

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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## THE PRICE OF PARTNERSHIP

The six thousand jobs lost at MG Rover are the most striking recent example not only of the decline in British manufacturing, (which has seen an 85,000 fall in employment over the last year – and that was *before* Rover) but also the long decline of British trade unions. Most Rover workers were union members. The unions, particularly the T&G, had worked hard to save the jobs. Three decades ago the T&G had two million members. It now has 820,000 and is in talks with Amicus and the troubled GMB to create a new 'super' union with 2.5 million members similar to IG Metall in Germany (and probably just as ineffective!)

Only 17.2% of workers in the private sector now belong to a union, despite an overall increase in employment levels (excluding manufacturing). Put another way eight out of every ten workers in private sector shops, factories, call-centres, banks, supermarkets, on farms do not belong to a union. A third are employed in a workplace where unions are recognised but two thirds aren't. Many of those who work in unionised workplaces do not bother to join a union.

The picture in the public sector is better, where 84.7% of workplaces recognise unions. Overall though the long decline in trade union membership continues. According to government figures released last week membership fell by 0.5% last year or 36,000. In the 1970s, when the British workforce was smaller, thirteen million workers belonged to unions. The figure now is just 6.78 million, or 28.8% of the workforce.

In the past union leaders blamed Thatcher for their decline, and it is true that the closure of traditional industries and union strongholds such as ship building, coal mining and car manufacturing hit the unions hard, but the unions have had more than two decades to recover yet membership has dropped by a third in the last eighteen years. While boss-friendly anti-union laws such as the ban on secondary picketing remain in place Labour has been reasonably union friendly. The economy has also grown increasing the potential pool of recruits for unions. But the decline continues and it is set to get worse.

Whoever wins the election this month the new government is pledged to cut public service employment. The growth in public sector membership has partly hidden the collapse elsewhere. This will

stop as over a 100,000 jobs are lost in central government.

Some union leaders also blamed industrial militancy for the union's decline and advocated partnership and a more consumerist approach to membership instead (seen for example in the provision of union credit cards). You hear very little these days about partnership or AA style membership packets for the simple reason that they have failed to deliver as the relentless decline in membership shows. No one is going to join a union for cheap travel insurance and more importantly partnership with the bosses is a fundamental contradiction. The interests of workers and bosses cannot be aligned. The aim of the boss is to extract as much profit (or in the public sector 'efficiency') as he or she can. Union membership was much higher when there were many more days lost to industrial action than now. The decline in militancy has been mirrored by a decline in membership.

Some unions have bucked the trend. The RMT has seen its biggest growth ever, as has the FBU. Both unions rejected partnership and have taken aggressive stances against employers' attempts to cut back benefits. You don't have to be a class struggle anarchist to see that this makes sense (although it helps!) If I am going to hand over my hard earned money to an organisation that claims it will represent my interests what do I want it to do when my employer tries to slash the value of my pension? Roll-over like the TUC did last month in the public sector or threaten strike action like the RMT did? Really it's a no brainer. Rail worker pensions have been saved, but after the election public sector workers will see the value of theirs fall.

There are few glimmers of hope in the figures published last week by the Department of Trade and Industry. The number of women joining unions has increased (by 42,000), offsetting the decline in male membership. The future though looks bleak. If the unions have not been able to stem to loss of members in the last few years what hope have they when the economy takes a down turn?

I have been writing for Freedom for about ten years. Every year I write an article when the official figures on union membership are published. It is like Groundhog Day. Membership, particularly in the private sector is in free fall. Unions are not standing up for their members. Militancy is not the problem but the solution. In a year's time what are the odds I'll be writing a very similar article to this yet again?

Richard Griffin

See also page 3 for Iain McKay's proposals on a possible future of MG Rover, and check out Imagine it... on page 8.



## DON'T VOTE

Throughout its history anarchism has rejected parliamentary politics. In Anarchy Malatesta wrote that through the state "the control over their personal behaviour, the responsibility for their personal safety are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who by usurpation or delegation are vested with the powers to make the laws for everyone and everybody and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be by the use of collective force." Elections give a veneer of respectability and legitimacy to the robbing of power from the people. That is one reason anarchists will not be voting on 5th May.

Anarchists' critique of power prevents us from participating in the sham of elections. Anarchism opposes the handing over of authority to leaders. Anarchism is about true democracy. Democracy realised through workplace self management and worker control, through housing associations, food co-ops, through free schools and community action. Anarchists believe people should have control over their own lives, sharing resources and skills, co-operating and participating in the decisions that affect them. Putting a cross on a ballot paper every four or

five years is a million miles away from the true meaning of democracy (literally 'rule of the people'). Worse than that it actually stands in the way of progress. This is another reason why anarchists will not be voting on 5th May.

Once elected governments' quickly turn their back on the people who put them in power. The list of broken manifesto promises could fill a whole issue of Freedom! Here's a recent few – Labour promised not to raise taxes, but they did. They promised not to introduce top-up fees, but they did. They promised to ban fox hunting in their first term, but took another eight years to deliver trying to wriggle out of their commitment right to the end. The British people overwhelmingly opposed the war in Iraq but Blair still went ahead and invaded resulting in over 100,000 dead. No wonder that trust in politicians is so low! Once in power we have little control over government. This is another reason why anarchists won't be going into polling stations on 5th May.

A hundred years ago Kropotkin pointed out universal suffrage cannot achieve real change because the political system will always be manipulated by those with the most

power. Under capitalism Capital will always have more influence than Labour. Kropotkin also pointed out in *The Conquest of Bread* that Parliamentary rule is "pre-eminently a middle class rule." While 19% of Britain's population are officially living in poverty the middle classes have benefited from low taxes, low interest rates and inflation. Wealth redistribution is not on the agenda. Government is about privilege and exploitation. Parliamentary democracy was always a compromise – the rulers gave a little power up as long as the capitalism wasn't challenged. Electing a government will never result in a fundamental change in power. The poor will remain poor. This is not something that anarchists can take part in by voting on 5th May.

Anarchists will not be alone on 5th May in not voting. Forecasts predict that turnout will slump. People have lost faith in politicians. They know that parliament will not deliver so why bother voting?

The answer to voter apathy isn't fiddling around with the current system but abolishing it. Voting can only delay real change. Don't vote.

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# Home and away

## FREEDOM

Volume 66 Number 8

### Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject government, and all forms of exploitation and domination.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher, founded in 1886. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice – see our website for a full list.

In our building in East London we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host the Autonomy Club meeting room and the Freedom Hacklab open-access IT space.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that people can work together and use direct action to practically improve our lives and build a better world.

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.

### Angel Alley

Apologies yet again to all the subscribers who received their paper late. We've been struggling to meet our deadlines and could really do with more help. We all have to balance putting this newspaper together with work, study or other commitments. We could always do with a hand writing articles and putting the paper together, but most importantly with sending the paper out. When we get the paper back from the printers we desperately need people to help put it into envelopes, and those envelopes all need stamps and address stickers putting on. It's not glamorous but it needs doing, so if you can help please get in touch!

We're also looking for people to help sell the paper at the London Trade Union Mayday march, so let us know if you're interested.

### Correction

The front page splash in the last issue of Freedom (Nuclear waste contracts sold, 9th April) was researched and written by Rob Ray, not Jack Ray as was previously stated. Apologies to Rob for the error.

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### Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 7th May and the last day to get your copy to us will be Thursday 28th April (see contact details above for where to send your letters/articles). If you are interested in writing regularly for Freedom we want to hear from you!

# News from the inside

### Freedom for prisoners

As many of you may know, Freedom provides free subscriptions to anyone in prison. If you have friends or family in prison, or regularly write to a prisoner, if they are interested we will be happy to send them a free sample issue or sub. If you are a prisoner yourself we can provide subs to any of your fellow inmates if they wish. Please also feel free to write to us with any news about your imprisonment, developments in your case or anything else!

### Aachen prisoners day of action

Supporters of the Aachen prisoners, currently on trial in Germany, are calling for an international day of action on Wednesday 4th May. This is to show solidarity with the four comrades on trial and to protest their treatment at the hands of the German authorities, which includes being held in isolation, the use of sensory deprivation, and being shackled hand and foot in court. For information on the case, including regular updates on the trial, see [www.escapeintorebellion.info](http://www.escapeintorebellion.info)

### New 325 magazine

The second issue of the anti-prisons/anti-repression magazine 325 is now out. Features include International Prison and Repression news, Inside the Surveillance Capitol of Europe, Joel

Aubron interview, and much more. Contact [325collective@hush.com](mailto:325collective@hush.com) for copies.

### Uprising at HMP Moorland

On 31st March there was a kick-off at HMP Moorland near Doncaster in South Yorkshire. More than forty prisoners refused to return to their cells when the screws attempted to lock them up at 7.45pm. After the screws legged it under a bombardment of prison furniture and other missiles, the prisoners took control of the wing and barricaded it. During the next four hours the wing was thoroughly trashed before large numbers of riot screws, brought in from the other jails in the area, finally managed to re-take the wing around midnight.

### International day of action against prison slavery

To highlight the growing exploitation of the slave labour of prisoners throughout the world, the UK Campaign Against Prison Slavery are calling for an international day of action against prison slavery on 7th May. Many of the companies exploiting prison labour are international or have international links. Details of a large number of slave labour companies are given on the CAPS website at [www.againstprisonslavery.org](http://www.againstprisonslavery.org) Please pass on details of forthcoming actions if

that is appropriate, and report back as soon as possible after the day, email [againstprisonslavery@mail.com](mailto:againstprisonslavery@mail.com)

### Sue May to be paroled

Sue May, victim of one of Britain's most notorious miscarriages of justice is to be released on parole next month. Sue, now 59, has spent twelve years in prison fighting her conviction for killing her elderly aunt, Hilda Marchbank, in 1992. Campaigners had expected she would be freed on appeal years ago, but two appeals against her conviction were rejected. Sue's supporters say that she is glad to be freed, but will continue to fight to clear her name.

### New Tre Arrow website

A new website has been set up by supporters of imprisoned eco-activist Tre Arrow. See [www.trearrow.org](http://www.trearrow.org)

### HMP Belmarsh bans anti-racist newspaper

HMP Belmarsh recently banned prisoners from receiving the Revolutionary Communist Group's newspaper 'Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!' on the grounds that it is racist! This is not the first time that the Prison Service have banned the paper, which is popular with prisoners, particularly for its 'Prisoners Fightback' column, on the

same spurious grounds. Not only is this decision ridiculous, but it is a flagrant breach of Article 10 of the ECHR, and contradicts a Prisons Ombudsman decision made in 2002 when HMP Full Sutton banned the paper.

### Chris McIntosh

Twenty-two year old Animal/Earth Liberation prisoner Chris McIntosh is currently awaiting trial in Seattle, accused of an arson which caused \$5,000 worth of damage to a McDonald's. He's been charged with Animal Enterprise Terrorism and faces up to thirty years in prison. Send letters of support to Christopher McIntosh 30512-013, FDC SeaTac, Federal Detention Center, PO BOX 13900, Seattle, WA 98198 (all mail must include a full return address on the front of the envelope). More info [www.supportchris.org](http://www.supportchris.org)

### Crap arrest of the week ... for bursting balloons!

Two Wakefield teenagers were recently arrested and charged with threatening behaviour – they had apparently burst some balloons! The incident happened during a visit to the town by Royal Parasite, Liz Windsor, aka The Queen – who is apparently "aware of the incident." If she feels threatened by balloons, wait until she sees the guillotine!

## LISTINGS

Every Sunday the Kebele Kafe from 6.30pm, 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol. For info call 0117 9399469.  
Every Friday The Loaf has arisen – Use Your Loaf café from 7pm to midnight at the Ragged School, Hales Street, Deptford, London SE8  
until 14th May RISK: Creative Action in Political Culture, art and film at the CCA, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. See [www.cca-glasgow.com](http://www.cca-glasgow.com) or [www.riskproject.org.uk/risk.htm](http://www.riskproject.org.uk/risk.htm)  
26th April Brixton Prison Blues, talk at The Pullens Centre, 184 Crampton Street, London SE17 at 7.30pm.  
26th to 30th April Indymedia Middle East Film Festival at The Rampart, 15-17 Rampart Street, London E1. See [www.indymedia.org/en/regions/london/2005/04/308539.html](http://www.indymedia.org/en/regions/london/2005/04/308539.html)  
29th April London Critical Mass monthly bike ride, and eleventh birthday party. Meet on the southbank at Waterloo (NFT Café under Waterloo Bridge) from 6pm.  
30th April Seventh Manchester Radical Bookfair from 12 noon to 5pm, The Basement, 24 Lever Street, for info see [www.radicalbookfair.org.uk](http://www.radicalbookfair.org.uk)  
1st May G8 bike ride fundraising party at The Rampart, 15-17 Rampart Street, London E1. See [www.g8cyclecaravan.org](http://www.g8cyclecaravan.org)  
1st May Conflict, Lost Cherries, Inner Terrestrials and more at Jilly's Rockworld, Oxford Street, Manchester, from 6pm. See [www.mortarhate.com](http://www.mortarhate.com)  
8th May London Rising Tide film night showing The End of Suburbia, Hercubush, plus a short G8 surprise, from 6.30pm at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1. For more info see [www.londonrisingtide.org.uk](http://www.londonrisingtide.org.uk)  
9th to 28th May Brighton Fringe

Festival, see [www.cowleyclub.org.uk](http://www.cowleyclub.org.uk) for more info and event listings  
10th May Wild Walworth history walk, meet 7.30pm at 56a Infoshop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17.  
20th to 22nd May Action Medics training in Manchester, be prepared for G8. For more details of this, information on other locations in June or shorter action medic trainings see [www.actionmedics.org.uk](http://www.actionmedics.org.uk)  
30th May Kingston Green Fair at Canbury Gardens, Kingston upon Thames, from 11am to 8pm. Family environmental event. 020 8546 5202 or [www.kingstongreenfair.org.uk](http://www.kingstongreenfair.org.uk)  
4th June Strawberry Fair, for more info see [www.strawberry-fair.org.uk](http://www.strawberry-fair.org.uk)  
7th June Battle of the Beanfield talk at The Pullens Centre, 184 Crampton Street, London SE17 at 7.30pm  
11th June Norwich's second annual anarchist bookfair from 10am to 7pm, For info call 07941 657485, email [norwichanarchists@hotmail.com](mailto:norwichanarchists@hotmail.com) or see [www.norwichanarchists.org](http://www.norwichanarchists.org)  
4th July Big Blockade at Faslane, for info see [www.tridentploughshares.org](http://www.tridentploughshares.org)  
15th to 17th July Guilfest, for info see [www.guilfest.co.uk](http://www.guilfest.co.uk)

### International

14th to 16th May Temporary Wild Zone in Valencia, Spain. For info contact [llavors@nodo50.org](mailto:llavors@nodo50.org)  
15th May International Conscientious Objectors' Day, organised by War Resisters' International, 020 7278 4040 email [info@wri-irg.org](mailto:info@wri-irg.org) [www.wri-irg.org](http://www.wri-irg.org)  
21st May Global Boycott Proctor & Gamble, see [www.uncaged.co.uk/pg.htm](http://www.uncaged.co.uk/pg.htm)  
11th June World Naked Bike Ride, protest against oil and clothes

dependency. Go on, do it! For info see [www.worldnakedbikeride.org](http://www.worldnakedbikeride.org)  
6th July Global day of action at the opening day of the G8 Summit. See [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org) or [www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk)

### Nationwide groups

**Anarchist Federation**  
*Network of anarchist-communists*  
Box 2, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX  
[www.afed.org.uk](http://www.afed.org.uk)  
**Antifa**  
*Militant anti-fascist organisation*  
Box 36, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX  
[www.antifa.org.uk](http://www.antifa.org.uk)  
**Class War Federation**  
*Class struggle anarchist group*  
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX  
[www.classwaruk.org](http://www.classwaruk.org)  
**Dissent**  
*A network of resistance against the G8*  
[www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk)  
**Earth First!**  
*Ecological direct action network*  
[www.earthfirst.org.uk](http://www.earthfirst.org.uk)  
**Industrial Workers of the World**  
*Revolutionary DIY union*  
PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ  
[www.iww.org.uk](http://www.iww.org.uk)  
**Solidarity Federation**  
*Anarcho-syndicalist organisation*  
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX  
[www.solfed.org.uk](http://www.solfed.org.uk)  
See also [www.enrager.net/britain](http://www.enrager.net/britain)

### Social Centres

**Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE)**  
17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh  
[www.autonomous.org.uk](http://www.autonomous.org.uk)  
**The Basement**

24 Lever Street, Manchester (contact [mustsocial@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mustsocial@yahoo.co.uk) or 0161 237 1832)  
**The Common Place**  
23 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ  
[www.thecommonplace.org.uk](http://www.thecommonplace.org.uk)  
**The Cowley Club**  
12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA  
[www.cowleyclub.org.uk](http://www.cowleyclub.org.uk)  
**Freedom**  
84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX  
[www.freedompress.org.uk](http://www.freedompress.org.uk)  
**Institute for Autonomy**  
76-78 Gower Street, London WC1  
**Kebele**  
14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY  
[www.kebele.org](http://www.kebele.org)  
**Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)**  
The Basement, 78a Penny Street, Lancaster  
[www.eco-action.org/lancaster](http://www.eco-action.org/lancaster)  
**London Action Resource Centre (LARC)**  
62 Fieldgate Street, London E1  
[www.londonlarc.org](http://www.londonlarc.org)  
**The Ragged School**  
Hales Street, Deptford, London SE8  
**The RampART**  
15-17 Rampart Street, London E1 2LA  
[www.rampart.co.nr](http://www.rampart.co.nr)  
**SUMAC Centre**  
245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX  
[www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/](http://www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/)  
**1in12 Club**  
21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 2LY  
[www.1in12.com](http://www.1in12.com)  
**56a Infoshop**  
56 Crampton Street, London SE17  
[www.safetycat.org/56a](http://www.safetycat.org/56a)

# News

## Strike watch

• Hundreds of Amicus and media union, Bectu, members working for ITV struck for 36-hours at the start of April. The result? Management quickly tabled an improved pay offer which the unions are now consulting their members on. Union officials hailed the stoppage, which disrupted production of soaps and other entertainment programmes, a great success. "Our job may not yet be done" said one official, "but we have made progress." ITV made £340m profit last year.

• Unions at the BBC, however, are gearing up for action in protest at the proposed slashing of 4,000 jobs. Ballot papers were planned to be issued at the end of April for a 24-hour strike. The journalists' union the NUJ are particularly angry because the BBC is refusing to negotiate with them. Jeremy Dear, NUJ general secretary said "all we wanted was meaningful talks with the BBC but they simply and contemptuously refuse to negotiate." Dear told delegates at the union's conference that the planned one day strike would be the first in a campaign to save jobs and protect services in what is being described by activists as the BBC's 'Wapping'.

• The threat of redundancies at Hackney Community College led to lecturers belonging to Natfhe walking out in protest. Support workers belonging to Unison are being balloted to support the strike. At the time of writing redundancy notices for more than fifty staff are due to be issued on 1st May.

• 1st May is, of course, International Workers' Day a fact no doubt lost to the managers at Hackney College. The traditional London trade union march will assemble at 12 noon on 1st May at Clerkenwell Green (Farringdon tube) and then march to Trafalgar Square for 1pm. Readers will not need to be reminded of the anarchist origins of May Day.

• Elsewhere in East London T&G members working at Ambala Foods in Stratford have taken strike action in protest at the food manufacturer's on-going pay freeze. Workers voted nine to one in favour of the action which is scheduled to take place every Friday until the dispute is settled.

• The T&G is one of several unions, including GPMU and Amicus, recognised by Remploy who have begun the process of balloting for industrial action over threats to jobs. Remploy has failed to give assurances that the current numbers of disabled people employed in its factories will be maintained. "The management has a hidden agenda to reduce the number of disabled people working in skilled factory employment" said the GMB. "They cannot be trusted to stick to agreements."

• Cleaners working at Canary Wharf took their fight for fair pay to the Old Vic last month. Morgan Stanley, the company that employs the cleaners who earn less than £6 an hour, sponsors the Old Vic to the tune of £500,000, more than enough the T&G says to settle the dispute. Theatre-goers were handed leaflets after seeing Kevin Spacey on stage saying 'enjoy the play? We want fair pay!'

• The civil service union PCS has warned that if Labour is re-elected even more jobs could be lost from the public sector, in addition to the 100,000 already lined up for the axe.

# A modest proposal...

## Since MG Rover has been driven into the ground Iain McKay suggests the best way to save jobs there

MG Rover's management have pushed Britain's last remaining large-scale car manufacturer over the brink of collapse. Five years ago, the 'Phoenix Four', four Midlands businessmen, bought Rover from BMW for a token £10 five years ago. BMW gave them £427 million soft loan while they themselves invested a mere £60,000 each. Phoenix inherited a stock of unsold cars worth £350 million.

Over those five years, they have been busy. For one, they paid themselves £30 million while their firm lost hundreds of millions of pounds. They also set up a pension fund to benefit themselves and their families. This is worth £16.5 million while the workers' pension fund is £67 million in deficit. Separately the four men took control of MG Rover's lucrative car financing operation, which currently has £10.3 million of retained profits on its books. The bosses sold assets worth roughly £1 billion in cash and re-usable assets all told, which were all apparently consumed by Rover's loss-making manufacturing operations. They also transferred valuable assets from Rover to the parent Phoenix. Meanwhile six thousand workers have lost their jobs after talks with the Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation collapsed. Even the Financial Times felt urged to denounce this as "capitalism at its ugliest."

Five years ago, the Blair apparatchiks praised the Phoenix Four to the skies. In May 2000, then trade secretary Stephen Byers praised Mr Towers's "personal strengths." The current Trade and Industry Secretary, Patricia Hewitt, is repeating this nonsense, stating that "company directors who take big risks

and achieve big successes deserve big rewards." This is the neo-Thatcherism of Blairism at its stupidest.

Meanwhile Brown and Blair pledged to do everything possible to save the company. Given their track record on this, we can expect them to pick another bunch of crooks. While they always talk of 'making hard decisions' and not being bound by ideology, they seem to have no problem picking private sector solutions to all and every problem they face. We can expect the same here - with the customary opening of the public purse marked corporate welfare. No matter what, we can trust the government to ensure that the standard capitalist way of organising production is protected.

Perhaps we can make a suggestion. How about letting the workers at the company take it over as a co-operative, instead of making thousands redundant? They could then directly and democratically elect their managers and hold them to account for their actions. This would, at least, get rid of one set of parasites and show a positive example of libertarian socialist ways of organising. Who knows, the creativity such methods would encourage may even see the workers deciding to stop producing cars and turn their talents to producing more socially and environmentally useful products!

We are sure that the government and private sector would dismiss this outright. Unsurprisingly, as it would create the threat of a good example. That is why a factory occupation would be an essential first step. If the workers, their families and those in the local community interested in the struggle



should form an assembly, seize the workplace and simply declare it under workers' self-management. That should focus the attention of the politicians no end and place them under real pressure to give in to the workers' demands.

This is, of course, a short term solution and in no way suggests that capitalism can be reformed away. Nor is it to ignore the problems which will face any island of co-operation within the sea of capitalism. However, looking at the situation realistically, it is clear that a revolution is not on the cards for the time being. That suggests we need to look at ways of applying our ideas in a

positive manner so that we can help bring it nearer. That is why we support self-managed struggle and organisation.

So why not suggest a practical solution which, if successful, it could show that workers do not need bosses and give a positive example to a labour movement caught between the evils of privatisation and nationalisation? It is not perfect, but it is far more libertarian than the alternatives of closure, a government bailout to a new set of capitalists or nationalisation.

Ultimately, if our 'solution' is any issue or problem is always 'world-wide social revolution' then we deserve to be ignored.

## Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is defined in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act as relating to behaviour "which is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to any person." This broad definition includes very different levels of behaviour, ranging from low-level through to harassment, intimidation and violence. On this basis Tony Blair and his pals should probably have been locked up years ago, but funnily enough Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) don't tend to get imposed on the greedy, rich and powerful in our society.

ASBOs are imposed by magistrates courts with no jury to decide innocence or guilt. ASBOs don't just refer to criminal acts; so they can prohibit actions which, although not criminal, may be necessary before a criminal act can be committed e.g. a ban on entering a shop rather than on shoplifting - breaching the ASBO then becomes the criminal act subject to punitive measures. This kind of 'back door law' has provided the State with a new weapon of social control which effectively criminalises whole new

sections of mostly young working class people.

As New Labour has shifted to the right the focus on how to tackle problems in the community have shifted away from providing a balanced community based response involving prevention and rehabilitation, and has instead moved to the tougher approach of enforcement and punishment through ASBOs.

ASBOs target those most vulnerable. The DETR found that ASB was perceived to be twice as high in deprived areas than nationally. (Analysis of the Survey of English Housing 1997-98; DETR, 1999). The individuals and families involved also tend to be suffering from serious levels of vulnerability, ill health, drug and alcohol problems and family abuse.

ASBOs have been used as a form of social control using the insecurity of those involved as a weapon against them. The 2003 Anti Social Behaviour Act included measures to effectively make it easier for landlords to evict tenants on the grounds of ASB without a mechanism that attempts to deal with

the behaviour at its root cause. The government also proposed a plan to cut Housing Benefit to tenants accused of ASB. Despite doing a U-turn, deciding not to follow through on the plan, it reserved the right to introduce it, and this only goes to show the nature of an agenda that discriminates against those already deprived.

ASBOs are a blunt instrument that do nothing to help young and vulnerable people. They're not designed to! They don't tackle the problems that have caused the ASB in the first place and efforts to prevent family break-up, counselling and provision of services to treat drug and alcohol problems and employment opportunities, are far more effective in the long run than punishment.

In the here and now we need to organise in our workplaces and our communities to find ways to solve our problems ourselves. Through groups like tenants and residents associations we can work to foster greater solidarity and self-organisation in our communities to break down the barriers of neighbourhood fear. Of course sometimes there are real problems that need dealing

with, and where there is the case the community itself can learn to act collectively to find ways to tackle the issues.

Our powers of self-organisation and mutual aid can be strong but the State will always seek ways to attack us, because it is capitalism and the ruthless drive of market forces that puts profit before people and communities that needs to be got rid of before we can tackle the real underlying cause of problems in our society - the real anti-social thugs in this world are our bosses.

John D.



# 'Soft coup d'etat' threatens Mexico

The Mexican right seems intent on flouting popular opinion by prosecuting the leftist presidential candidate, reports Jack Ray

**M**exico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador looks set to be disqualified from next year's Mexican presidential elections after congress stripped the popular leftist of his congressional immunity (a *desafuero*).

Lopez Obrador can now be charged for planning permission violations allegedly committed in 2001, which would bar him from standing for office for the duration of proceedings against him.

In response to what Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatistas has described as a 'soft coup d'etat', Lopez Obrador and his supporters have pledged a campaign of civil disobedience and non-violent direct action against what they regard as a political prosecution designed purely to rule him out of a presidential race that he leads by nearly 30 points in the polls.

The case against Lopez Obrador relates to a dispute over the ownership of a two hundred square metre plot of land that was to be used to build a new road to a Sante Fe hospital. Federico Escobedo, a twice convicted fraudster, claimed rights to the site in December 2000 shortly before Lopez Obrador became Mayor.

In March 2001 a judge ruled in favour of Escobedo and ordered construction be ceased on the site whilst property rights were established. Five months later the Judge, noting that although construction had ceased equipment remained on the site, ordered the attorney general to charge

the Mayor (among others) with contempt of court.

Four years later the attorney general, an appointee of the governing National Action Party (PAN), resolved to prosecute the case against Lopez Obrador; had the case been brought in August 2001 when ordered by the Judge it would have been settled before the upcoming presidential race. Lopez Obrador's involvement in the matter appears to have been negligible – he has not signed a single document relating to the case – and none of the other city officials involved have been charged. The dispute in question was solved early in 2002 when the city constructed a different access road to the hospital and removed all the equipment from the Escobedo site.

News of the *desafuero* has led to a massive spike in Lopez Obrador's poll ratings, with around four-fifths of Mexicans opposing his disqualification. Over the past few weeks the Mayor has addressed hundreds of thousands of supporters at anti-*desafuero* protests. The overwhelming show of strength by the opposition may have begun to pressure the government into backtracking, with Vicente Fox announcing on 15th April that he had the power to pardon Lopez Obrador if necessary.

The Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) of which he is a member represents the centre left in Mexican politics and has been likened to Lula's Workers Party in Brazil, they are opposed chiefly by the conservative

PAN of President Vicente Fox and the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) which held power in Mexico for seven decades before the 2000 elections.

The battle over Lopez Obrador's candidacy is seen by many as a stern test of Mexico's young democracy, with many on the left opposing the *desafuero* but still suspicious of the PRD: Marcos in a communique last September condemned the *desafuero* but also outlined ongoing suspicion of Mexico's political class.

"All the politicians, even those who ride high in the polls, on the newspaper front pages, or in the numbers of demonstrators who support them, without regard to the colour of the rhetoric that they spout or the symbol of their party organisation, will count with the stubborn distrust of we, the Zapatistas, with our scepticism and incredulity ... However ... we cannot endorse with our silence the dirty legal tricks with which they are trying to stop the person who heads the Mexico City government from presenting himself in 2006 as a presidential candidate. It seems to us that this is an illegitimate action, poorly clothed in legal falsehoods, that attacks the right of the Mexican people to decide whether or not someone can be the government."

The possibility of Lopez Obrador's victory in Mexico is said to have worried the US state department, which although previously ambivalent to the possibility of Lopez Obrador's victory,



may have changed direction after the appointment of Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State and heightened concerns

that Sandinista Daniel Ortega may be heading for victory in Nicaragua's next presidential elections.

## Pressganged, but undaunted

**F**or the first time in ten years both the US army and marines have missed their quotas for new entries over two consecutive months. In late March army secretary, Francis Harvey, acknowledged the army would fall short of its recruiting goals for that month, and for April.

Although he again ruled out a draft, another military figure, retired Major General Edward Atkeson said on 19th March "The all-volunteer force is close to breaking right now. When it does break, that's when you'll see the draft come back."

The number of recruiters is to be increased by a third to 12,000. This will mean a renewed attempt to suck in the unemployed, college and school students and the poor. Typical tactics by the pressgangs are to lie about quality of life in the army, 'prospects' (career and financial payback), length of service, and the necessity of parental involvement in the right to change their minds.

There have been cases of pressgangs effectively kidnapping young people

and locking them in cars until they sign up, and of sexual abuse of school-age girls in the pressgang process. A sergeant in the Indiana National Guard was charged last month with sexually assaulting six high school students, some of whom he enlisted. He faces 31 counts of rape, sexual battery, official misconduct and corrupt business influence.

Many see their four fighting years as the only way to make a 'sounder' financial living. One recruiter working at Bell High School in southeast Los Angeles actually tried to convince students that they had a greater chance of being killed in their city than they would in Iraq.

Yet the military are not having it all their own way. A huge and apparently successful war resisters movement is growing weekly here. It's working on several fronts: popular, legal and legislative.

Several colleges have experienced strong student anti-war protests. So successful was one – at New York University – that a planned CIA recruiting event was cancelled less than 24 hours before it

was scheduled to begin.

Meanwhile counter-recruiting protesters Hadas Their and Carol Lang at City College New York were arrested in March for their peace work. They said, "We felt like we needed to make our case that this was not a real job opportunity – the military recruiters set up at City College because it's a working class school. It's predominantly people of colour, and they feel like they can target our community as people who might just be desperate enough to take this as a 'job opportunity' when it's really about risking our lives for what I think is an unjust war, and one that was based on lies."

The National Lawyers Guild has been slowly building up a huge array of resources dedicated to enabling young people to resist war. The Los Angeles Chapter, for example, has the Bill Smith Military Resistance Project, which presents the facts about the law as it relates to enlistment drawing attention to unambiguous legal rights.

Louis Further

## Brazilian occupation

**B**razil's government have threatened to jail members of a group providing a living for thousands of people unless they pay someone else's debts.

A judicial edict was issued on 6th April to seize 5% of the Cipla/Interfibra factories' gross sales income, on top of a previous order in March to turn over 15% of income.

Cipla/Interfibra, a factory currently owned and run by its workforce, was closed by its former owners in 2002, who had run up massive debts.

The empty factories were occupied by over a thousand workers, who got the machinery producing again and have since exercised control over its finances, putting profits back into their own community.

The government have variously threatened to auction the factory machinery off and imprison workers, claiming that the community is now responsible for the \$11 million dollar debt run up by their former bosses.

In response, the factory council have defied the edict on the grounds the workers would not get paid if they

agreed to it, opening the way for a police crackdown.

In a statement to friendly organisations, the factory council said: "The workers are not responsible for these debts and for the non-payment of taxes by the former bosses. That is why they will not pay the government the sums it is demanding.

"The workers call on all supporters to redouble the pressure on the administration through mass mobilisations, as well as resolutions and letters addressed to the Lula government, demanding the nationalisation of the occupied factories so that all jobs at Cipla/Interfibra can be saved."

A governmental commission of three state banks has supported the call, saying that without taking on liability for the debt themselves, the government is effectively dooming a perfectly viable job provider to insolvency.

A National March for agrarian reform and the nationalisation of the occupied factories will conclude on 2nd May.

Rob Ray

## Feature

# Coca cola in Kerala

Andy Williams reports from Plachimada where a local grassroots movement has brought a global soft-drinks giant to its knees

Coca Cola is everywhere in India. In the tiniest villages and the largest cities, from the deserts of Rajasthan to the beaches of Goa, walls are plastered with gaudy adverts, and massive new billboards dwarf everything around them. In large parts of the country even the road signs are sponsored by Coke. Taking advantage of India's new embrace of neo-liberalism and the 'free' market, the company is actively wooing the expanding consumer class here. Everywhere you see evidence of the familiar phoney advertising war between Coca Cola and Pepsi.

Three years ago the people of a small village in the southern state of Kerala started a struggle against a large Coca Cola factory that was stealing and polluting its water supplies, and further polluting farmland by dumping hundreds of tonnes of highly toxic slurry waste.

They set up a shelter opposite the plant and maintained a daily picket. Two years later, and due to the constant agitation of the people, the factory was forced to halt production. This was obviously a massive victory for their grassroots protest movement, and they stand as an example to all who oppose the spread of corporate power and global capitalist 'development'.

Despite its achievements the struggle has been a difficult one for the people of Plachimada. Today the protesters have the support of all the major political parties, as well as many NGOs, newspapers, and environmental groups, but for one long year they stood alone, shunned by politicians keen to kow-tow to the company, and newspaper owners afraid of losing Coke's valuable advertising revenue.

Coca Cola has been untiring in its backlash against the protests. The people have had to withstand the full force of the multinational's public relations machine, and of course, its hired goons on the local police force. At first they were promised the fruits of development and investment, and later, after the protests began, they were bribed, cajoled, discredited, intimidated, beaten, and jailed. So far hundreds of peaceful protesters have been arrested, many on charges under new anti-terrorism laws, and now await trials that could leave them jailed and/or financially crippled.

Today their struggle continues, and the future of their village is uncertain. Coke was forced to halt production, but not stop it completely. The case is still being debated at various levels of government and the judiciary, with nobody willing to make a final decision. Meanwhile the protesters continue to demand the permanent closure of the factory, and adequate compensation for their suffering.

The politics of Plachimada

One of the most persistent claims from Coca Cola has been that the people of Plachimada are the puppets of left-wing extremists. This couldn't be further from the truth. Leftist they might be, but they are nobody's puppets. Their political education at the hands of this company has radicalised them independent of any outside influence. This self-organised grassroots protest has even taught the local communists a bit about class struggle.

The main opposition party in the regional Kerala parliament, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (the CPI(M)) was originally among those who ignored the Plachimada protest. Despite the fact that they now offer their support, the people will not easily forget the long year that they stood alone while these Marxists talked about the importance of foreign investment and economic development.

"The CPI(M) has lots of money and influence, but they will not take a bold stand against imperialism. But here, even though we are a small community, we have taken a bold stand and we've achieved something. If we join political parties they will talk about imperialism, but they will only talk" says Ramdas, a member of the village struggle committee.

"I feel the same", adds Veluchami, also a committee member, "but I feel we should take a stand with political parties according to their stand towards us."

Very clear about retaining their autonomy, they are as wary of major non-political groups as they are of the parties. Ramdas continues, "I think the parties and the NGOs have lost credibility as the agents of social transformation. Only the people, the people's movements, the grassroots movements, are able to continue the struggle."

Direct democracy and consensus

A commitment to truly democratic decision-making structures is as important to the people of Plachimada as retaining their autonomy. All decisions related to the fight against Coke are taken by the village struggle committee, a body made up entirely of locals. This committee is leaderless, and makes all its decisions by consensus.

Since their resistance has been catapulted onto the world stage they have become aware of the recent upsurge in interest in horizontal organisational methods. During my stay people talked with me about the Zapatistas, the Argentinian Piqueteros, and the demonstrations on the streets of the major summits, and it was clear that they realised their way of making decisions tallied with that of other new and successful social movements worldwide. Their commitment to direct democracy, however, was not a conscious decision. It evolved out of the



social structures that already existed within the community.

"Now we look to these other social movements," says Ramdas, "but with us democracy was an organic process. This is a tribal community, and all people are brothers and sisters. If he has no food in his house, for example, Veluchami can go next door and take food. Other types of society cannot do this. Our democratic way of making decisions is an extension of this community life."

C.R. Bijoy, a human rights activist close to the struggle, explains this further. "The principle of non-hierarchical structure and the consensus approach came naturally in Plachimada as the affected people are Adivasis – incidentally they are designated as 'primitive tribal groups' by the Keralan government – the manner in which their struggle took shape was based on what was naturally available in their community." He sees this as a key difference between the villagers and the political parties that were originally so keen to placate Coke and ignore the protesters.

"As far as the major parties are concerned, they are involved with a representative democracy that's based on existing unequal structures. They follow the rules of the social and political power structures as they exist, and they fall into line. This contrasts with the ideas of participatory and direct democracy, which are ideas that negate the present form and practice of democracy."

Branded 'primitive' and ignored by their

'democratically' elected parliamentarians these people have forged their own successful struggle based on truly democratic social relations.

The future for Plachimada

The demands of the community at the moment continue to be for the permanent closure of the plant, and for adequate compensation from Coca Cola. Many think that the first demand might well be met, and that the company would rather be rid of the vocal protesters than risk further damaging its public image. The issue of compensation is thornier, and would involve a prohibitively expensive legal case.

Some within the movement are starting to entertain the idea that if Coke does pull out they would be getting off lightly. They have come to realise that the issue is about much more than one factory in one village, and that their struggle has much wider implications.

They can see that corporate power in India (and elsewhere) has entered a new phase. Whereas before that state favoured and colluded with companies, now it has given up almost all control of its natural resources to the private sector. Whereas before the state was seen as the trustee of resources, maintaining them on behalf of the people, in this new phase of corporate globalisation the state has given up this power. The struggle has shown that corporations see natural resources as their own private property to be used as they see fit. The inability or unwillingness of the state (in either its judicial or political

capacities) to do anything to stop the company shows how powerless it is in the face of the major corporations.

Coke can entertain the idea of closing down one factory in one region as an exercise in damage limitation. Even if the protesters were victorious (and shutting down the factory permanently would be a major victory) Coke would still have over 50 major plants in India. The question of the corporate control over natural resources would still exist, and the theft of water would continue.

C.R. Bijoy claims that the future survival of the community, and others like it, hinges on whether it is willing to take the struggle into another, more radical phase. The local confrontation with Coke would have to turn into a more general struggle to wrest back the people's natural right to the control over their own resources. What would really rattle Coca Cola (and other multinational corporations), he says, would be "the establishment of direct and participatory governance over groundwater by the local community through a political struggle for self-rule. Coca Cola would rather lose a plant here or there than have its control over water resources questioned and challenged."

The state has failed to protect the people's water, so the people must take it back. The people's struggle for control over water has always been a struggle for survival. It could also become a struggle for direct and true democracy, and a struggle for control over their own lives.

# Editorial

It seems that no famous person dies these days without a flood of sycophantic drivel being inflicted upon the rest of us. The Pope is the latest of these. The irony of people like Bush praising the Pope as "wise," one of the "great moral leaders" and "a hero for the ages" while ignoring their previous dismissal of him before the invasion of Iraq is deep.

The same can be said of Bush's supporters who are lining up to eulogise the man whom they had previously (at best) ignored or (at worse) attacked as a supporter of Saddam and a loony lefty.

The sight of Castro, that persecutor of Catholicism, praising the Pope is equally pathetic.

Yet this is not the only repulsive sight we get subjected to when some famous people dies. We also get the apparently mandatory 'great man who changed the world' bollocks as well. When that evil scumbag Reagan died, the press went cock-a-hoop presenting him as the man who ended communism.

The idea of the Pope as a defender of freedom does have its problems. In his own domain, the Catholic Church, his time was marked by authoritarianism.

The securing of the Papal hierarchy was the focus rather than freedom. His attack on 'liberation theology' was an example of this: he would not tolerate priests defying and challenging the church's hierarchical structure.

Needless to say, if you were a woman then the freedom to control your own body and reproduction was never an option for John Paul. Neither were gays granted much liberty either. The impact of his anti-abortion and contraception views on the most impoverished countries and peoples of the world are also hardly liberty enhancing.

Even his influence on Poland suggests that he continued tyranny rather than ended it.

While the Pope supported the strikers in Gdansk and the Solidarity union they founded, when martial law was proclaimed he rejected calls for mass protest, direct action and factory occupations in favour of patience. When Stalinism was finally ended, it was by the defiance on the streets which the Pope had rejected years before.

This, perhaps, is unsurprising as the Catholic Church has always bolstered any regime (no matter how barbaric) which allowed it to corrupt the minds of children and adults. Moreover, it has systematically opposed any attempt by humanity to free itself.

As the Bible says, our current rulers are selected by God and rebellion is a sin, so you had better do what the spiritual and temporal rulers decree.

## Quiz answers

1. It demolishes their arguments, as it is a species of mosquito that has evolved on the London Underground and is found nowhere else. Funnily enough, its habitat didn't exist until some time after Noah's flood.
2. "The idea that a Congressman would be tainted by accepting money from private individuals or private sources." Bribery's okay then.
3. Gerald Ford. The 'great communicator' meant to say Congressman.
4. He told the questioner to go home and read his Bible. Pedants might point out that the Bible was written at least a millennium before 1688. Even longer for those who accept the Bible as literal truth.

# Commentary

## Now and then

Socialist Worker (9th April 2005) had a two page special on the fifteenth anniversary of the Poll Tax Riot.

Now, it argues that "the mass civil disobedience that confronted the poll tax – especially the Trafalgar Square riot – fatally wounded Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher" (Fifteen years since the poll tax revolt).

Then, it argued that "no socialist believes rioting will beat the poll tax" (Socialist Worker, 7th April 1990).

Now the party talks about how people formed "anti poll tax groups, unions and federations, pledging not to pay."

Then, the party was warning of "the danger that community politics divert people from the means to win" and arguing that only strike action, not non-payment, would defeat the tax ('Socialists and the Struggle Against the Poll Tax', SWP Pamphlet).

It was in only the late spring of 1990 that the party dropped this line and joined with the anarchists and Militant in arguing for the collective class power of community based non-payment.

I wonder why the SWP did not consider those facts worthy of mention in their account of the defeat of the poll tax and what lessons we should draw from it?

Iain McKay

## Borough market

Although growing the anarchist movement in Britain remains small. We struggle to muster much of a presence on demonstrations. Despite an increasing number of local groups most of us are isolated sometimes only meeting other anarchists at the Bookfair. Maybe this why anarchists are such prolific posters on the web? At least in cyberspace people can feel part of a libertarian movement. It is in fact an interesting question whether there is any such thing as an anarchist movement in Britain. Sure there are anarchists but a movement I am not so sure? A movement implies some degree of coordination, activity and common purpose.

One would have thought, for example, that in the run up to the next general election which, by the way, will see record numbers of people not voting anarchists of whatever persuasion would want to work together in an anti-election alliance. Other than some limited local activity nothing much though seems to be happening on that front. Surely at the heart of anarchism is the idea that people are most fulfilled and creative when freed from the constraints of the state?

On New Year's Day 1912 the women textile workers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, went on strike in protest against their pay being cut. Famously a group of them on a march through the town during the bitter nine week struggle carried a banner demanding 'Bread and Roses'. A poetic cry for the working classes' right not only to the basics but also the pleasures of life.

It took nearly 150 years from the publication of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* in 1792 for ordinary people to secure the vote. Democracy as Paine would have understood it has now been achieved, it has not though as anarchists predicted delivered 'the power of the people' (the literal definition of democracy). It has not delivered bread and roses to the working classes.

Borough market under railway arches and in the shadow of Southwark cathedral on the south bank of the Thames sells plenty of bread. While roses are less evident the luxuries of life are certainly on display – smoked eel, fine

wines, organic beef, an array of salad leaves, single estate teas, cakes – a cornucopia of pleasure if you can afford it. A small loaf of bread costs £1.50. Most residents of Southwark no doubt make do with cheap mass produced bread from local supermarkets rather than the focaccia on sale at Borough (£2.50).

The wealth and opulence on display at Borough market sits uncomfortably in working class Southwark. Nearly half of the homes in Southwark do not meet the government's basic 'decent homes' standard. Fourteen thousand people are on the council's waiting list to be housed. Life expectancy is below the national average and infant mortality twice national rates. Crime rates are high. The people of Southwark feel deserted by politicians and have in turn deserted them. At the last general election just 50.1% of people there voted. Like in so many working class areas across the country they have turned their back on electoral democracy.

Fearful of low turnout amongst their 'natural' voters (some three million Labour voters say they are not sure whether they will vote in May) Labour has suddenly rediscovered the working classes. Their message though is a gloomy one: 'we are not great but we are not quite as bad as the Tories'. In 1991 21% of British people were living in poverty. After two terms Labour has made a difference. The figure is now 19%! At the same time the proportion of income going to the top 1% has grown through out Labour's term of office.

People in working class areas like Southwark realise that electoral politics has not delivered the goods. The wealthy who can afford to shop at Borough market may be able to enjoy bread and roses but for those living at or near the poverty line it is industrially produced bread 45% of which may be water.

Electoral democracy is not the only type of democracy as the history of Southwark show. In 1638 the 'mechanic folk' of the district protested outside of Parliament at the imprisonment of the future Leveller John Lilburne. Later they went on strike as the king tried to impose Catholic style forms of worship in their churches. Southwark has in fact long had a reputation for riots and disorder. In the sixteenth century there were seven prisons in the area. One was located in Clink Street just north of Borough market. This is where the name 'clink' for prisons derives from.

The past radicalism of Southwark points to a different tradition of democracy, one more ambitious than electoral representation. Other democratic traditions also survive and indeed thrive in Britain. Some 24 million people undertake voluntary work. According to journalist Will Hutton "they work for local welfare groups and hospitals, for children and the elderly, in schools, protecting animals and the environment. And their numbers increase by a million a year." People are not waiting for politicians to improve their lives. They are taking matters into their own hands. As anti-authoritarians there is much for us anarchists to be cheerful about. Despite this though anarchism still remains a small current amongst the left in Britain.

In her recent book *Reclaim the State*, Hilary Wainwright charts numerous examples of popular participatory democracy ranging from the Exodus collective in Luton to self organised nurseries in Italy. Like many on the authoritarian left though she is unable to free her self from liberalism. Rather than seeing self organisation and mutual aid as ends in themselves Wainwright

pulls away from the logic of her own examples. "The argument is still sometimes put forward," she writes somewhat patronisingly "that participatory democracy should be the basis for a whole political system, a replacement for parliamentary democracy." She rejects this. "Representational democracy's legitimacy stems from the minimal but equal participation of all through the vote." Despite providing example after example of direct democracy that works in the interest of communities Wainwright states that participatory forms of democracy can be dominated by active minorities. She retains an unbelievable faith in Parliament.

If the state and elections were the answer we would be living in a better world than the one we do. One in five of our citizens would not be living in poverty. Electoral democracy has failed. People want more than a 'minimal' say once every five years. They also know that not all votes are equal and that politicians are happy to lie, cheat, break the law and ignore the will of the people. No wonder trust in politicians is so low.

This is surely fertile ground for anarchism. The left tradition represented by Wainwright and others has nothing to offer. Marxist Leninism is dead and buried. Anarchism is emerging from the long shadow of Marxism. We anarchists need to come together. We need to build a movement and spread our ideas.

Richard Griffin

## No nukes

Not much in the news these days about American nuclear weapons. But the April 2005 *Nature* reports that on 3rd April The New York Times published the opinion of a retired bomb designer that stocks of W76, a brand of hydrogen bomb warhead, had deteriorated in store and were now "at best unreliable and probably much worse." The Senate was told on 4th April, by the administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), "We have looked into this concern extensively, and our best technical judgement is that it is simply wrong."

Three thousand or more of the ten thousand nuclear bombs in American stockpiles are W46s.

Each W46 has five times the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb. Each missile carries eight W46s, which can be directed to different targets. Each nuclear submarine carries sixteen missiles. In sum, each fully loaded nuclear submarine is capable of destroying 128 cities, with a total explosive force equivalent to 640 Hiroshima bombs. The targets used to be in the Soviet Union. We don't know where the bombs are aimed now.

The 'British Independent Deterrent', (dependent on America for supplies, and deterring nothing) consists of nuclear submarines which work in shifts, one of them always on patrol, ready to flatten 128 targets on command.

The alleged deterioration is said to be due to the W46 bomb casings having been made thin to save weight, too thin to last for the thirty years since nuclear testing stopped. The fission bomb triggers will go off alright, each with the force of a Hiroshima bomb, but they might not set off the fusion bombs with the really big explosive force.

The best we can hope for is that the whole nuclear arsenal is a fake. A deterrent need not be real, as long as it is believed to be real. But this would rely on the military-industrial complex trying to avoid deaths, which is quite unlikely. The Senate was told that the NNSA is designing a Reliable Replacement Warhead.

Donald Room

## Antonio Téllez

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accounts of the urban guerrillas and the feats of friends of his like Quico Sabaté, Facerías or Ponzán, besides encouraging, assisting and sponsoring any project likely to expose Franco's criminal regime. His earliest efforts enjoyed the invaluable support of the Ruedo Ibérico publishers, when José Martínez, an old hand from the Libertarian Youth, like Téllez himself, was supervising editor and gave them priority over more pro-marxist options. In 1973 Ruedo Ibérico published his book *La Guerrilla urbana: 1- Facerías*, followed, albeit from different imprints, by Sabaté: *Guerrilla Urbana en España (1945-1960)*; *La red de evasión del grupo Ponzán: Anarquistas en la guerra secreta contra el franquismo y el nazismo (1936-1944)*; *Historia de un atentado aéreo contra el general Franco*; *Apuntes sobre Antonio García Lamolla y otros andares*; *El MIL y Puig Antich*, and lots of other titles later translated and published in France, Greece, Great Britain, Germany and Italy and which represent the earliest first hand accounts of the anti-Franco resistance. In addition, Téllez's enthusiasm as an educator and his commitment to libertarian ideas led him to contribute to lots of like-minded publications such as *Atalaya* (established by himself along with other anarcho-sindicalist militants), *Ruta Solidaridad Obrera* or the more recent *Historia Libertaria*, to which he brought fresh evidence on the little known anarchist maquis in Asturias.

His writings and his record suggest that he had two main obsessions: to restore the historical record of recent events and the debate on legitimate self-defence as a mark of human dignity, as reflected in the forewords to some of his books. Thus, in Sabaté, he embraces Errico Malatesta's words when the latter argues that "the violent one isn't the man who resorts to the use of weapons against the armed usurper who trespasses against his life, his liberty or his bread; the murderer is the one who confronts others with the ghastly choice between killing or being killed." And as far as memory goes, he was, apropos of Facerías, to write – in line with the words of Eduardo de Guzmán to the effect that the victors are such not just because of their victory but primarily because they are the ones who write history – "Tomorrow history will be written by experts who were far removed from the events and personnel concerned and they will deliver their emphatic interpretations and verdicts. We here are talking about protagonists who will be excluded from all the histories as yet unwritten."

Antonio Téllez Solá – an anarchist who taught us that some people died with their boots on.

obituary from Rojo y Negro

Antonio Téllez Solá, anarchist, guerrilla, historian, born 18th January 1921, died 27th March 2005

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# REVIEW

**9 Songs is the 'dirtiest film ever shown in Britain'.<sup>1</sup> If this is so then thought must be dirty, as that's all it aroused in Tom Jennings**

**M**averick director Michael Winterbottom's demystifying of genre has yielded an unparalleled range of highly distinctive films.<sup>2</sup> His latest innovation is that *9 Songs*' sex scenes are not simulated, featuring the full hetero hardcore checklist in fly-on-the-wall anatomical close-up – given an '18' certificate uncut by the BBFC and striking a blow for what art can dare to project into the pub(l)ic realm. Through impeccable handheld digital video photography, appropriately dingy lighting and muted colour, effectively brisk editing and valiant acting, the waxing and waning of a love affair is depicted in flashbacks of sexual activity interspersed with concert footage, in an attempt to capture the way memory prioritises iconic moments and intensities.

So, following a one-night stand after a Brixton Academy gig, fun-loving American student Lisa (Margot Stille) regularly fucks with academic Matt (Kieran O'Brien), but becomes increasingly frustrated by his hidebound cultural, social and erotic routines. She tries to awaken sensuality and enchantment in him (musically via salsa moves and sexually in sado-masochism-lite), but his tender trump cards (earnest cookery, icy seaside skinny-dipping, Christmas tree decoration) barely touch her. Lacking all conviction as a meditation on love, and laughably pretentious as existential philosophy, *9 Songs* somehow does convince despite also falling so far short of entertainment or engagement.

Thanks to straightforward realism, the film implies that sex itself is actually no big deal, either as misguided aspiration for personal fulfilment or grounds for complaint. The mechanics of bodily connection fascinate us because physical pleasure can point beyond present disappointment towards meaningful possibilities of intimacy and exploration. However, as Michel Foucault observed in *The History of Sexuality*, the contemporary injunction to obsess about sex as the centre of identity displaces attention from both personal ethics and the overarching social and

political disciplining of bodies. Base sexual urges scarcely represent the ultimate horizon of human yearnings for growth, even if twentieth century capitalism's masturbatory individualism and narcissistic culture is exemplified by the pornography industry dressing them up for instant gratification. The tragedies of misogyny, homophobia and paedophilia testify to the damage done in falling for that illusion; and *9 Songs* gestures at what consumerism promises but is constitutionally unable to deliver.

## Going Through the Motions

The film overturns this overvaluation of sexual behaviour – whose mediated forms embellish fantasy in a hysterical 'frenzy of the visible', ignoring anything heartfelt in the most fleeting throwaway consumption. Their seductiveness obliterates the less-thrilling reciprocal altruisms of shared solace and affectionate companionship which enrich mature sexual love and non-erogenous sensuous engagement with the world. Conversely, childish playfulness and polymorphous perversity are justifiably cherished in sexual or any other creative activity. Rather than any ideal integration of these unlikely bedfellows, perpetual reworkings of the dialectics of desire seem inevitable when danger, tragedy and farce circumscribe the human condition.

Absolute safety, security and purity are guaranteed only in death, where moral judgmentalism also leads. Healthy relations in any social sphere require continual pragmatic renegotiation of intention and consequence – but not, as here, among those sleepwalking their way through someone else's script. The excerpt from Michael Nyman's sixtieth birthday concert as one of the nine songs now seems less incongruous among the drearily derivative indie dirges. Along with the choice of profession for the male lead as glaciologist, Nyman's stylistic variations on death-knell orchestral minimalism echo the film's sterility, the pathos of the protracted decay of rock and roll, and the ironic desperation of postmodern culture.

More specifically, Winterbottom accidentally deconstructs humdrum mainstream masculinity as tediously



adolescent and soul-destroying, and the smug flush of young middle class 'enlightened' courtship as so much shallow self-delusion. The hardcore conventions aren't tarted up with titillation, the unexplained complicity of women and other trappings of the self-important patriarchal male gaze which work to conceal porn's fundamental lack of respect. But images can't convey fleshly force, heat, textures, pheromones or feelings, and with no psychological complexity rendering the characters real to each other or prompting identification among viewers, their sex acts seem irrelevant. The director's negativity governs this show, and, hey presto, it's cold out there in the unknown/unknowable continent of Antarctica/feminine desire – even if (as we're told in the voiceover) the history of life on earth is tantalisingly fossilised therein, and which furthermore retains the capacity to thaw out and flood us all. But not in this scenario.

And if all this feels far-fetched – well,

it's pretty chilly in the bedroom, too, when the rich traces of bodily biography are reduced to hapless couplings by people displaying only the merest hints of awareness of self or other. So Matt resignedly (and fancifully) ascribes selfishness, wildness and impetuosity to Lisa in a denial and projection of his own imaginative failure to rise to the occasion and offer her anything she wants. Distracted ennui sees her turn from provocation to bitching about how boring he is, preferring a lapdancer or vibrator to his sexual presence, and eventually abandoning him altogether to stew in his own juices. It remains unclear why it was supposed that real sex between partners who don't care for each other might be better than, for example, simulated sex between those who do.

*9 Songs* goes through the necessary motions of its supercool exercise in calculated miserablism – quietly rubbishing the preposterous *Four Weddings*, *Bridget Jones* and all those other sorry

antiseptic upperclass excuses for passion, but with absolutely nothing fabulous or of significance to offer in their place. Generically an (anti-) romance, it is undoubtedly an interesting experiment in critiquing both the fairy-tale complacency of love stories and the ridiculous pneumatics of porno. Unfortunately it fails to grab you by the attention (or any other parts, despite the shock-horror headlines) – and will really only exercise those who prefer to not be moved.

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

## Notes

1. According to the tabloids, anyway.
2. Including *Wonderland*'s meditative ensemble tapestry of the intersecting lives of various Londoners, *In This World*'s quasi-documentary journey with a young Afghan refugee, *Code 46*'s speculative fiction, and *24 Hour Party People*'s docufictional honouring of Madchester as well as more downbeat period dramas (*Jude* and the forthcoming *Tristram Shandy*).

## OBITUARY

### Antonio Téllez Solá

Antonio Téllez, one of the leading figures in the younger generation that fought alongside the Libertarian Movement, has died. He died in Perpignan, the French border town where he settled in his enforced exile in France, a town that knows so much about anarchists' attempts and schemes to overthrow Franco and put paid to his oppressive rule. Along with people like Octavio Alberola, Eduardo Pons Prades and others, Téllez belonged to the legendary breed of libertarian resisters who taught us practically and through their research that there were some folk who refused to surrender. It was through their

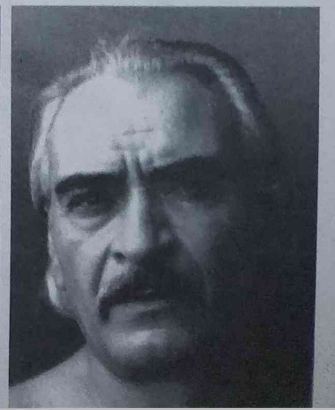
quiet efforts and hush-hush attempts to undermine the dictatorship that we can today speak with some justification of the recovery of historical memory. They showed us the way.

Antonio Téllez Solá was born in Tarragona in 1921 and was barely 16 when he immersed himself in the fight against fascism. Having enlisted in the Republican Army, he saw action on various fronts up until February 1939 when, with thousands of other anti-Francoist fighters, he was forced to cross the border into France. At the age of 18, with the vigour of a youth moulded in the image of the exemplary effort and selflessness he had witnessed on the battle-field, he endured the policy that

the French authorities enforced on the vanquished, winding up in one of the many concentration camps set up to 'welcome' a people who had held Nazi-fascism at bay for three years.

On French soil, and with the advent of Allied forces imminent, he, like other leading members of the Libertarian Movement, like Cipriano Mera or Juanel, he joined the resistance and helped liberate the town of Rodez. In October 1944, after the German army was routed in the Russian campaign, Téllez took part in a guerrilla invasion of Spain via the Arán Valley, this being one of the first operations mounted by the republican maquis against Franco's regime. It was to be a pointer to subsequent

guerrilla actions and raids in the Spanish interior. After Francoism consolidated its hold through support from the 'western democracies' which chose to draw a veil over its collaboration with the Nazi regime, Antonio Téllez – like the Herodotus of the Spanish maquis – devoted much of his time and effort to rescuing from sterile oblivion the lives and concerns of those who, even though all was lost now that nationalist Catholicism had emerged the victor, never acknowledged defeat or gave up. Thus, even while he was supporting himself by working as a reporter for *Agence France Presse*, as early as 1954 he started writing his soon to be famous



# Gypsies and travellers march

Hundreds of Roma Gypsies and travellers marched through London on 8th April to protest against both government and opposition policy towards them.

Flanked by the Jewish Socialists and other independent supporters, the march was timed to coincide with Remembrance Day for the Gypsy community. A wreath was laid for the estimated two million gypsies who were massacred during the Second World War before the march moved off.

Travellers have organised in recent months against a wave of mass media and political attacks against them, including headlines such as 'Stamp on the Camps' and threats to repeal the human rights act specifically to prevent travellers applying for retrospective planning permission.

Specifically the march hoped to raise awareness about the planned eviction of Dale Farm in Sussex, the largest traveller camp in Britain housing over a thousand people.

Essex county council have threatened to evict the camp on 13th or 14th May, using Constant and Co. - a specialist in evictions who are facing several court cases for human rights abuse.

Sylvia Dunn, who has launched an electoral bid against Michael Howard, said at the march: "The things Michael Howard has said about Gypsies and travellers are absolutely vile. They are motivated by racism. Well all followed the advice that his conservative government gave us to buy our own land and develop it."

It is thought that both sides have placed traveller communities in an impossible position by first closing caravan sites originally laid out for them, then attacking them for buying and settling on their own land.

## Imagine if...

John Towers, the ex-chairman of MG Rover, looked at his watch. Where was the getaway car?

He'd been waiting for what seemed an age, his shiny black shoes tapping nervously on the floor.

All in all the plan had been a great success, driven (he chuckled to himself) by extensive preparation. He and his three cohorts had watched all the great crime capers. They had taken notes watching Lavender hill Mob, The Thomas Crown affair, and of course The Italian Job before finalising their Phoenix bid.

They had nearly gone too far at one stage, until it was pointed out that driving their £40m away in three Mini Coopers would look a bit suspicious and was probably unnecessary. Good old Nick 'Edna specs' Stephenson, always the thinker of the group.

He felt vaguely guilty about conning 5,000 people into believing his gang wasn't just going to gut the company and run off with four million times their

original investment, but as the old saying went, 'there's one born every minute'.

He looked over at his sidekick, Peter 'Chins' Beale, who looked antsy.

"Wot if this whole caper goes wrong gunvor?" John sighed.

"It won't go wrong Chins, they're mostly blaming the Chinese and the general public."

"Yeah but the papers like..." John exploded.

"Look Chins, the papers will moan a bit, but in the end they won't challenge the legality of us buying the company for £10, sucking out its research budget until it can't keep up with rivals, so we can pay ourselves all this cash, and then cynically trying to sell it to a foreign company who we know will either take it on and destroy it, or not and catch the heat."

"Why not?" Chins scratched himself bemusedly, trying vainly to understand. John clipped him round the ear in exasperation.

"Because that's the market Chins!" As Chins sniffled and tried to hold back the tears, their getaway car pulled up - a BMW.

"Now lets get out of here. And try not to blow the bloody doors off as you get in."

## Blast from the Past

Taken from Freedom of 23rd April 1955 and entitled The General Election: "Second biggest story of the year has also fallen into the strike period. A General Election has been declared for 26th May.

The local elections of a fortnight ago were said to have been adversely affected by the lack of daily papers. Without the national Press, we were assured, people lost interest in local affairs, to the astounding extent that in the London Borough of Stepney only 17% of the electorate voted.

The chagrin of the local big-wigs must have been considerable, but they cannot put the blame altogether on the absence of papers. The electorate cannot really be expected to get enthusiastic over the tweedledee-tweedledum arguments that pass for political struggle today, and it will be extremely enlightening if the newspaper famine continues until 26th May to see just what effect it will have upon a General Election, where a much higher poll is always expected than at local or bye-elections.

We could fairly safely predict a low poll. Left to themselves most people agree with the Anarchists that 'they're all the same' and that there is little point in choosing between the political parties.

Only when they are 'got at', and persuaded that it is their civic duty, do the majority of voters make a choice - and then it is a 'lesser evil' choice, voting to keep someone out rather than to express positive confidence by putting someone in."



## A Sideways Look

As I write this, the phoney election campaign is over and the 'real' one has begun. By the time you read this, you'll have had to endure several more weeks of barefaced lies. But on the plus side, it will be nearly over. Phew.

Labour are desperate to get out their 'core' vote. This is code for those sections of the working class that can still be bothered to vote, especially those public sector workers with direct experience of Tory plans and cuts. However, they're far more interested in a few alleged floating voters in 'Middle England', wherever that is (hobbits?), which is why their message apes that of the Tories on social issues.

The Tories are desperately imitating successful right wing populists in Australia and the US, by appealing to the lowest common denominator and hoping that ordinary people share their prejudices. They are certainly energising their base (who clearly do share their prejudices) and may be doing Labour a favour by reminding people what a disgusting bunch of slimebags they are. I notice that a lot of their posters, with the nudge-nudge complicity of the secret racist - "are you thinking what I'm thinking" - have been graffitied. Perhaps most shocking of all is "how difficult is it to keep a hospital clean?" A hell of a lot harder since you scumbags privatised the cleaning, resulting in fewer cleaners, on lower pay, but more profits for the companies involved.

And somehow the Tories aren't racist because their leader is Jewish. This is the sort of nonsense that used to say black people can't be racist. Let's be clear, we don't like Michael Howard because he's a Tory, it's got nothing to do with his race and a lot to do with his barrel-scraping, hypocritical politics. The son of a refugee who tried to get

into this country illegally, he wants to close the borders to anyone else in his father's situation.

The Lib Dems are desperately hoping to capitalise on disaffection with Labour over Iraq and student tuition fees. Plus there are nationalists, Greens and George Galloway to their left, and fascists, UKIP and Kilroy-Silk to their right. What an unattractive bunch!

At almost every election I can remember, someone somewhere in the anarchist movement will start to make a case for participation. This time, they pronounce, it is different, an epoch-making chance to change things. Or perhaps their arguments will go along the lines of how much worse things will be if the election doesn't go a certain way. I'd like to turn that argument on its head - in this election it's likely that turnout will be even lower than last time. It could fall below 50% nationally - it already is in the inner cities. Given that many people stay off the electoral roll anyway (no gain from being on it plus you avoid jury service if you're not) the level of participation in the electoral farce is dropping dramatically. The underlying message from almost all analysis of why gives two related reasons - the parties are virtually indistinguishable and nothing will change anyway. It's doubtful that anyone will get airtime or newspaper space to put anarchist arguments about this, but it is certainly true that nearly half the population shares some of our analysis of electoral politics. I wouldn't want to put it stronger than that, but it's certainly a base to build upon.

Svartfrosk



## Quotes of the fortnight

"US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld issued a terse warning to Iraq's new leaders on Tuesday, urging them to avoid cronyism that could lead to corruption and sap confidence in government." *Financial Times, 11th April 2005*

"President Bush has nominated Vice President Cheney's son-in-law [lobbyist Philip Perry] to be the general counsel of the Department of Homeland Security." *Washington Post, 1st April 2005*



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## The quiz

1. What's the significance of Culex molestus for creationists?
2. According to right-wing Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, what was "essentially a socialist idea"?
3. Which US President was a communist, according to Ronald Reagan?
4. How did the Reverend Ian Paisley reply when he was asked "Who is King Billy?"

Answers on page 6

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