre (LARC)

62 Fieldgate Street, London E1

www.londonarc.org

SUMAC Centre

245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX

www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/

Use Your Loaf

227 Deptford High Street, London SE8

www.squat.freeseve.co.uk/

useyourloaf.html

1in12 Club

21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, West

Yorkshire, BD1 2LY

www.1in12.com

56a Infoshop

56 Crampton Street, London SE17

www.safetycat.org/56a/

Britain

Strikewatch

January 2004

- Tens of thousands of civil servants were last week set to launch a two-day strike over pay. However, at the last minute the PCS leadership went behind members' backs and suspended the strike at the Department of Work and Pensions, instructing its 86,000 members there to go to work as usual to allow talks to take place. Several thousand other workers still struck as planned elsewhere.

- Tram drivers in Manchester struck on 17th January for 24 hours, threatening more stoppages in the coming weeks in a dispute over union recognition.

- RMT and Amicus members walked out last month, shutting down the Tyne and Wear Metro in an attempt to reduce the length of the working week.

- Land Rover workers fighting for higher pay struck on the 26th January for 24 hours. Land Rover bosses have made noises threatening the future of the plant if workers don't put up and shut up.

- On the 13th January, staff employed by the tram drivers' union Aslef have voted overwhelmingly to walk out, following severe bullying by their new leader, Shaun Brady. Staff – who are members of the GMB general union – decided by twenty votes to five to take industrial action, following harassment, and Aslef bosses threatening workers with the very same anti-union legislation they are supposed to oppose.

- A string of Ulster public services will be hit by extended strike action within the next few weeks. 20,000 workers, mostly members of the Nipsa union were set to walk out on 6th February as Freedom went to press, after attending protest rallies in January.

- University lecturers began a month-long ballot for a national strike last month, claiming that wages in the sector have fallen by 40% compared with the rest of the workforce for its 47,000 members.

- Industrial action by nursery nurses reported in previous Freedoms is set to escalate in the coming weeks. Staff have fought for better pay in a series of short walk-outs, but as this has achieved nothing they are preparing to stage an indefinite strike. Best of luck to them!

- Driving examiners are to be balloted on strike action that could see thousands of driving tests cancelled. They say their employer, the Driving Standards Agency, has refused to settle a six-month-old pay dispute. Driving examiners conduct 6,000 tests a day, and we are pretty sure that the bosses couldn't hire milkmen as scabs as Royal Mail attempted to do during the postie strikes ...

- Reporters at the Telegraph newspaper may soon strike, amid growing anger at years of cost-cutting while owner Conrad Black was receiving allegedly unauthorised payments.

- Thousands of school employees in Croydon are contemplating industrial action in a bid to ease the education funding crisis. A half-day strike in the spring is being lined up in an effort to prise more money out of the Government or Croydon Council.

- More than 100 workers at the Beagle aircraft firm in Christchurch staged a one-day strike in support of a 6.5% pay claim. Management had only offered 2%.

There is power in a union!

... in its members that is, and unions should be structured to reflect this

The current period is marked by an increase in workers' anger and action. Trade unions have started to reassert themselves. Strikes, while increasing, are nowhere near the levels of twenty and thirty years ago. However, it is still early days. What happens next depends on what direction trade union militants decide to take.

Currently, the various parties of the left, led by the SWP in England/Wales and the SSP in Scotland, are trying to get the more militant unions to break their financial links to New Labour. Anarchists cannot help but agree. Why fund your oppressors? Yet while agreeing on this, we radically object to the suggestion that unions should tie themselves to a new, 'more leftwing', party. To do so will simply repeat the mistakes of the last hundred years when the union bureaucracies created the Labour party. Rather than push the struggle for socialism forward, electoralism has simply gutted it of any real radical practice and theory. Instead of

constructive organisation at the grassroots, energy and resources are wasted trying to elect politicians who will not betray us or the ideals of socialism. But of course they always have done.

Instead anarchists argue that the unions should be independent from all political parties. They should use their members' contributions not to fund a new set of would-be politicians but rather to campaign for their members' interests directly. We suggest far more than just this. Anarchists argue that the labour movement is currently deeply flawed and that is the source of many of our current problems. Moreover, we have a practical alternative which would make politicians irrelevant.

The current unions

Anarchists have little time for the way the current trades unions are organised and act. They are bureaucratic and top-down. The rank and file have little say: their power is delegated to leaders, whose interests are more often in maintaining their huge salaries than fighting in the interests of their members. The unions are hopelessly sectionalist. While we have one boss, we are divided into many



Militant pickets during the miners' strike in Yorkshire

different unions. The members of one union often cross the picket lines of their fellow workers simply because they go on strike at different times. They do the bosses' job for us by dividing our forces. Assuming, of course, the union bureaucracy actually decides to support effective action rather than giving up at the first hurdle.

So, for anarchists, the unions waste the only real power we, as workers, have: our economic power, our ability to use direct action to defend and further our interests where we work and are exploited. For these reasons we argue for a different form of workplace organisation, one run by and for its members.

From the bottom-up

This is how anarchists think the labour movement should be organised, from the bottom-up. The basis of the union should be the mass meeting of workers assembled at their place of work. This meeting elects its office or factory committee and delegates. It is for the workers affected to decision when and what kind of action to take, not distant bureaucrats. To co-ordinate common struggles, anarchists advocate federalism.

The workplace union is federated to all other such committees in the locality, each locality federates and so upwards. This promotes class solidarity. In addition, unions within the same industry federate together. The IT workplace is affiliated to a district IT federation. In district federation is affiliated to the national federation.

The decision making process flows from the union meeting upwards. The committees are not vested with power to abuse. The members of union committees should not be representatives like MPs who air their own views and ignore the people. Rather they are delegates who carry the message of the workers who elect them. If they try to tell the workers what to do, then they are replaced as every delegates is subject to instant recall by the persons who elected them. Rather than being highly paid, the aim would be for as few as possible to receive wages as delegates and if they do then it should be the average wage of the workers at the base of the union. This is not merely a pipe-dream as such unions do still exist – despite the massive repression unleashed against them worldwide – for example

the revolutionary syndicalist unions the CNT and CGT in Spain and the horizontally-organised base unions in Italy such as UniCOBAS and CUB

Getting there ...

Clearly such a movement does not exist in this country and it will not appear overnight. It will require anarchists to work together to spread our ideas to our fellow workers. For those of us who are anarchists, we need to think about how we can work within the labour movement (at the rank and file level, of course). I believe we should be working with the rank and file and trying to create autonomous workplace organisations, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and organised in a libertarian way and using libertarian tactics.

By a member of the
Anarchist Workers Network

The AWN wishes to help link together anarchists by industry and sector to spread basic ideas about workers' autonomy and direct action amongst our fellow workers, unionised or not. Contact the AWN c/o Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. See www.awn.org.uk

Nazi no-show

A proposed march by the National Front through Upton Park in London failed to materialise last week, after anti-fascists travelled to the area to protest.

A bystander who didn't wish to be named said: "They must have been frightened off, there were a lot of police around. The current tactics of the ANL (now known as Unite against Fascism) seem quite ineffectual though. They didn't seem to have any specific plan, they were

just turning up and shouting."

The abortive march is the third time in three weeks that the National Front and BNP have organised events in London, after a break of nearly a year.

On 18th January the National Front marched through Woolwich, when 50 members marched down Church Street escorted by police, and a leafleting campaign on the 24th in Pimlico saw 25 BNP members accosting the public, to general derision.

Monkey magic

The end of January saw a victory for animal rights campaigners after plans for a primate research centre in Cambridge were dropped.

Cambridge University, who had proposed the centre, pulled out citing excessive security risks after repeated demonstrations and warnings from concerned animal rights groups.

A widely publicised effort working under the banner of 'Stop Primate Experiments at Cambridge (SPEAC)',

featuring several coordinated regional organisations, has been a major factor in the decision.

The project was originally given the go-ahead by John Prescott after heavy opposition from both local authorities and Cambridge Police. It was intended to generate research into Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's disease by using live monkey's brains as a research tool.

See editorial, page 6

International

21st century dambusters

Our roving reporter talks ecology, anarchism and the struggle against the dam with Solidari@s con Itoiz

We live in an age of water wars. The Israeli state occupies the West bank largely to take advantage of its aquifers and a recent attempt by the Turkish state to dam the Tigris and Euphrates rivers almost caused war with Syria. The control of rivers through vast dams has been the dream of states and corporations across the world for over eighty years. The Spanish State is no exception. In the North of the Iberian Peninsula the Plan Ecologica aims to divert many rivers and put them at the disposal of industry, tourist hotels and intensive agriculture. The water wars are fought between states and within the states – against the interests of the common people and against the very earth itself. In the region of Navarra the Itoiz dam will flood nine villages and destroy the wildlife of two valleys. The struggle against the Itoiz dam has reached international prominence through the use of direct action by the ecological group Solidari@s con Itoiz (Solidarity with Itoiz).

Your fearless Freedom reporter caught up with two activists from the Solidari@s asked them some questions. I refer to the two activists only as 'M' and 'C' to keep their identities secret. Sometimes I've also slightly changed or paraphrased their answers for clarity.

In 1996 the Solidari@s stopped work on the dam for one year when they cut the cables on the concrete transporter. Although the Spanish High Court had already ordered the dam's construction illegal, the Solidari@s were rewarded for their act of law-enforcement by being charged with kidnapping – a security guard had been locked in his office for several minutes. The activists charged responded by going on an international tour, doing talks and actions across Europe, most memorably an occupation of the London Millennium Eye in alliance with opponents of the Indian Narmada dam.

Freedom: The Solidari@s are a part of a wider wave of ecological direct action. Where did they get their inspiration?
M: For us, the UK direct action movement is a very big inspiration: fighting the motorways, the anti-road campsites ... we have a lot of influence from here ...

Freedom: And how did you find out about the UK direct action movement?
M: Mainly from the Undercurrents' videos – we have all the videos. We are also working with groups from all parts of Europe, and we made actions with Narmada-UK, since is same struggle. In Holland we made action with Groen-Front, a very strong direct action group ... and also in other parts, with the

Italian anarchists ... there are a lot of people who have the same problems and the same mentality and the same actions.

Freedom: A lot of the time we are connected, not through any formal group, but because we share a way of doing things ...

M: Informal, yes it is the best way.

Freedom: The roots of the anti-dam campaign lie in the 1980s, when the Coordination Against the Dam began to oppose the government's plans. This grouping of unions, political parties and civil society groups mainly fought the impending dam through the courts. When construction work began in 1995 the Solidari@s adopted a different kind of tactic.

C: We don't believe in law! We are direct action ...

Freedom: In the mid 1990s we also saw a rise in ecological direct action in the UK. Is it a coincidence that the same kind of movement was happening in the Basque country?

M: In the 1980s there was a strong campaign against the road from Pamplona to San Sebastian, we made one camp; that was 1990. It was a strong ecological fight against the road ...

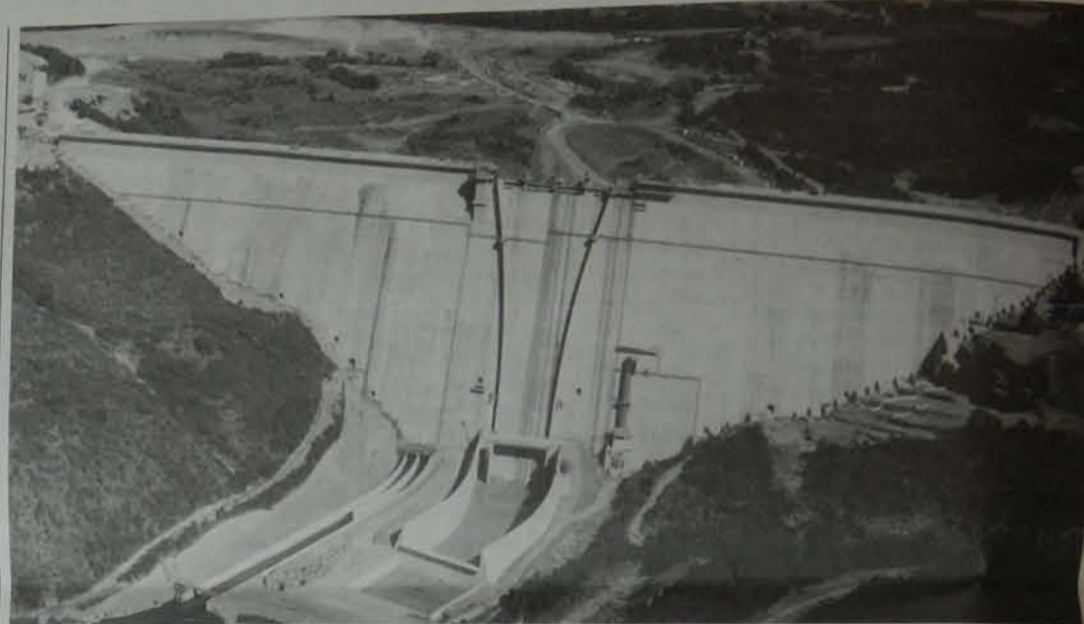
C: Against progress!

Freedom: Did your group arise out of a wider environmental movement?

M: The end of the motorway campaign saw a lot of changes – many environmental groups started to talk with the political parties, to change their tactics and become less radical. Also at the time ETA began putting some bombs and killing some people ... so it became part of a wider struggle in the Basque country, it introduced another dynamic.

Freedom: I've heard that it's more dangerous to be a radical activist in many parts of Spain now, because of the presence of ETA, the government will make up links and use that as an excuse to repress you – is that a big problem?

M: It can be a problem, because the tactic of the Madrid government is to use the argument of violence – they're eager to make our struggle seem violent. When we made an action that stopped the work one year – because we cut some cables – the newspaper and all the media started a very strong campaign saying that we are terrorists and we start with the violence ... it wasn't any violence ... but it was a strong action, because we made a lot of damage, millions of damage, so they start 'you are terrorists, you are part of ETA', so the government is always very interested to manipulate the reason for the fighting.



Expensive, illegal, environmentally destructive: the Itoiz dam in Spain

C: But now there are all the other movements, the squats, the government is very eager to link them with terrorists – doesn't matter if it is in the Basque country or not – Barcelona, Madrid ...

Freedom: Many 'Spanish' activists refuse to recognise the legitimacy of the Spanish state. The legitimacy of this state is also challenged by regional nationalist groups. Historically, nationalist groups in the Basque area have resisted Madrid's authority. How does this affect the actions of Solidari@s con Itoiz? Is that area's history of national struggle a bonus?

M: You mean, if the social movement in the Basque country helps, for example, the struggle against the Itoiz dam? Yeah, I think so. Yeah, because I think the people are more sensitive to other problems, environment problems, natural problems ... I think maybe the community sense, the links, it help social struggle, the political struggle and the struggle for the earth.

C: I think that Basque people are quite open minded, because they are fighting so long that they don't believe in government; they know well the face of government and politics ... they are a people who live connected with an environment – forest, rivers, all other parts of Spain is very industrialised.

M: And so are some parts of the Basque country! Some provinces are very developed; very badly. Maybe the place we live, in Navarra, is more forest ... For us there are no borders to say 'this is the Basque nature, this is the Spanish nature', for us there is no border.

Freedom: So in the Solidari@s campaign, there are both people who have been born in the area, and there are also people who've come from other parts

of the Spanish State?

M: And also from Europe, and from the world ...

C: You are welcome to come!

M: A lot of people take part, we have no restriction of the territory – we are fighting against earth destruction, first thing, because for us there are no borders to say 'this is the Basque nature, this is the Spanish nature', for us there is no border.

Freedom: How do the Solidari@s see the other political groups active in the Spanish state? Ignoring the traditional left – the PSOE, equivalent to our own Labour Party. They're in the pockets of the companies just like the PP (conservatives), but maybe in slightly different pockets. But what about the Anarchist organisations, like the legendary CNT direct action union?

C: We are like a net – so we help each other. We are fighting against the dam, but maybe there is an action in another city against the high-speed [rail link], or maybe against a jail, and we go ... so we are like a net, and one day we're all together, but there are too many struggles and we cannot be all together ... I used to lived with a CNT member ... and for example in the social centre we had in Pamplona, the CNT is there.

M: I think the CNT is very few people, but they work hard, very active.

Freedom: Right now the authorities are test filling the dam, to see whether it will hold the water's weight. Most of the villages in the water's path have already been violently evicted. Although the Spanish high Court is still ruling against the dam there is no guarantee that the dam won't be filled quickly in a few days, to prevent all the campaigners with a fait accompli.

Still the struggle continues. The wars that are fought by the companies always demand our resistance. After making more than seventy actions in eight years the Solidari@s con Itoiz also need to struggle to defend themselves. Iñaki Garcia Koch was recently jailed for five years for his part in the cable cutting action.

Is there anything else you'd like to say to people in the UK who will be reading this interview?

M: We'd like to say that we are fighting against this dam, and we have to say that it is not a local problem. Because now the big discussion in the world is the water privatisation; this must be one of the biggest problems in the world. Now in the 21st century the big corporations want to take control over all the water, and this is already happening in many places around the world ... so, I think we have to take control of our resources, not only the water – everything that we need, that is not a luxury, but a real need. They want to steal this resource that belongs to everybody, and they want to get a lot of money from that, and there are a lot of people who are dying now because they don't have any fresh water to drink. So the water in this century must be the biggest problem, just like oil was for the last century and the cause of the biggest wars, just like oil has been.

Notes

1. Spanish anarchists began using the @ symbol for plural words to make them non gender-specific, as opposed to the standard masculine 'os' form.
2. Undercurrents is an activist news reporting group that has, since 1993, made videos reporting on direct action and campaigning issues.
3. The armed struggle Basque nationalist group.

See www.sindominio.net/sositoiz/ or www.sositoiz.net
email sositoiz@sindominio.net

Kingdom of Micomicon

Solidarity forever

Dave M considers twenty-odd years of organised anarchist (and related) activity in Haringey

I've been active in various local libertarian, class struggle and community groups and campaigns in Haringey, North London for just over twenty years. This is my personal recollection and summary ... it is just one view. The idea is not to blow any trumpets, but to evaluate some of our local experiences to see whether anarchist ideas and activities can be relevant, popular and even mainstream in our local communities – and whether organised local radical activity can make a real difference. If so, how do we realise this potential?

Our area

230,000 people live in Haringey, North London – the generally middle-class western side (Crouch End, Hornsey, Muswell Hill) and the generally working-class eastern side (Tottenham), with a very mixed centre (Wood Green) dominated by the commercial High Road and its 'Shopping City'. In the predominately working-class areas there's a very high percentage of people from minority ethnic groups, mainly African and Caribbean, and Greek, Turkish and Kurdish. Most of the area's factories have closed down and employment is now mainly service and shop work, with the Council being the largest employer.

Local libertarian activity

I haven't heard much about local anarchist activity before the mid-1970s. There was the so-called Tottenham Anarchist Outrage in 1911 when apparently two Russian anarchists killed a copper chasing them after a robbery – and there was an anarchist bookshop, *Libertaria Books*, in the area in the early '70s.

In the late '70s and early '80s local anti-nuclear power campaigners were very active, and there was a strong, independent Haringey Women's Centre. The local labour movement was also strong, but dominated by the Communist Party. When I moved to Tottenham I was initially active in the Haringey and Islington Claimants Union – a libertarian group who'd been highly involved with claimants struggles since the late 1960s. A few of us set up the Tottenham Claimants Union (TCU) in 1983, at first meeting in someone's home, then in a newly-set up council-funded Unemployed Workers Centre dominated by the Communist Party.

The TCU flourished, concentrating on empowering claimants to fight for their needs, exposing fraud squads, and making good links with local labour movement activists, the pensioners' action group and short-life housing co-ops. Women at the unemployed centre set up Haringey Unwaged Women's Group. Our high point was calling a two hundred-strong occupation of the Civic Centre to demand emergency payments

during a DSS strike. We were also very active in the Federation of Claimants Unions and helped organise conferences and a few of their annual camps.

Some Haringey activists got heavily involved in the Stop The City mass protests/carnivals in London, 1983-4. We decided to form the Haringey Community Action (HCA) anarchist collective, to support and encourage autonomous, radical local campaigns and groups – we also set up a pro-squatting group, Homes For All. Some of us started an anarchist paper, *The Free Tottenham Times*.

During the 1983-84 miners' strike both HCA and TCU got involved in support, with TCU members putting strikers up in their homes. In 1985, TCU's active support for the Wapping printworkers was the last straw for the local Communist Party who decided to try to suppress our ideas, example and influence, producing a hilarious local scandal sheet attacking us. All to no avail – the CP itself collapsed soon after, following the overthrow/demise of the USSR. The Socialist Workers Party are now by far the most dominant Left party in Haringey.

In 1985, following some years of black people's self-organisation and anger at injustice, there was the local Broadwater Farm anti-police uprising – the resulting defence campaign inspired a number of other local campaigns against police brutality and racism. The local residents association there have since worked hard to transform conditions on the estate. There were also battles that year between police and anti-fascists when anti-fascists attacked a National Front meeting in Tottenham. Fascists have not been seen in the area since – a threatened BNP meeting in Hornsey last year failed to materialise when three hundred anti-fascists gathered in wait in the area.

HCA ground to a halt in the late '80s, but libertarian activists in the west and central parts of the borough were involved in renewed anti-nuclear campaigning and strike support. TCU and the Unwaged Women's Group decided we'd had enough of the way the Unemployed Workers Centre was run, and set up our own Unwaged Centre (a shop front which we kept open daily for over five years).

The modern era begins

Then came the poll tax – a huge turning point. Through our contacts with Claimants Unions in Scotland (where the tax was first brought in) we in TCU thought it could be beaten. In 1988 Tottenham Against the Poll Tax (TAPT) was set up, based in the Unwaged Centre – one of the first anti-poll tax groups in England – and soon after, libertarian activists elsewhere in the borough were the key to the setting up of Hornsey & Wood Green APT, followed by Green Lanes APT. These three groups were the basis of a Haringey-wide mass non-



From billboard to community noticeboard: subvertising in Haringey

payment campaign (HAPTU) involving the distribution of hundreds of thousands of leaflets, 500 street reps and at one time up to twenty independent neighbourhood groups. As a strong and active local organisation we helped set up London-wide and national anti-poll tax networks and federations, including the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign after the huge anti-poll tax demo/battle there.

As the campaign drew to a close in the early 1990s, all three main Haringey groups decided to build on what was achieved and to transform themselves into local general solidarity organisations. After a year or two, the three groups merged into Haringey Solidarity Group which has continued to meet at least monthly ever since.

Solidarity activities

HSG has been involved in a wide range of issues, campaigns and initiatives – including support for community struggles and residents groups, anti-police brutality groups, strikes (including support for a long and bitter local strike by Turkish factory workers), unwaged claimants issues (including Job Seekers Allowance and housing benefits), anti-militarism, opposing privatisation of services and antisocial regeneration and development projects, opposing advertising (and supporting subvertising), and organising regular local 'critical mass' bike rides. We have responded to some local elections with Vote For Nobody leafletting and publicity (which is pretty popular – about 70-75% don't vote anyway). Many of us in the last few years have become heavily involved in our local residents associations.

All the while we have run a small office, done monthly mailouts of info and minutes to about 140 local people, held discussions, produced a range of leaflets for handing out on the street, and for many years distributed a free local door-to-door news-sheet (originally 8 to 16 pages and called Community Action, but now 2 to 4 pages and called *The Totally Independent*, with 4,000 to 15,000 copies of each edition).

HSG has always tried to encourage other people around London to form community-based solidarity organisations. We've been particularly encouraged by the growth and strength of anarchist activity in neighbouring Walthamstow, and their regular community paper *The Underdog*. It's great to hear of so many similar groups throughout the country, and to read their excellent local news-sheets. The total copies must add up to hundreds of thousands a year! With effective groups in every borough, village and town I'm sure that could be millions ... We try to play an active part in helping organise and publicise national networks and events, including the annual Mayday actions. We helped produce *The Agitator* directory of anti-authoritarian groups countrywide, and also produced and distributed a range of community solidarity stickers. Numbers in the group have fluctuated, with twenty to thirty people regularly attending meetings a few years back. There's currently about eight to twelve people actively involved. We're not a huge, dynamic group, and much of our activity has been marginal and of modest effect – but we are plugging away and doing our best to spread ideas and to support positive initiatives.

Debate and dilemmas

The group's politics have been flexible and there is often debate and sometimes controversy – but in general we have promoted libertarian/anarchist ideas and activities, collective forms of decision-making, and grass roots working-class solidarity and struggles. Apart from some Turkish comrades, there have been very few black and ethnic minority people in the group. Men are usually well in the majority at meetings, and women in the group at one time set up their own HSG Women's Group. There are few parents involved. These are major challenges to us if we want to involve more people, have real influence, and overcome marginalisation.

Other dilemmas have included: agonising over the excellent but locally

controversial Reclaim The Streets mass party which took over Tottenham High Road with unfortunately no prior involvement of local activists or residents; how community and class issues intermix; how to respect and be part of the community rather than just try to push a line and recruit; whether to work more with the SWP-dominated Trades Union Council or set up a new independent local workers network; whether to work with leftist-dominated or hierarchical organisations; focussing on local versus (inter)national issues; how to work effectively with other Haringey groups and campaigns without compromising our revolutionary ideas; how to avoid being a marginal clique; how to share the decision-making collectively whilst encouraging initiative and more involvement. We're also continually wondering why aren't we achieving so much more when there's so much fucking potential out there?! I'm sure many of these questions affect each and every local anarchist group.

If we are going to develop and build-up a popular mass anti-authoritarian movement in this country and across the world then we need to see similar locally-based solidarity groups everywhere, sharing ideas and experiences and thereby developing successful strategies for long term community resistance and real alternatives. A successful revolution can only be made by a process of ever-increasing empowerment of people at the grass roots where we live and work, in which people gain the confidence and strength to challenge all the powers-that-be that currently dominate our everyday lives. I believe it is essential to build up an independent residents' group in every street and neighbourhood, a solidarity group in every workplace, and a local anti-authoritarian/anti-capitalist organisation in every borough and town. Dave is a member of HSG and resident of Tottenham. HSG have produced a number of pamphlets, stickers and leaflets. Check out their website at <http://hsg.cupboard.org> or write to them at HSG, PO Box 2474, London N8. Donations would be appreciated!

Editorial

On 23rd January Vincent Palmer was found hanging from a ligature in the showers at HMP Woodhill. He was 37 years old and had been at Woodhill for sixteen days. Vinny, as he was known, had been on the run for six years, having escaped from Birmingham Crown Court in 1997 after being convicted of conspiracy to rob a post office. He was taken back into custody on 6th January. His was the eighth jail suicide of 2004.

Last year 94 prisoners died from acts of self-harm. Thirty-one were 25 or under, a third were on remand. The fourteen women were the highest number recorded in a single year. As Juliet Lyon of the Prison Reform Trust said, "prison suicides are a tragic indicator of sickness, not only in the individual but also in the system."

Although women make up only 5% of the prison population they account for over 15% of suicides and 45% of self-harm incidents. To quote Juliet Lyon again, "after a typical lifetime of childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence and severe mental health problems, these women are too vulnerable to be imprisoned. Female prisons are being used as psychiatric holding-cells on the cheap."

Cambridge University's announcement that they'd abandoned plans to expand their primate research facility ought to make us pause for thought.

Experiments on monkeys cause hundreds to mobilise, while the most damaged, brutalised and vulnerable members of the working class can be thrown into jail in their thousands, to rot or – for many – to take their own lives. Yet many activists barely raise an eyebrow.

Prisons are dumping grounds and, increasingly, graveyards for that section of the working class which is least economically viable and, in capital's own terms, the most dysfunctional. They're full, not only of the minority who refuse to recognise the law of property, but also those who can't cope with 21st century capitalism – the drunks, beggars, shoplifters, fine-defaulters, street drinkers and pub brawlers.

Easier for New Labour to jail them than to support them, or have them wander the streets as a despairing, disenfranchised rabble.

The German revolutionary Ernst Bloch once described revolution as a "dark crossroads ... where the dead return, bringing new announcements." In rebuilding the independent organisation of the working class we avenge all those whose lives have been lost to the cause of profit. We should speak, not only for the living, but also for the dead which this system, so full of pious cant about 'ethics' and 'remembrance', would prefer us to forget.

Quiz answers

- In descending order, samurai (warriors), farmers, artisans and merchants. The samurai despised merchants, and feudalism was showing signs of collapse by the early nineteenth century when merchants earned more than senior samurai.
- He was a submarine captain in the Austro-Hungarian Navy, sinking several ships in the Adriatic with great loss of life.
- You should never have your best trousers on.
- Three policemen were shot during a jewel robbery in London's Houndsditch in 1910. The thieves had left a card from Malatesta at the scene. After investigation, it was found that one of the thieves had approached an East End anarchist club, posing as an unemployed mechanic, and had obtained the card to get an introduction to a supplier. Malatesta was found to be innocent.

Commentary

Leaden clouds

Brian Morris and our anthropological comrades liven up my Saturday mornings. In the leaden clouds of depression I see thin blue streaks reflected in the pages of Freedom. I'm sure some of what Brian says is correct (Commentary, 24th January). He sees me as arrogant, ignorant, naive, wilfully misinterpreting him and more. Perhaps his over-reaction to disagreement is symptomatic of an inflexible mind?

Although I think anthropological arguments applied to anarchism don't work, I'm not concerned with the rights and wrongs of them – these don't exist. What matters is whether an idea is effective or not. There's nothing wrong with the idea of a flat earth (look out of the window and one can see it's flat). But as an idea it does have problems.

As I see it, what we're about is trying to untangle why anarchy hasn't come about. The battle that's always raged is basically the dichotomy between nature and nurture, or its modern equivalent, anthropology versus sociobiology. In the pages of Freedom the contest is: postmodernist academic claptrap (called such by John Shute) versus postmodernist anarchist claptrap (called anarchobabble by me).

My contention is that we now have (which we didn't have before) scientific evidence to support the 'academic claptrap'. The problem with the anarchobabble is that it's based on social science (anthropology) which has never been a science. My concern isn't with the academic aspect of the argument. I'm concerned with implementing the ideas, since that is what's missing at present from arguments about anarchism.

The problem is a tough one because many anarchists have a weak background in biology (the 'academic claptrap'). This now seems to have become my fight, since I have a sociobiological interest.

Brian asks what insights I have to offer. I thought I'd given them, but fortunately he answers his own question succinctly and correctly: humans are animals and the state consists of humans. Most people, including anarchists and (I suspect) Brian, don't think we're animals driven by our genes. He and anthropologists believe that, in some mysterious way, we're superior and that the rules governing other animals don't apply to us. If they did, Brian would have nothing to write about and anthropologists would be out of a job.

I know I'll never convince Brian and other anarchists whose views are based on anthropology. My hope is that some postmodernist neophyte will be impressed by the sociobiological argument rather than tired old anarchist rhetoric.

Peter Gibson

Surprise attack

At present there's a lot of talk of cooperation between the various anarchist groups in this country, so I was surprised to see an attack on anarcho-syndicalism in Freedom (Syndicalism, 10th January), especially as this was written ten years ago and originally published in Red and Black Revolution, the journal of Ireland's Workers' Solidarity Movement, in October 1994.

The article describes one form of revolutionary syndicalism associated with the old Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and then uses this definition to criticise present-day anarcho-syndicalism and the International Workers Association (IWA).

This leads the writer, Alan McSimóin, into making the statement that anarcho-

syndicalism is apolitical. It isn't: the very description gives the politics away. Anarcho-syndicalists see the revolutionary union in a much wider sense than that described in the article. For us, the union includes both workplace and community organisation. It's seen as an economic and political organisation – we don't see why the two have to be artificially separated.

Of course, the real crux of the article is to argue for a specific anarchist organisation, outside of any revolutionary union. Such an organisation would guide the ordinary workers' union and keep it on the 'correct' path. Sound familiar? It should – it's a mirror image of the Leninist argument for the revolutionary party.

The criticisms of what happened in Spain have been debated many times. All I want to point out is that many of those criticised for what happened were also members of the specifically anarchist organisation, the FAI.

One thing the article does get right is that anarcho-syndicalists reject political power. After all, we're anarchists. All power has to be abolished. We argue for workers' control, a different concept altogether.

Apart from the grudging admission that anarcho-syndicalism has been the largest organised tendency (in fact the only one that achieved mass appeal), the entire piece could've been written by a member of any Trotskyite group. Instead of publishing old articles, perhaps it would be more productive if you published something about modern anarcho-syndicalism, written by active anarcho-syndicalists.

Steve

DOC concession

Your report on actions taken by the Tennessee Department of Corrections (News from inside, 10th January) was a little bit misleading. It said that the DOC had effectively terminated inmates' legal work by removing typewriters and word-processors from authorised prisoners' property lists.

Initially this was indeed the position; but as a result of a co-ordinated worldwide letter-writing campaign by, amongst others, the Friends of Harold Thompson, the Tennessee authorities agreed to provide him with regular access to a typewriter, albeit of the old mechanical kind.

Small beer, perhaps, but in doing so the DOC has conceded the principle of prisoners being allowed free use of such facilities for law work. A very important concession to those, like Thompson, engaged in the struggle for prisoners' rights.

It also increases the chances of extended improvements following. The point, here on the outside, is that pressure can be exerted if we're organised strongly enough to try and do something about these impositions by faceless prisoncrats.

Harold Thompson extends thanks to all who responded on his behalf and urges us to keep up the good work for less fortunate comrades who are suffering in all manner of ways at the hands of the state repression machine. Together we can make a difference.

Frankie Dee

Friends of Harold Thompson, PO Box 375, Knaphill, Woking GU21 2XL

Pete Turner

Like many, we were saddened by the death of Pete Turner (Freedom obituary, 24th January). Pete was a huge font of local knowledge in West London, being

involved in every local struggle we can remember. He was a major thorn in the side of our council, cutting through the opportunism of local politicians.

When we set up West London Anarchists & Radicals (WAR), Pete gave it his support, attending various events despite his failing health and providing feedback on our newsletter, WAR Cry. We fondly remember Pete coming on the Hammersmith Radical History Walk during the Mayday celebrations in 2002. As others have noted, he never complained about his obvious difficulties in breathing.

More recently he gave his support to the Say No to ALMO campaign in Hammersmith, attending early meetings in his wheelchair. When he became too ill to attend he kept in touch with the campaign by telephone, always eager for news.

We were proud to raise the black flag at his funeral and it was fitting that he was buried with the banner of the London Anarchist Group. We're planning to hold a large social event in Pete's memory. We'll send details to Freedom when we have them.

Tony & Kim

West London Anarchists & Radicals disbanded in June 2003. For a copy of the final issue of WAR Cry, containing the group's final statement, please send a stamped self-addressed envelope to West London Anarchists & Radicals, BM Makhno, London WC1N 3XX

One unsung contribution Pete Turner made was as a founder member of the London Shop Stewards' Defence Committee (LSSDC) in January 1966. This was based on the well-organised ENV engineering factory in West London and it acted in defence of the convenor and chair there, Geoff Carlson and Geoff Mitchell.

On instructions from the Joint Shop Stewards Committee (JSSC), they'd acted against scab workers and consequently faced prosecution. Incidentally the JSSC, unusually for the time, covered white collar workers and were famous later for marching through London in support of NHS workers behind the banner, 'We care for those who care for us'.

The LSSDC was something of a mish-mash, comprising rank-and-file workers and some dissident union full-time officers. Peter was there as a representative of the building workers' union, with (we can imagine) his own distinctive views. The LSSDC went on to publish books and a journal, Resistance, and it took part in militant action to resist the factory closure a bit later.

It had been a base for aggressive tactics for years. For example, they met weekly to vet the names of the workers management were planning to start the following Monday. As well as being successful over its immediate aim, the LSSDC acted as a magnet for those union members who opposed the Incomes Policy of Harold Wilson's Labour government, compliant union bosses and rampaging capitalists. Peter, we need you now.

Alan Woodward

Wildfire pt 364

Karen Goaman's summary of my ideas (Commentary, 10th January) is so much at odds with what I actually wrote that I don't know where to begin a reply. It often seems that supporters of primitivism speak a different language to the rest of us. So when Karen labels me a lover of "modern industrial society" she's distorting my position. Then there's the whole 'primitivist' rhetoric itself.

The first Bulletin stressed that primitivism isn't "posing the Stone Age as a model

for our Utopia". Now Karen points to "only 150,000 years of our own pre-history" as "models and examples". She stresses that the "small-scale land-based cultures" primitivism wants aren't peasant communities (though she also says that "peasants and small farmers" are what "the Wildfire writers argue for"). This leaves us with the "gathering and hunting" tribes the first Bulletin rejected.

So to recap, primitivists don't want to go back to the Stone Age, they just imply that they do. They also consider peasant life a "return to a life of drudgery," but also "argue for" it. Which, I suppose, shows that Zerzan was right to combat the evils of language.

Then there's the whole issue of (to quote the first Green and Black Bulletin) when "civilisation collapses" through "its own volition". That can only mean one thing. It means the destruction of life as we know it, in a short period of time and whether we want it or not. Primitivists, when pressed, seem to say that they don't mean instant chaos and mass starvation by that expression but that's what it sounds like. Yet they get huffy when you point this out!

Karen shows this contradiction between rhetoric and reality. She says I raise an important issue "of how people could manage nuclear and toxic waste caused by decades of military and industrial production." She suggests finding "skilled people to contain the legacy of industrialism or to allow them to degrade as safely as possible in areas that people can avoid."

So nobody will want to work in a mine or a factory, but they'll want to look after toxic and nuclear waste? And how will they do that? Both the first Bulletins rejected workers' control out of hand.

It will require technology and industry to provide the means of waste containment, yet these are rejected out of hand. So, how will this task be done? As for dumping the waste in one area, doesn't Karen know that the environment can't be subdivided in this way? The effects of a rotting pile of industrial waste won't stop at human-made barriers.

The key problem with Karen's response to me is that it doesn't address the basic question of how we get to her primitivist utopia. She talks about "small-scale land-based cultures" but doesn't explain how the UK will support 58 million people living like that nor how we arrive there. This, incidentally, is the very crux of my critique (which none of the 'primitivists' have bothered to acknowledge, never mind address).

Given that primitivists reject workers' control, federalism, the "continuation of industrial society" (even temporarily) and so forth, I don't see how it will happen without starvation and misery on a massive scale. Perhaps 'primitivism' will be as wonderful as Karen says, but until she and her fellows actually discuss how to get there I won't be signing up.

Perhaps the reason they don't is because they know it will involve all the things they slag off 'traditional' anarchists for advocating. In other words, a process of transition involving workers' control, federalism and the use of industry.

And if they admit this, then they'd also have to acknowledge that 'traditional' anarchists don't want the "continuation of industrial society" at all but rather a total transformation of how we live.

We just recognise that this can't be

REVIEW

The self-styled 'Black Panther of Rap' is back and on top form, reckons Tom Jennings

Sonic Jihad, the new album by Paris, has (like its predecessors) seen media controversy and a delayed release, all thanks to its cover. Eventually concealed by a plain black sleeve, this shows a low-flying aircraft approaching the White House, with the legend "who is able to make war with the beast?". It has left the San Francisco Bay Area MC a target for Bush's Patriot Act, along with fellow Californians Ozomatli, Boots Riley of The Coup (pictured in front of the World Trade Centre holding a detonator on the Party Music cover, though this was several months before 9/11), Rakaa Iriscience of Dilated Peoples, and Michael Franti of Spearhead.

The Act has also affected other hip hop radicals such as New York's Mos Def and Dead Prez, all of whose record companies and distributors have been intimidated by FBI and government officials after their vocal criticisms of Bush policies.

On Sonic Jihad the lyrics and subject matter are as uncompromising as ever, ripping into the Iraq adventure, US capitalism and the New World Order, scrupulously linking these phenomena to the perspectives, realities and conditions of the Black American (and other) urban poor. What makes Paris particularly interesting, as with acts like The Coup and Dead Prez, is the explicitly revolutionary analysis.

This builds on aspects of Black Panther thought but goes beyond (for example) the fetishisation of charismatic leadership and masculine supremacism that were so prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. This more nuanced approach to contemporary issues of class, race, politics and economics avoids the impasses of Leninism, black separatism and recuperation into black nationalist/capitalist ideology, while insisting on the necessity for fundamental political change from the grassroots (the 'streets') if the degradation of the lower classes isn't to

be perpetuated.

The sound is classic raw West Coast G-Funk, with the deep driving basslines reinforcing the energy and anger of the lyrics while encouraging the body and mind to throb in response. The minimal beats are embellished with different instrumental and vocal styles and samples of political speeches, media reportage and other soundbites.

These are often direct and up-front. Sometimes they use irony, humour and parody to make their point, while on standout tracks like Sheep To The Slaughter and the single What Would You Do? the rhythms, counterpoints, percussion and vocal accompaniments are more complex and subtle, making the album less monotonous, both musically and in the straightforward (occasionally clumsy) lyrics and delivery.

Paris's 15-year longevity in the rap game can be attributed to a pragmatic nimbleness in negotiating the commercial music environment. Political integrity has led him to deal with mainstream companies strategically and on his own terms (if at all), for limited purposes and without surrendering control. What is lost in access to larger audiences is gained in autonomy and clarity of purpose, a lesson even the most apolitical commercial hip hop entrepreneurs learned early on as they tried to bring the art to the masses in the face of a corporate stranglehold.

Paris left Tommy Boy Records after their Warner Brothers distribution deal went for a (Halli)burton thanks to his attack on Dubya's dad over the 1991 Gulf War. He left Priority Records in 1995, resisting commercial pressures to pose with fashionable gangster nihilism. Setting up his own company and releasing records online leaves a mainstream role only for the independent distributors who major retailers rely on for their niche market stock. While it's more difficult to find the music, checking out the excellent guerillafunk website reveals releases by other artists of similar political hue as well as texts and links expounding and widening



their analysis.

Hip hop's influence is undeniable and unprecedented, but its political utility has been concealed and undermined in many ways. Routine contempt is shown by mainstream commentators for any cultural form coded as 'black'; and the vulgarity and profanity fuels moral panics and attracts censorious impulses from the black and white bourgeoisie, reactionaries and the politically correct. There's also deep suspicion of the commercial dilution and poisonous distortion of some of its elements, which appear to be 'negative' (and which

are magnified in order to be marketed as such) when isolated from the contexts in which they make sense.

But artists such as Paris and Dead Prez, as well as others who remain in the commercial mainstream (like Mos Def and Talib Kweli) demonstrate that hip hop culture can be revolutionary in the political sense as well as culturally. Even more than that, as representatives (but not leaders) of millions of adherents and practitioners who will never receive media coverage or reach celebrity status, they exemplify a potential for expression and organisation among the

contemporary lower classes which most radical political groups haven't predicted, noticed or appreciated.

This potential has yet to be realised in explicitly political action, but the hip hop generation is steadily becoming more assertive. The penetrating understanding shown by Paris and his comrades of the political and economic reality of global capitalism, both in general and in its local manifestations, bodes well.

Sonic Jihad by Paris (featuring Dead Prez, Public Enemy, Capleton & Kam) is available from Guerilla Funk Records at guerillafunk.com

NEW RELEASES

Still Reportin
Tragedy Khadafi
Solid / 25 il Life

As Iron Sharpens Iron
The Procussions
Traffic Records

US rap veteran and ex-child star Tragedy comes with an album of songs about the 'hood. The beats are of a high quality but the lyrical content leaves a lot to be desired: it is formulaic. The promo company which sent me these releases is run by Mike Lewis, who is also a journalist for the biggest UK hip hop rag (who shall remain nameless - suffice to say it's available in W.H. Smiths), record label owner and internet recordshop owner. Incidentally, some music CD review copies now

come with anti-bootlegging noises interspersed around the CD. This is very annoying and a great diminisher of the listening experience.

The Procussions don't inspire or engage this (white suburban) reviewer with their bog-standard 'retro' beats and rhymes. Having said that their DJ can scratch. One rapper has a similar cadence to a Jurassic 5 rapper and another sounds like Talib Kweli. US rap to me pales into insignificance in relation to what we're producing in the UK. Nottingham's Cappo, Out Da Ville and Pitman (a.k.a Styly Cee) and London's Braintax, Mystro, Blak Twang, Infinite Livez, Rodney P, Task Force and so on are bringing a fresh UK voice and fresh beats.

Chris Byrne

For more information on UK hip hop see www.ukhh.com

Falling Down
Jehst
Low Life Records

Jehst's newest offering is nothing less than superb. Jehst has this way of giving out fine rhymes that just flow relentlessly word after word. Frustration, rage, introspection, hope, all words sown through the highest grade of poesy and politics.

The guest list runs strong on London hip hop's finest names. Klashnekoff and Lewis Parker on the dirty jazz of Give It Here, Asayour on Monotony and Usmaan and The Sundragon on Manimals. The soulful vocals of Diablo, live flute from Biscuit and cuts and scratches courtesy of Mr. Thing and the prodigy under 18s DMC champ DJ IQ. Smooth loopy (up)beats that you can

nod and get down to without losing a breath.

Jehst is prophet of London's fine hip hop scene. Independent hip hop is blowing up in London and the finest of the world are coming out of the local scene. London's style and finest artists, Taskforce, Braintax, Rodney P, Klashnekoff, and most all of the Low Life Crews, are world quality, dense and intelligent beats and rhymes that make other hip hop look like child's play. Jehst lets no one down and keeps London up as one of the premium grounds for hip hop.

xParty Gurx

For more information see www.lowliferecords.co.uk

Send us your book/CD/DVD/event reviews - for details of our address see page 2.

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