

FREEDOM

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POSTAL WORKERS STEP UP ACTION

Following a second successful one-day strike at the end of June, which saw over 95% of workers out and even bigger numbers on picket lines, the postal union, the CWU, is stepping up action in its dispute with Royal Mail.

Workers from the various sections of Royal Mail will take separate action over a two week period causing considerable disruption to the company. On the 25th July, for example, 30,000 staff at mail centres will walk out. The following day when they return to work, data entry staff who deal with poorly addressed envelopes begin their 24-hour strike. They will be followed by staff working on international mail, HGV drivers, workers who load planes and delivery staff. The cycle will restart again.

The union, with the backing of its members, over three-quarters of whom voted for action, has escalated the dispute in reaction to the employer's unwillingness to negotiate. "We have contacted Royal Mail leaders on copious occasions, consistently asking for negotiations to find a resolution to the dispute. Royal Mail management continue to ignore the union and its workforce. This is absolutely unacceptable," said Dave Ward, CWU Deputy General Secretary.

As Freedom previously reported (on 14th July) workers are striking over a range of issues including a below inflation pay increase (basic pay for a postal worker is just £323 a week), health

and safety issues, shift changes and job losses. There are also separate disputes against the closure of post offices.

At Abingdon sorting office there is unofficial action in support of a suspended worker and CWU steward. In another dispute at Abingdon, the website libcom.org report that "eighty postal workers walked out after a member of staff was suspended for refusing to take on extra work without pay. After talks between union officials and managers, the man was reinstated" showing, it should be added, that wild-cat action does deliver the goods!

On Saturday 21st July around 1,000 postal workers and their supporters turned up for a march and rally in central Liverpool. Constant rain did not dampen the enthusiasm of the demonstrators. An IWW member on the march said "there was a good deal of support from the general public as the march passed close to the main shopping area". Carl Webb, CWU North West Regional Secretary said "the rally is part of a campaign along with a lobby of parliament, national petition and a postcard calling on the government to ensure that Leighton and Crozier return to the negotiating table with a fresh approach that not only focuses on competition and pay but seeks consensus on how we shape the future of our industry."

As the dispute moves into its second month there is no sign that postal workers are weakening. June's stoppage saw even more workers walking out



Postal workers on the picket line in Coventry

than the first one day action. There is ever-growing anger at the way management is running the industry reducing services, pushing up the price of stamps, threatening 40,000 jobs

and closing post offices. CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward said there is "a heavy responsibility on the people who really run the post office - the government. It's just not acceptable

that we have a bloody Labour government doing nothing while Allan Leighton and Adam Crozier get away with wrecking our industry."

Richard Griffin

RISING UK INEQUALITY

The wealth gap between 'rich' and 'poor' in the UK is the widest it has been for 40 years. People living in wealthy areas have become 'disproportionately' wealthier than the less wealthy; and the number of 'poor' households has risen in the last 15 years. There has been a reduction in the number of people living in 'extreme poverty', but the overall number living below the poverty line has increased.

In London, for those who make their money in and around the Square Mile, it has never been better to be an entrepreneur. Some argue that the business environment of London

benefits the whole country, but for the majority, including those on relatively high incomes well above the poverty line, economic situation is getting worse. Interest rates are rising, personal debt escalating, council tax increasing and the cost of living is climbing.

There has been increasing wealth segregation since the 1980s, as wealthier people have moved to the suburbs whereas poorer people have tended to stay in the inner city; it is now less likely, than in the 1970s, that people with large wealth differences will be neighbours. This is due to a number of factors, such as wealthier people gaining from the prices of the property market. Research has found that people tend to think those on the highest wages are paid too much, rather than those on the lowest wages being paid too little.

The Labour Government have introduced measures to try to get people out of 'poverty', but this has meant that the least well-off have been

left behind, as it is easier to lift those just below the poverty line out of poverty than it is to tackle all the issues facing the least well-off. The Government can quote impressive statistics about the numbers of people it has helped out of 'poverty', whilst ignoring those in the worst economic conditions.

On 10th July, the British Venture Capital Association had its first 'round table' meeting with the TUC, which apparently went well for both groups regarding issues such as transparency and terms and conditions for staff employed in the private sector. However, these comfortable discussions do not fundamentally challenge the economic apartheid we are facing in the UK today. The crucial point is that this polarisation is not surprising nor is it the accidental side-effect of innovative forms of capitalism; it is inherent to the development of global political economy as capital follows its logic of finding more ways of making money

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MUTINY SPEAK OUT

A group targeted in a recent crackdown on leftist groups in Australia has hit out against the 'intense' methods being used to put them down ahead of a major planned action in Sydney.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference (APEC) is set to be the focus for strong protests this August, and plans for the event have prompted a major state repression, according to campaigners.

Following the exposure of state attempts to infiltrate leftist groups last month through the failed recruiting of student Daniel Jones, Freedom got in touch with anarchist collective Mutiny, which had been picked out for observation following its calls for solidarity with protesters arrested for violent offences.

Jan, from the group, said: "There's been a lot of surveillance and intimidation in the lead up to the APEC conference in September. The Federal Police have been present and overtly taking photos at even the smallest demo.

The NSW police have approached a number of individuals and warned them to stay away from others they (fairly stupidly) seem to have singled out as 'leaders'.

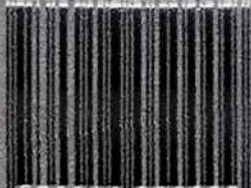
"There's also been more general intimidation through a whole lot of intense laws that have been passed, including announcements that a list of 'known troublemakers' will be banned from the city."

The APEC Meeting (Police Powers) Bill 2007 would allow the Police Commissioner to create a secret list of people who are excluded from APEC security areas.

Astonishingly, the commissioner would not say who would be on the list, noting only that "they know who they are". The flexibility of the blacklist would allow the arrest of almost anyone for no reason other than allegedly being on it.

"I think Dan did a really good job by going public. Hopefully it will make the cops think twice before approaching anyone else," Jan added.

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Home and away

Tube maintenance company goes into administration

Metronet, the company contracted to undertake modernisation of the London Underground, went into administration on July 18th as a result of serious mismanagement and a massive overspend.

The company, contracted under a controversial Public-Private Partnership (PPP), has amassed an estimated overspend of £2bn on top of its original £17bn budget and a £500m bail-out from the government's coffers.

Earlier this month Peter Hendry, the commissioner for London Transport, told the *Guardian* newspaper that there was no reason why Transport for London should bail out the blundering company any more. Nevertheless, the government has pledged £212m of taxpayers' money, on top of Metronet's current annual fee of £860m annually.

The PPP project has been disastrous from the start, and Metronet's woes are another on the long list of blundering and inefficient private companies who have, with the support and encouragement of the government, wasted billions of pounds since PPPs began in the 1990s.

Brown's plans for new homes

Government plans to ease the country's housing shortage by building three million homes will bankrupt most of the social housing sector within five years, an industry body claims.

The National Housing Federation (NHF), which represents England's social housing providers, says ministers' financial predictions are based on an assumption that housing associations will fund the work by taking out huge loans which, in reality, they will be unable to afford.

The NHF hit out before the publication of the Government's Housing Green Paper, which is expected to include the release of public sector land for housing and carbon-neutral eco-towns.

Gordon Brown has said that the new homes would be built by 2020, and up to 70,000 of them would be social housing, built mostly by housing associations. A new financial settlement has been agreed with the social housing sector but the NHF warned ministers in private talks last week that their financial assumptions were so flawed they would "kill the goose that lays the golden housing egg".

ACE under threat

The Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE) is threatened with eviction as the landlord is seeking planning permission to turn the premises into a flat.

ACE is the only social centre left in Scotland. The Council's development policy is to protect local shops, community halls and meetings rooms, and ACE is requesting supporters to write to the Council asap politely objecting to the proposal (more information from autonomous.org.uk or call 0131 557 6242).

ACE provides: free film screenings/workshops including women's health, massage, screenprinting, desktop publishing, make-your-own short film course for black and asian women aged 16-18, photocopying, free broadband access, large library and archive, meeting space for groups including support for claimants, muslim women, Chiapas solidarity, womens health, Leith wholefood co-op, the IWW and many others.

Around the world

Peru: As an indefinite teachers strike continues into its twelfth day, farmers, miners and construction workers joined the protests, with one farmer shot dead by police.

The latest death brings the reported death toll to four over the last week in what has been described by some as a general strike.

The strike began when the teachers union struck against a new law requiring all teachers to sit regular competency exams. This was the catalyst for wider discontent to erupt, and miners, construction workers and *campesinos* (peasant farmers) joined the demonstrations.

With thousands taking to the streets in every major town and city, police have made mass arrests of around 100 union leaders and others whom the government labels 'left-wing radicals'. In total over 300 arrests have been made since the start of the teachers strike on 5th July. Much of the anger has been directed at the President Alan Garcia, whose social democratic Aprista party won a narrow victory over the populist/nationalist Ollanta Humala in elections last summer. Humala has voiced support for the protests in a move seen by many as an attempt to re-ignite his own presidential ambitions.

The indefinite teachers strike has been bolstered by a two-day strike by the Campesino Confederation of Peru (CCP) in protest at a free-trade accord with the US which was ratified by the Peruvian congress last summer but has yet to come into force. Against a backdrop of widespread poverty – half of Peru's 27 million people live on less than \$1 a day – there is anger that the government is pursuing the free-trade deal whilst reneging on promises to ensure that workers and *campesinos* benefit from the country's annual 8% economic growth. Despite this growth promised improvements to electricity, water and food provision have not materialised and President Garcia's approval rating has plummeted to 35%, down from 60% when he was elected, although it is unclear whether

Humala's nationalist opposition has made gains.

Oaxaca: On 16th July 16th in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, a confrontation between the APPO (Popular Assembly of The Peoples of Oaxaca) and security forces of the State of Oaxaca as well as Federal Preventive Police has left at least one movement participant dead as a result of police violence, at least 62 detained, and an unknown number of people disappeared.

According to an APPO press statement released the same day, the police launched "a broad offence" against the people of Oaxaca who were celebrating an alternative Guelaguetza. The APPO announced two days previous that it would hold an alternative cultural festival in the main Guelaguetza auditorium, located in the Fortin Mountain outside of the city.

Federal Preventive Police and State police surrounded the perimeter of the Guelaguetza auditorium in order to stop people getting to the festival. A caravan heading to the festival, tailed by 10,000 people, arrived, and in that moment the police attacked the crowd with tear gas, rocks, sticks, and explosive projectiles. People retreated, and the police advanced, beating and arresting people. Three photographers were reported to have been beaten. Countless others were tossed into the back of police pick up trucks with serious injuries.

Mozambique: One person died and three others were injured, two of them seriously, when violent clashes broke out on Monday at the Mafambisse sugar plantation, in the central province of Sofala, after about 4,000 seasonal workers went on strike.

The strike began when a group of workers demanded a wage rise, overtime pay and a reduction in what they considered the excessive workload demanded of them by the company.

The strikers gathered at the entrance of the factory before dawn, at about 4am. Some of the demonstrators told

reporters from the Maputo daily *Noticias* that they had not attempted to interfere in the operations of the sugar mill.

The workers said that the company's security guards opened fire on them with rubber bullets, in an attempt to disperse the crowd. They accused the head of the company security force, Cardoso Equivale, of firing the pistol shot that took the life of 23 year old Domingos Chanjane.

With three other workers injured by the security guards, the demonstrators, brandishing machetes, retaliated. They destroyed a company official's motorbike, who fled from the scene.

The police were called and eventually managed to calm down the angry strikers, who then went into a meeting with the company management, the Mafambisse trade union committee, and the Sofala provincial director of labour, Omar Julilo.

The strike had not been called by the trade union committee, but was a spontaneous outburst of anger against what the workers regarded as the company reneging on its promises to increase their pay.

Ethiopia: Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia's prime minister, has freed 38 opposition members who were sentenced to jail this week for treason, inciting violence and trying to overthrow the government.

Human rights groups and donor governments had said that the trial was politically motivated against the opposition after they made strong electoral gains in May 2005.

Meles said: "The pardon is total. They are being freed with their constitutional rights restored. They have committed themselves to adhere [to] and respect the rule of law as well as the constitution of the country. They are being released as I speak."

An Ethiopian court rejected a prosecution attempt to sentence leaders of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) to death, and handed life sentences to 35 of them. Eight other

defendants were given sentences of between 18 months and 18 years.

The sentences, which followed an almost two-year-long trial, were immediately met with criticism from human rights groups. The United States, a close ally of Meles, urged clemency.

The defendants were tried after two post-election bouts of violence in which 199 people were killed, 800 wounded and 30,000 arrested, according to a parliamentary inquiry.

Siberia: In the early morning of 21st July, neo-nazi skinheads launched a vicious and unprovoked attack on an anti-nuclear protest camp in Angarsk, Siberia, Russia. The nazis violently attacked activists in their sleeping bags and tents with iron rods, knives and air pressure guns. Ilya Borodaenko, a 21 year old from Nachodka, suffered a head-fracture during the attack and later died in hospital from his injuries. At least nine others have been reported to be seriously injured, one of which has had both their legs broken. Tents were set on fire and several belongings were stolen.

The camp started last week and is aimed at protesting against a planned centre of uranium enrichment in Angarsk. Ever since the arrival of the activists, the police have tried to intimidate them and have entered the camp in an attempt to gather information about planned actions. The organisation who planned the camp, the 'Ecological Wave of Baikal', had planned various rallies in the surrounding area to inform locals about the plans and drum up support for the campaign.

Financial help and other forms of solidarity are urgently needed. If you are able to offer any help please contact xmakimax@gmail.com or ogopogos@gmail.com

Police said they have detained two suspects in the assault and identified at least thirteen others.

A criminal investigation has been launched in connection with the attack.

Prison news

Suicide link to prison overcrowding

Prison overcrowding is contributing to a sharp rise in inmate suicides in jails in England and Wales, the Chief Inspector of Prisons has said.

So far this year, some 50 prisoners have taken their own lives, compared to 67 in the whole of last year.

If deaths continue at the same rate, it would reverse a trend which has seen prison suicides fall from levels such as 95 in 2002, 94 in 2003 and 95 in 2004 to 78 in 2005 and 67 in 2006.

Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, said that the recent overcrowding crisis had seen newly-convicted prisoners housed in police and courthouse cells, where they do not have access to the support proper jails offer at their time of greatest vulnerability.

The prison population hit a record of 81,040 this month, before dipping by 1,500 because of a Government early release scheme. Up to 400 inmates were also being held in cells in police stations and courts.

Support Falk

In 1996, Thomas was sent down for a bank robbery. He'll be inside until at least 2010. Because of his strong beliefs, he's been subject to very harsh repression – kept in solitary, daily cell raids, suppression and censorship of mail (no packages, he has recently been denied his regular correspondence with some political groups by a High Court Ruling), with no access to education. On top of this his cell is in bad disrepair. Protest letters and faxes are needed towards improving his conditions. When

writing to him don't mention you are a political supporter. Besides handwritten letters, the only things he can get in the post are three IRC's at a time.

• Thomas Meyer Falk, JVA Bruchsal, Zelle 3117, Schoenbornstr. 32, 76646 Bruchsal, Germany. For more info email: thomas_m_f@so36.net

Antifascist in Belarus jailed

Maksim Gubkskiy was recently given a prison sentence of three years for 'malicious hooliganism'.

Maksim joined antifa two years ago, when he was 15 years old. He was one of the organisers of Food Not Bombs in Minsk, actions took place in Gorky Park, in Victory Square and a number of other spots. Maksim supported football club MTZ-RIPO, famous for its anti-fascist ultras. Maksim was a

good friend and made talented artwork.

In late 2006 a fight between Nazi boneheads and Minsk antifa took place, and the Nazis got trashed. One of the racists could memorise the face of Maksim, and went to snitch about him to the cops. Eventually charges according to statute 339 part 2 of the Belarussian criminal codex (malicious hooliganism) were pressed against Maksim, and court sentenced him to three years in prison, to be served in a prison with a 'strict regime'.

As *Freedom* goes to press, Maksim's exact whereabouts are unknown. But please write him letters of support by e-mail to afa-ripo@bk.ru, they will be printed and passed to him in prison. You may send him birthday greetings, as on the 24th of July Maksim will be 18 years old!

News

The Big Meeting

David Douglass reports on the recent events at the Durham Miners Gala, or Big Meeting as it is known

The 123rd Annual Durham Miners Gala, or the 'Big Meeting' as it is called, took place on Saturday 14th July. Defying forecasts of the torrential rain which had fallen incessantly for weeks, 70,000 people were blessed with glorious sunshine which reigned all day and into the evening. The splendour and magnificence of Durham takes some putting into words. Hundreds of traditional Lodge banners from the cornerstones of industrial history and a once massive coal industry parade each year. Thirty five brass bands, now frequently staffed by youngsters alongside older musicians, march with huge martial and pomp and circumstance. The banners, bearing the age-old messages of solidarity, class struggle and 'the World for the Workers', together with religious themes of mutual aid and compassion. Where the ancient Lodge banner has given up the ghost and long ago disintegrated into dust, new recommissioned banners take their place. Banner Committees, drawn in the people of the old community, old colliers and their families and people who never seen a pit head. The last mine closed in Durham in 1994, some might have thought the culture and tradition of the miners would rapidly die as we became faceless unemployed or soulless service workers lost in sea of low pay and dog eat dog. They would have been mistaken, the Durham miners communities refused to die, refused to give up the vision of

a better world, a world of co-operation and solidarity and an end to capitalism.

This year as every year, miners from across the globe marched with us, previously Australians and Canadians, this year Hungarians and Poles. German miners in their pit uniforms strode through the crowds.

Durham is now supported by most of the big unions, their contingents growing year by year and from further and further afield. Union leaders on the platform often reflect the extent to their union's involvement. Tony Woodley of TGWU/Unite, Paul Kenny, Gen Sec of GMB, and even the TUC in the guise of its Deputy General Secretary Frances O'Grady who actually made one of the most powerful speeches of the day. Dennis Skinner, a long time favourite speaker because of his irreverence to the Tories, Thatcher and the monarchy, with no Tory windmill to tilt at this year instead gave us a lesson in what this government had done for us all. Sadly he wasn't being sarcastic. It was a little sad actually, although very critical of the war, and he pointed out he, unlike the Liberals has opposed it while it's still on and not just before it started, in the end was trying to tell us New Labour wasn't just the Tories by another name. The crowd seemed far from convinced. The crowd – it must be said this year was the largest I have ever seen actually listening to the speakers. The field was massed with working people and their families.



Woodley was trying to put a spin in Gate Gourmet, saying the law didn't allow the BA luggage handlers to take secondary action but he had been proud of them and they had saved 170 of the jobs at the Gourmets. He ducked from the fact that if ever we were going to kick those anti-union

laws into touch, that action starting at Heathrow could have been the spark. It should have been let rip right through the industry and then across all TGWU sites and industries with an appeal for all workers to down tools in solidarity with the Gate Gourmet workers – we couldn't have

wished for a better issue, more strongly felt across the country. This could have been our 1971 docker's action which killed the Industrial Relations Bill of the period, with a wildcat general strike. Instead we had had the TGWU telling workers not to take solidarity action.

The MOVE organisation

Screenings of the rugged and raw MOVE (2004) have been introduced at venues across the country by the revolutionary back-to-nature organisation's 'Minister of Communication', Ramona Africa. Narrated by prominent radical historian Howard Zinn, film students Ben Garry and Ryan McKenna's documentary atmospherically details the decades-old Philadelphia government and FBI persecution of the group. Escalating vicious harassment failed to silence their vocal class- and race-conscious environmentalism (itself far ahead of fashion) even after the 'MOVE 9' were framed for the murder of a cop during a 1978 siege – culminating in the deliberate slaughter of six unarmed adults and five children on 13th May 1985. When floods of water cannons, tear gas and automatic weapons fire failed to flush out and finish them off, a bomb dropped on their house from a helicopter burnt the whole Osage Avenue block to the ground. Emerging with her daughter as sole survivors, Ramona Africa promptly got seven years for riot.

Not surprisingly, MOVE has since concentrated on countering official and corporate media lies over these pivotal

events, working for the release of those falsely imprisoned. The wider effort now encompasses the cases of MOVE supporter Mumia Abu Jamal (see update in *Freedom*, 2nd June), the American Indian Movement's Leonard Peltier and various Black Panther and Black Liberation Movement stalwarts among countless other police and 'justice' system outrages. However, the fight against this particular ongoing judicial jihad soon reaches a critical phase with the MOVE 9's impending parole hearings as their thirty-year minimum sentences expire. The authorities have recently been inclined to leave the organisation alone, given their admirably intransigent stance – but international vigilance and support are now more crucial than ever. Even so, despite understandable preoccupations, MOVE speakers scrupulously encourage and namecheck resistance against the capitalist system's onslaughts around the world.

MOVE's astonishing fortitude, courage and commitment facing the US state's brutal duplicity stem from 1960–70s Black activism and the sheer longevity of a struggle characterised by steadfast refusal to collude in domination or

remain passive about it. Nevertheless their ideology is only indirectly political, being rooted in spiritual convictions concerning the rationality of instinct – with a resulting confusion of philosophy and science, humanity and animality, and truth and morality giving room for profound contradictions in theory and practice. But unlike many religious bigots, animal libbers, primitivist propagandists or eco-evangelists, MOVE members don't hide behind hysterical, self-deluding, fanatical rhetoric. Simultaneously humble, open and uncompromising, they engage with anyone actively recognising the unifying force reflected in the campaign around political prisoners, articulated as a common cause anticipating grass-roots rebellious self-determination as the ultimate harbinger of any freedom worth the name.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

General information and news are available at onamove.com/ and onamove2007.org.uk/. The MOVE documentary can also be viewed online at brightcove.com/title.jsp?title=428944249&channel=219646953. The MOVE Organisation's postal address is PO Box 19709, Philadelphia, PA 19143, USA.

Carmel-Agrexco action

On Sunday the 15th July, a dozen or so human rights activists invaded the main distribution warehouse of Carmel-Agrexco, the part state-owned Israeli agricultural company that grows much of its produce in settlements within the Palestinian territories, settlements that are illegal under international law.

Carmel-Agrexco is 50% owned by the Israeli state, and so is deeply involved with Israel's illegal activities in the Palestinian occupied territories. Not only does Carmel buy fruit, herbs and vegetable from illegal Israeli settlements, it chooses to ignore inhumane abuses committed by the Israeli state and settlers against Palestinians. For example there are reports that Palestinian children along with adults, are being paid 30 sheckles (about £3.75, much less than the Israeli minimum wage of 130 sheckles) a day by settlement farmers for working in the fields during the sabbath, a day when religious Jews such as most settlers are not allowed to work.

Settlements within the occupied territories are small enclaves of Israeli citizens, heavily armed and defended

by the Israeli defence force. Human rights observers have consistently reported routine harassment from settler men, women and children of Palestinians going about their day to day business; anything from verbal abuse to rock-throwing, with IDF troops either encouraging or ignoring it.

The Israeli and British flags outside the warehouse were taken down by half of the group and replaced with the Palestinian flag in solidarity and the red and black flag of anarchism. Meanwhile another group had made their way to the loading bays in the back of the warehouse and entered the building. Leaflets were left for the workers explaining the Israeli warcrimes and Carmel-Agrexco's complicity. A couple of workers responded violently, but did not get out of hand when they were told they were being filmed. The activists then left the warehouse and two of them locked onto a storage trailer by the loading bay, mildly disrupting the warehouse activities. After three hours, those locked on were unlocked by their comrades and left voluntarily with no arrests made.

News

Oh law!

Louis Further takes a look at some recent interpretations of the law in the US legal system

It's sometimes the little reactions and gestures that reveal how small-minded or insecure the state really is. And its manipulation and selective application of the law that reveals its figures for what they are.

At the end of June lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union (the equivalent of 'Liberty' in the UK) filed a motion to ask a federal judge to void a law introduced a month earlier which made it illegal to sell products carrying the name of dead American soldiers. Dan Frazier, a businessperson from Flagstaff, Arizona, had been selling T-shirts with the message 'Bush lied' printed on one side and 'They Died' over the names of 3,000 members of the armed forces who lost their lives in Iraq on the other. Local police in preparing their case against Frazier told him that they were investigating other activities of his with a view to submitting a report to the office of the city attorney. If convicted under this law, offenders would serve six months in jail.

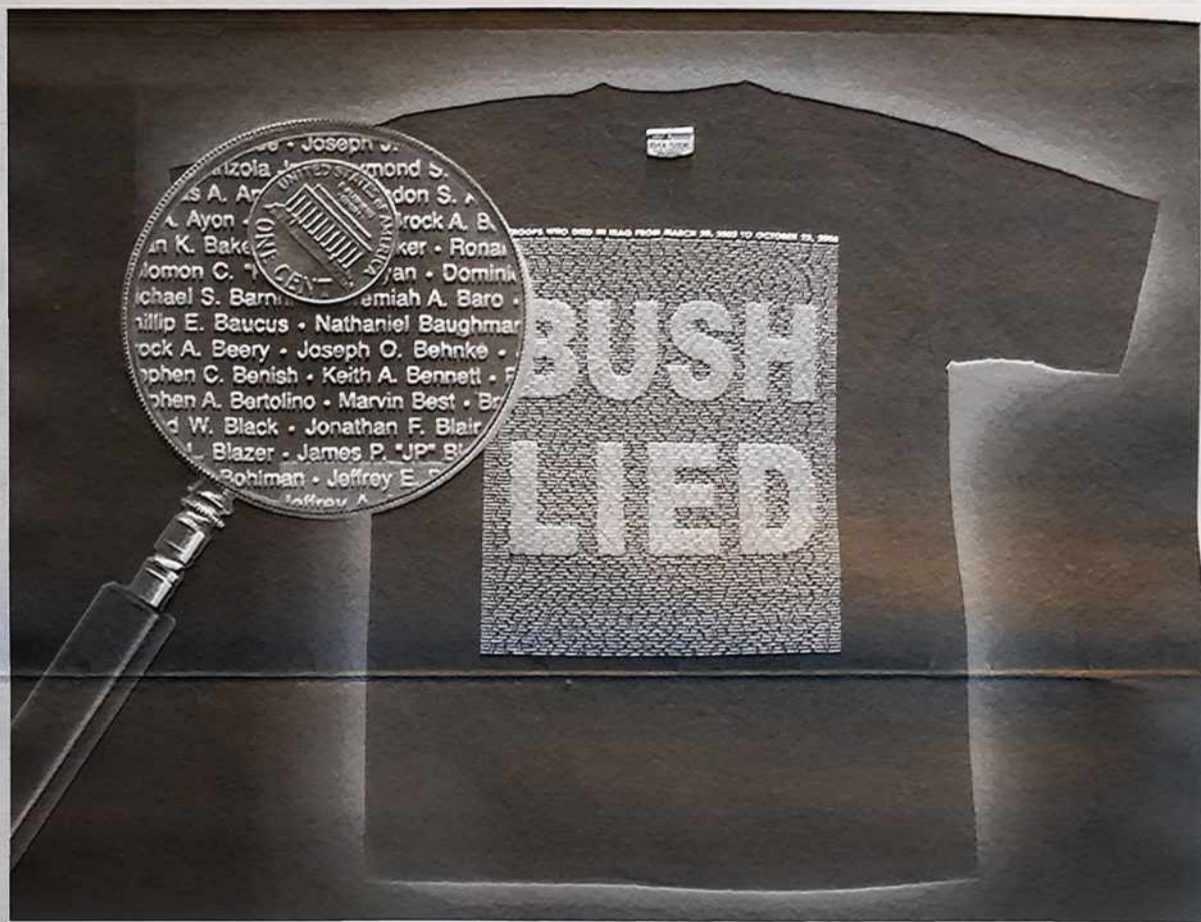
According to the first amendment to the US constitution, citizens have the right to voice dissenting opinion, and indeed to protests such as Frazier's.

But of course that's theory: in fact the experiences of three members of Iraq Veterans Against the War are more typical. They were arrested early in July for trying to meet active duty soldiers at the base at Fort Benning, Georgia. Liam Madden and Nathan Lewis were arrested after being told

not to wear 'political T-shirts'; they read, 'Iraq Veterans Against the War'. The third peace activist, Adam Kokesh, changed into a plain shirt but was still arrested. These arrests came only a few days after the same three were detained for a similar 'crime' at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

On reading this you could be forgiven for thinking that the rule of law can be pretty strict in the United States. In Georgia it can be: Genarlow Wilson, a 21-year-old African American, is now serving a ten year prison sentence for having consensual oral sex when he was a teenager. He was 17 years old and the girl was 15. But in a recent ruling, a Georgia judge criticised prosecutors and ordered Wilson's release. So there is some justice? Well, state Attorney General Thurbert Baker then appealed that judge's decision and the district attorney, David McDade, released three dozen copies of videotapes allegedly somehow showing the teen's sexual encounters and clearly identifying the girl.

Then there's the case of the 'Jena Six' in Louisiana. These are six black high school students who have been charged (in a case with an all-white court) with attempted murder and conspiracy. They face possible cumulative sentences of over 100 years. Teens Robert Bailey, Theo Shaw, Carwin Jones, Bryant Purvis, Mychal Bell and a still unidentified minor were provoked into a brawl with a white student when they responded to the



appearance of nooses tied to trees (unilaterally 'reserved' for whites) under which they had earlier sat. So maybe justice was hiding on that occasion.

Good news: in the middle of July, barely 24 hours before he was scheduled to be killed by the State of

Georgia, African American Troy Davis was granted a 90-day stay of execution by the Georgia parole board. The 38-year-old African American from Savannah, Georgia, has been on death row for more than fifteen years for a murder he did not

commit. There was no physical evidence, no murder weapon, and the prosecution case was built entirely on witness testimony - but seven of the nine non-police witnesses said they were coerced by police and have since reversed their testimony.

UN offensive against Iraq mercenaries Bush lawyers

Mercenary recruitment agencies that send former soldiers to Iraq have been accused in Chile of human rights abuses, illegal association, possession of explosives and unauthorised use of army weaponry, and are the target of a special United Nations mission.

The UN Working Group (UNWG) on the "use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination", established in July 2005 by the then UN Commission on Human Rights, conducted a fact-finding mission about the recruitment firms in Chile this week, and then planned to head to Montevideo.

Senator Alejandro Navarro, of the governing coalition Socialist Party, is the prime mover behind the visit by the delegation, which arrived in Santiago on Monday. He stated that these firms declare legal residence in Uruguay, and that contracts are signed in international airspace while the mercenaries are being flown to the

Middle East.

A Jordanian city has also been named as a venue where contracts are signed. Some of these contracts designate the Conciliation and Arbitration Centre of Panama (CeCAP), linked to Panama's Chamber of Commerce, as the arbiter in case of any dispute, said Navarro, who had negotiated for two years for the UNWG to visit Chile.

At last the government of President Michelle Bachelet officially invited this delegation, led by UNWG executive president José Luis Gómez del Prado, of Spain, who has already visited Honduras and Ecuador in 2006 and Peru in 2007.

The other UNWG members are Amada Benavides de Pérez of Colombia, Alexander Nikitin of Russia, Najat Al-Hajjaji of Libya and Shaista Shameem of Fiji, not all of whom came to Chile.

Navarro said that US private security companies such as Blackwater and Triple Canopy, who recruit guards at the request of the US

government to send into armed conflict zones to protect strategic installations, tend to subcontract to South American firms like Red Táctica Consulting Group.

The owner of the Washington-based Red Táctica is José Miguel Pizarro, a retired general of the Chilean army who lives in the US. He is also known as a commentator on Iraq security issues for the US news service CNN.

Pizarro had at first agreed to meet with the UN mission in Santiago, but later changed his mind, saying that Gómez del Prado is not impartial and has taken an 'anti-American' stance, according to Gómez del Prado himself.

Navarro's investigation has so far found that seven or eight companies, in the business of recruiting former Chilean troops who have retired from the armed forces or left voluntarily, were set up by Pizarro's lieutenants. The senator sued them for illegal association before local courts in 2004.

The White House is still openly defying Congress, which has several times demanded information in its investigations into the politically-motivated dismissal earlier this year of nine US attorneys.

Documents referring to the dismissals are known to exist. On the first occasion thousands of relevant emails were 'lost'. Now the White House is refusing to comply with a subpoena and hand over a log, claiming 'executive privilege'.

Effectively this is an attempt to put the executive branch above the law, which will not be for the first time. In mid-July the Justice Department issued a brief legal opinion that Bush's former top lawyer and other senior White House officials 'can ignore' these subpoenas from Congress.

Lest it be thought that this conduct is the exclusive province of the current junta, it should be noted that this 2007 memo cited the opinion of the attorney general in 1999.

Then Janet Reno claimed that the then White House did not have to make available to Congress documents about a decision by President Clinton to commute the prison sentences of sixteen members of a Puerto Rican nationalist group convicted of bomb-making and other crimes.

In some ways more disturbing than this latest defiance itself is the perception by the state that its power is so absolute, its accountability (not that, as anarchists, we believe in such a concept: but many liberal thinkers in the US do) so small and unimportant that it can even try to hold out in this way.

The arrogance of those in power has been further compounded as they call on the huge apparatus of media propaganda to discredit what by law is a legitimate attempt to investigate the scandal; they term it 'unpatriotic' (a sure way to win support), and a 'back door attempt to weaken security', which no-one wants, do they. Law oh law!

Feature

Terror and instability

Sam Urquhart reports on terror and instability in North Africa and the failure of US foreign policy

On Friday, 22nd June, rebels from Niger's Tuareg ethnic minority stormed a military camp, killing 15 troops and abducting between 40 and 70 others. The attack, which dwarfs any others by Tuareg forces in recent years, came a week after the Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) claimed credit for another raid, this time on the airport at the town of Agades in Niger's uranium producing north west region.

Thirty of these soldiers were released a week later, but on 4th July the rebel group followed up their earlier attack with the kidnapping of a Chinese uranium executive – causing the shutdown of all Chinese mining operations in Niger. Meanwhile, since the crisis began, Nigerien president Mamadou Tandja has promised to mobilise 4,000 troops and send helicopter gunships to Tuareg areas. Reports from the capital Niamey suggest that he is whipping up anti-Tuareg sentiment, portraying rebel demands as unfair and anti-democratic.

But the grievances are real. The Tuareg have been historically marginalised, ignored by central government and denied a political voice, while the effects of massive uranium mining have diminished their grazing lands.

Uranium dust from the mines, such as that run by the French group Areva, has dispersed across huge areas of Tuareg grazing lands that lie downwind from them. Efforts by local people and NGOs to monitor its environmental and health effects have been obstructed and specifically prevented by the government in Niamey, which fears the withdrawal of investment in the mines, with the collusion of the French. As a result, local people continue to drink water poisoned by the mines and graze their animals on contaminated lands.

At present, with the uranium sector undergoing an expansion in Niger, Tuareg concerns are rising. Thirty new projects are slated for exploration and development, with Chinese, Indian and Canadian firms leading the way. Tuareg know well that they will suffer the consequences of these projects and receive few of the benefits.

According to regional expert Jeremy Keenan, "there is certain amount of sympathy for the rebel cause, although the people don't want a rebellion". Moreover, some of the leaders of the MNJ, notably Aboubacar Alambo, are known in the region as criminals and, in Keenan's view, "would have zero credibility of enjoying a following at any political level".

Children of the Terror Myth

But there is a deeper history behind the instability in Niger and it is a theme that stretches across the Sahel region of Africa. Since 2003, the Sahel nations – Niger, Mali, Chad, Mauritania and Algeria – have been absorbed into the global 'war on terror' and have all come under the US counter-terrorism military umbrella. Lurid accusations of these nations harbouring 'al-Qaeda in the Maghreb' or groups allied to Osama Bin Laden have justified the expansion of US military assistance to often brutal regimes, such as that of Niger.

US intervention stems from a deception in the desert that was eagerly embraced by the Pentagon as its strategic value became clear. As Keenan has documented in his article 'The Banana Theory of Terrorism', published in the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, terrorism in the Sahel began with a fake kidnapping staged by the Algerian authorities.

In 2003, 32 German-speaking tourists were abducted in southern Algeria by a group called the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The official narrative of what ensued goes as follows:

Through a partnership with the Algerian government, US special forces waged a campaign against the kidnappers, raiding their hideout, pushing them into neighboring Mali (where the hostages were released) and then pursuing them all the way into Chad. US ground forces and aerial reconnaissance planes covered thousands of miles on the trail of 'El Para' – dubbed 'Bin Laden's man in the Sahel' before tracking him down and allowing Chadian forces to capture him. El Para did then escape, before being recaptured by Chadian rebels, sent across the border to Libya and then back to where he now languishes in prison.

Yet Keenan argues that this is a fabrication. Tuareg in the region doubt that 5,000 Algerian troops with their aerial surveillance capabilities could fail to spot either the kidnappers or their tracks as they escaped from Algeria to Mali. El Para himself was in constant radio contact with outside parties, while US AWACS planes flew overhead and on the numerous occasions that Algerian troops could have captured the kidnappers they failed to do so, allowing them to 'escape' from Mali.

That escape too is veiled in mystery. Keenan has found that on occasions when El Para and his band were accused of carrying out hold-ups to support their flight, these crimes were actually carried out by totally separate local bandits. When they did surface in the Air region of Niger (and sought to



Looking for uranium, a masked worker at an open cast mine in Niger

rob a group of tourists), El Para's men, asked that photos "be taken of them, their vehicles, arms, and the written contracts, signed by the tourists, agreeing to pay El Para money in Algiers".

As Keenan notes, this is risky behavior for battle-hardened terrorists. In his view, "this bizarre behaviour suggests a bunch of men stumbling around lost in the desert with insufficient supplies of fuel and perhaps other materials and trying, very publicly, to advertise their presence in the area, rather than seasoned Al Qaeda 'terrorists'." El Para was constructing a narrative on behalf of superiors within the Algerian state as he wandered across the Sahel, through each of the nations to which the US would soon begin to dole out military aid.

When he arrived in Chad, El Para was supposedly still being tailed by US special forces, although when he fell into the hands of the rebel MJDT movement there, these forces failed to capture him, even though El Para had by then been flagged by the Pentagon as 'Osama Bin Laden's man in the Sahara'. Keenan contends that his immunity derived from his position as an agent of the DRS, the Algerian secret services.

From tranquil to terrifying?

The Bush administration therefore latched onto the opportunity presented by the Algerian secret services to launch their 'chase' across the desert, thereby incorporating the governments across whose territory the Special Forces ranged, into the global war on terror. Uranium and potential oil resources proved an irresistible lure.

Right wing commentators began to make a cottage industry from discussing the rise of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb. At the same time, legions of military and intelligence personnel within the US European Command (EUCOM), which has had responsibility for African affairs, have been looking for work. Major Gen. Charles Wald, for example, has been the foremost US military voice in hyping the Sahel terrorist threat.

In 2004, for example, he told Congress that "the terrorist activity in this area is not going to go away ... This could affect your kids and your grandchildren in a huge way. If we don't do something about it, we are going to have a real problem on our hands ... We have to ... have the ability to get our intelligence into that area and infiltrate there so we can get into their environment. And that is when we will stop it."

But there has been no attack against terrorism, as there has been no terrorism to attack. There has however been a bungling attempt to arm local regimes against the 'terrorist threat'. This has led to conditions of instability, as shown by the case of the Nigerien Tuareg, who may find their grievances against environmental depredation and political marginalisation being overtaken again by military rebellion and government repression.

Keenan quotes on Tuareg leader, who describes the fruit of US policy as "being close to an incipient state of near-permanent rebellion". Tellingly, Keenan adds that the terrorism threat provides "a good underpinning for the US Secretary of Defense's next step in militarising the continent through the creation of a single, unified US African

Command." Conditions on the ground have been subordinated to grand strategy.

The US has appeared incompetent in the face of real instability, even as it has skillfully created fake terror to extend its influence in North Africa. Keenan told me "when you get a rebellion that is actually real, lo and behold, Special Forces suddenly aren't there ... the first time there is a genuine issue, the Americans have become silent."

In his view, after years of spinning tales about terrorism and running Special Forces in the region, the US is over-exposed and lacking credibility. Algeria, a faction of whose secret services Keenan suspects may be behind the MNJ, can take on the role of sub-imperial power with impunity. There may be a covert US presence in the region – a US special forces soldier was reportedly killed in neighbouring Mali last week – and the US role in the current instability in Niger is unclear. There is, however, no evidence on the ground of an American hand in the troubles of Niger.

With the authoritarian Nigerien government seeking to prepare the ground for a military assault on the rebels, the connivance of the Algerian secret services, the presence of Qaddafi (whose army may contain as many as 5,000 Nigerien Tuareg soldiers) and the possible role of US Special Forces, the region is now a powder keg. As a result of the 'war on terror' governments have been emboldened to step up repression, and minorities are in revolt.

It is another underreported consequence of the global failure of American foreign policy.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 15

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

First of all, we'd like to extend our congratulations to an ex-editor of *Freedom*, Toby, who recently got married. We hope Emma and yourself have a long and happy life together.

Meanwhile back in Angel Alley, the pleas for volunteers goes on. We desperately need people to help with the *Freedom* mailout. Get in touch by mail at 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, telephone 020 7247 9249, email subs@freedompress.org.uk or, if you're in the area, leave a message at the shop.

This is your paper, and we need your letters and articles letting us know what's happening in your area. You can send those to The Editors at the address above, or email copy@freedompress.org.uk

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 11th August 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 2nd August. Send articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel

Thinking with Freedom

First of all I'm not going to disagree with the main thrust of John Griffin's article on the relationship between authority and mental illness, (*Freedom*, 30th June, page 5) merely add a few thoughts in response to it.

Whilst I'd agree, for example, with the use of Erich Fromm's work in this field, I'm just a little surprised that John didn't see fit to mention the work of Alex Comfort. I would have thought his classic *Authority and Delinquency – a study in the Psychology of Power* might have been relevant?

Another point is that John makes the point that having "a well thought out, deeply held system of belief does help to integrate the character structure, and makes the individual more able to resist the most extreme social pressures."

Now, I've no doubt that this may be true of many libertarians, but it is equally true of people who hold any deeply held beliefs. One has only to think of our recently departed Prime Minister whose religious beliefs were central to his political decisions and enabled him to ignore social pressures, such as those arguing against invading Iraq. Equally anyone studying cults can see that authoritarian structures and deeply held beliefs can make for very anti-social practices.

One final point John is optimistic about a libertarian society being able to reduce the incidence of mental illness. Whilst I share his hope, it may just be that a libertarian society would produce its own particular forms of 'mental illness' – perhaps ones that only outsiders would recognise? (And that's before we even get into a discussion of what constitutes 'mental illness' and what causes it.)

Richard Alexander

Alternative consumer

Worried about global warming? Not sure what you can do to halt the ice caps melting? Worried about polar bears? Want to make things better but don't know what you can do? Oddly, given that capitalism is actually the cause of climate change it seems that the answer to these problems is to 'buy stuff'. Capitalism can exploit anything it seems including the end of the planet. Bookshelves are groaning under the weight of books like John Houghton's *Global Warming: the complete briefing* (£24.99) or *The Rough Guide to Climate Change* (£9.99). Or you could put your feet up and watch Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* (£19.99).

Looking environmentally friendly

doesn't come cheap. According to the broadcaster Freeview, festival goers in this country spend around £500 on accessorising themselves. Everyone seems to be in on the act. At Glastonbury the Oxfam stall sold 1,000 pairs of wellies and 2,000 waterproof, 700 wedding dresses and 700 dinner jackets, 200 basques, two tonnes of fancy dress and one tonne of wigs and hats.

Oxfam also exclusively sold a Stella McCartney designed limited edition t-shirt. Wow cool! As the waters rise and the forests burn its good to know that you can look great in a £30 t-shirt and hey if you don't like Stella's design there are plenty more to choose from. How about Kate Moss designed eco-friendly Buddhist Punk clothes (t-shirts come in at £50, shipping free though)? Howies sell a pair of shorts made from old fleeces and tees. When you have finished with them you can send them back and they'll make a new pair (only £45 each plus postage).

Here's an idea though why not just wear the clothes that you already have until you can't wear them any more, until they are faded and worn like you used to do with your favourite shirt when you were a kid.

From environmentally friendly car insurance to eco wedding rings (presumably for the people who bought those 700 wedding dresses from Oxfam's stall at Glastonbury) to recycled shopping bags and stylish organic clothing the shops are packed full of eco friendly ideas. The consumer is spoilt for choice as long as they can afford the price tag.

It's good to feel good even if all that you are really doing is using climate change as a lifestyle choice and still buying while capitalism still makes a profit and hail stones fall like snow in the summer and the rivers flood. It's all about missing the point. Bands play Live Earth but none say what really needs to happen. Everyone has a good time and nothing changes. Well actually things get worse as capitalism east and west continues to eat the planet alive. And as the Anarchist Federation point out "capitalism cannot be reformed – it is built on the domination of nature and of people. We need to take direct control of every aspect of our lives." That means doing a bit more than buying a t-shirt.

A new Earth First! group is being set up in east Kent. If you are interested in getting involved contact mattclowes@riseup.net. Some of us AFers will be at climatecamp.org.uk.

Captain Swing

London couriers have it tough

An Olympic athlete may train up to four hours a day. A cycle courier can expect to be running for at least twelve, often in the most adverse and wretched of conditions. I started working as a

courier earlier this year because I found out that I owed £250 to BT.

Couriering is by far the easiest job I've ever picked up, the only qualification being ownership of a bicycle. After about half an hour of telephoning various companies around London, I found one which was hiring, and inside the hour I was out working.

Although its an easy occupation to fall into, the evidence I've seen suggests that it's a very hard one to get out of. Most of the couriers I've spoken to have been on the job for anything between seven and thirty years. Many are in middle age, with little prospect or interest in pursuing anything else. A courier makes a subsistence living, with fixed and stable wages being a great rarity (I have encountered only one courier who claimed to make a regular wage – £6 an hour).

The terms of employment are otherwise always heavily stacked in the favour of the retaining company – the courier works on a freelance commission basis (the standard commission being £2.50), and the only contractual responsibility is the courier's – against loss, theft or damage of the goods he carries. There is no job security, and work comes in ebbs and flows – you can go hours without a single job coming in, and the next hour pick up seven.

I never made more than £150 on my best week (roughly £2.50 an hour), although companies generally promise their couriers between £200 and £300. I have heard of very, very good couriers making as much as £500 a week, although I have never met anyone who claimed anything near that figure. I'd estimate the average weekly income of a fairly good courier at around £200 – that is, £3.34 an hour.

The health hazards are overwhelming – long term exposure to traffic fumes resulting in hacking coughs and chronic lung complaints being chief amongst them. After three weeks I developed a deep and hollow hacking cough, as well as recurring migraines. The cough would often come on while riding, doubling me over the handlebars in uncontrollable bouts of coughing which made breathing very difficult. After a fit of coughing, I would usually spit up large quantities of a thick, yellow-brown mucus. As a relatively heavy smoker, I have been used on occasion to the development of a light bronchitis, accompanied by similar symptoms – but the severity of this cough alarmed me enough to make immediate purchase of an expensive breather mask.

I have worn this mask ever since when in traffic, and my cough has all but disappeared. I am, however, the only courier I've ever known to wear a breather mask. It is also quite common for long term couriers to develop a permanent crink in the spine as a result of the stooped position adopted when riding for any length of time.

Then there is the constant threat of being mangled, crushed or permanently maimed amongst the avalanches of cars and heavy vehicles moving through the city every day. Bendy buses are the worst hazard, because of the unpredictability of their 'swinging' movements, and because the drivers all seem to be bloody minded, aggressive, and inexperienced. In a month, I came off my bike four times. In each instance, I simply got back on my bike and carried on – there is no contractual provision made for sickness or injury,

recuperative period, whether five minutes or five months, is unpaid. Wounds, whether minor or major, are therefore regarded as a temporary inconvenience.

Unlike the United States, where couriering has developed into a distinctive subculture, there is little cross company contact or social networking amongst couriers here – let alone a more systematic or sophisticated organisation, such as a union. This is perhaps related to the complete disorder and irregularity of the traffic in London where, unlike America, there are no laws against jay-walking, and the distinction between pavement and road is abused at every possible opportunity.

The chaos of the roads in Greater London makes riding through them at speed immensely stressful, and precludes any sense of real camaraderie, or all but the most fleeting contact, with other riders.

As far as the road laws are concerned, the cyclist is the most heavily penalised of any category of vehicle operating in the Greater London area. Of course, both private and professional drivers are subject to the ever increasing Congestion Charge, but this is nothing compared to the enormous clamp down currently being undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Force on cycle couriers contravening even the meanest and most minor road laws.

If caught jumping a red light, zebra crossing or cycling on the pavement, regardless of context, you can expect a £30 on the spot fine. This is undoubtedly an ill-considered and unjust policy – given the fact that a courier exists on little more than a subsistence level anyway, and that the money he makes is in direct proportion to the speed at which he can complete a run of jobs, it is actually in the active interest of the courier to break the law at the every possible opportunity.

Couriering is an underpaid, highly stressful, life-consuming, occasionally traumatic and for the most part lonely job. Having said all of this, I have also found couriering to be, in its better moments, both exhilarating and fulfilling, and many couriers do take real pride in their work. It is rare to be able to work at a job which, in a society constructed out of largely superfluous but nonetheless comparatively highly paid labour, has both a long history and a definite function in the modern world. The work, like any other work, has dignity in it – despite the fact that it is at this time made the subject of terms and conditions of employment which border on naked exploitation.

Anon

Quiz answers

1. The Glasgow Hillhead by-election in 1982. At the time, she was part of the 'Gang of Four' who had found the SDP – the by-election was won by Roy Jenkins, their leader. If only she'd been right, as the SDP was a bit crap really.
2. The adoption of underwear. As it became more popular, it led to there being more rags available when it was discarded. This in turn led to a growth in paper making, allowing more books to be published.
3. Sir Hiram Maxim, who invented the automatic Maxim gun and many other armaments, but also developed a medical inhaler.

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REVIEW

Richard Alexander finds Rebel Alliances an engrossing, if dry look at class struggle anarchism

This is probably the most up-to-date evaluation of the British anarchist movement. It is well-written, lucid and well-laid out. And for that alone we should be grateful to both publisher and

author. The book is not, however, a straightforward history of the movement, a participant's account, or a bibliographical guide – although it does encompass elements of all those. Rather it is an evaluation of the movement, through both its texts and acts, against four main criteria for what Franks's idea of what an 'ideal' anarchism should be.

It primarily covers self-defined 'class struggle' anarchisms, which also contains those who would consider themselves to be libertarian marxists, council communists, autonomists or working within the situationist legacy. (There has been considerable overlap in both ideas and personnel between these and 'pure' anarchist groups, and it's true to say that without the wider anarchist movement most of the other groupings would probably cease to exist.)

The study does not discuss overtly academic, individualist or liberal groupings except where they have some relevance to the main areas of study.

The book opens with a brief history of the anarchist movement, with the emphasis on the national class struggle groups (or off-shoots therefrom). The author is well-aware that many anarchists exist outside of these groups, many of them being active in more localised or specialised anarchist groups, whilst others have their main focus of activity in broader based political, environmental and other groupings.

Inevitably this leads to a rather lopsided account. Also being dependent on the availability of the relevant archive material means that unless the author could source material, then the groups concerned are omitted. The account also omits the names of the main movers and shakers of the groups involved (unless this is public knowledge). This is partly for security reasons, partly to avoid the 'cult of the individual'.

Franks defines, on the basis of the writings of anarchists themselves, what he considers to be the four main characteristics of his 'ideal' class struggle anarchisms. These can be summarised as:

1. Complete rejection of capitalism and the market economy.
2. Egalitarianism regards the interests and concerns of others, as part of creating non-hierarchical relationships generally.
3. Rejection of state power and other quasi-state mediating forces.
4. Prefiguration. That is the means are consistent with the desired ends and the agents of change must be in charge of the change (no substitutionism/vanguardism).

(Note: Franks is well aware that others might come with a different set of criteria for defining anarchist groups, including some that would contradict

some of the above in some instances. However for clarity, he confines the book to a consideration of the particular subset of anarchism, class struggle anarchism (which includes both syndicalist and communist variants.)

Before considering these in detail, however, Franks discussed whether there is such a thing as an anarchist 'ethics'. Here, although he notes that some have tried to dismiss the topic out of hand, few groups and individuals actually dispense with an ethical dimension to their activities and writings.

Franks dismisses moral judgements based on the liberal individual, rather he assesses whether the actions and writings of anarchist are consistent with their aims and the agency they wish to appeal to. Equally he dismisses the Leninist approach which is consequentialist, that is the ends justify the means, not least because he considers anarchism to open-ended, which makes the imposition of a universal 'end' an impossibility.

Franks' anarchisms are therefore tactical rather than strategic in their outlook. Hence the emphasis on 'direct action', those forms of action which are both prefigurative in structure, and where the people immediately affected attempt to deal with the problems themselves without mediation.

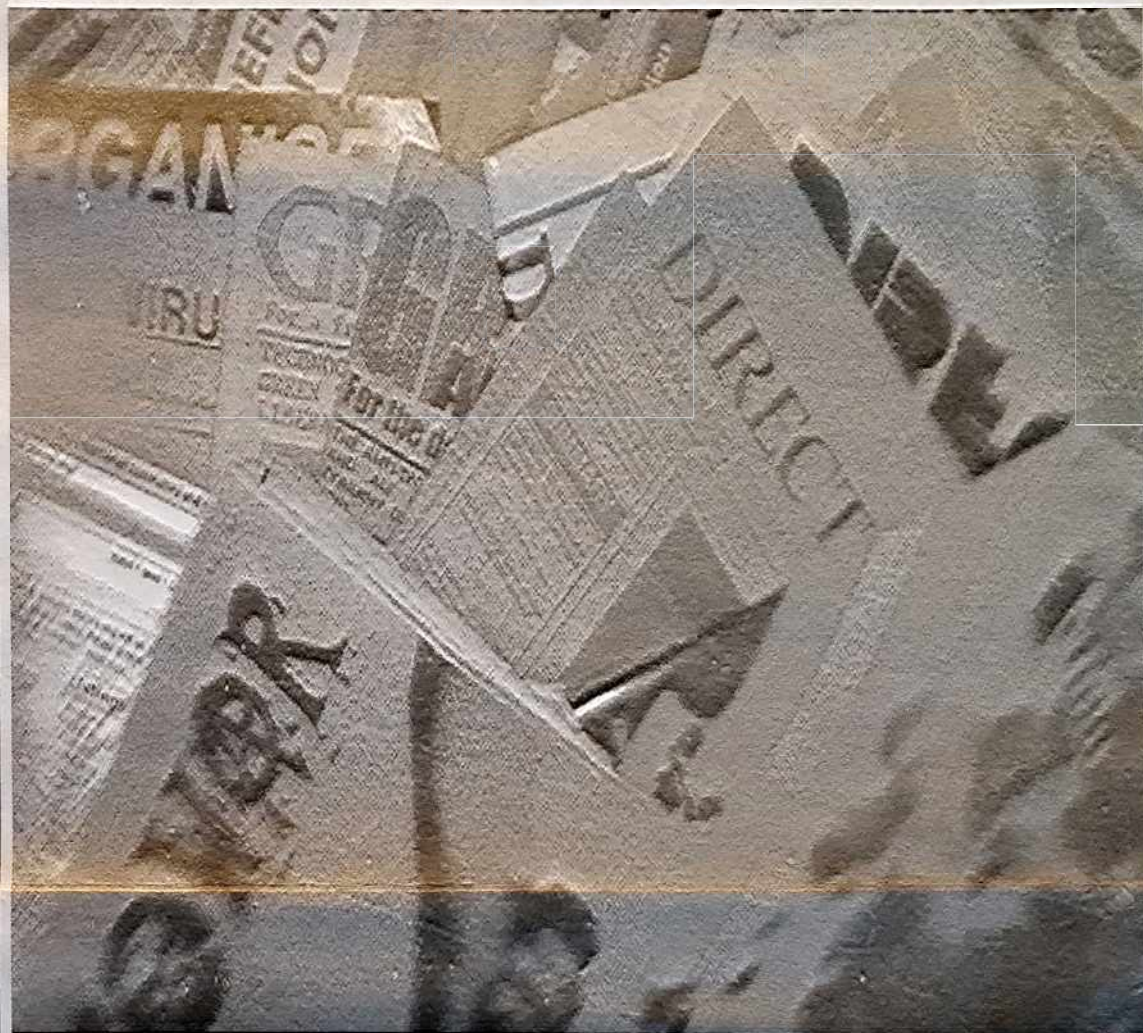
Following the discussion of 'direct action', Franks turns his attention to the agents of change. Following Foucault and others, he works from the basis that there are multiple positions of power and exploitation, any of which can be a locus of resistance and struggle. Traditional class struggle anarchism might well be asking that if that is so, then why is the focus of the text 'Class struggle anarchism'?

Franks gets round this by interpreting 'working class' to be a category that is inclusive of working and non-working people, those and discriminated or subjugated by reason of gender, race, sexuality, age and so forth, but, following autonomist arguments, only those subjugated by a particular form of oppression can struggle against it (or at least lead the struggle).

By this form of reasoning he decides that the animal liberationists are guilty of substitutionism, because it is the animals themselves that are not involved in, let alone leading the struggle against their exploitation. Again one has to point out that the economic is not sidelined by these forms of analysis, rather the economic is denied its privileged position accorded to it by traditional workplace economic deterministic forms of class struggle.

Having discussed the variety of ways that anarchists have theorised agents of change he looks at the way anarchists have organised themselves.

This is an interesting section in particular the differences between open and closed cell groups, clandestine and public forms of organising, which structures are



necessarily prefigurative of a non-hierarchical society, and whether organisations should have any form of permanence or should be purely temporary.

For myself it seem axiomatic that one adopts the form appropriate to the task to be performed, but that any organisation should last no longer than it needs to meet the needs of the people who are in it and to satisfy the aims it has set for itself. The dangers of ossification are well-known, the principle of free association means that nobody should stay in an organisation if it no longer is of use to them (and equally people who are detrimental to the organisation can be removed from it.)

The differences between the permanent syndicalist forms, and the more spontaneist councilist tradition are clearly laid out. What Franks does make clear though, is that there is no single form that is appropriate to every agent or function.

The final section of the book deals with anarchist tactics. Here those of a more traditionalist outlook will discover that most anarchists these days do not regard 'the revolution' as a one off overthrow of the existing order and its immediate replacement by a libertarian society, but rather an on-going process, with no ultimate end point, but "multiple confrontations of oppressive power", where struggle takes place over "a variety of terrains and is carried out by the oppressed subjects themselves", with, hopefully, these, over time, consolidating into zones of relative freedom, federated together and expanding until such time as the agents of oppression have

been overcome.

Understandable then that few anarchist groups these days spell out what they actually have in mind when they use the term 'revolution'. (Not to forget that a group trying to spell out an anarchist 'Utopia' would be self-contradictory – as it would omit the self-activity of the agents of change who might have other ideas.)

The book also deals with forms of industrial, community, and other forms of struggle including a section on anarchist propaganda, including pranks, hoaxes and carnivals.

That then is a brief and incomplete summary of the book and there is much in here that most readers will find stimulating, or at least 'debatable'.

Franks has had access to a wide range of materials and I suspect many readers will find mention of periodicals and other texts that are unfamiliar – although whether these are still accessible is moot. By drawing on many such publications the author can give an indication of the differences that apparent on a wide range of subjects within contemporary anarchisms (the plural is necessary as it encompasses several forms of anarchism). However, it is difficult for outsiders to know just how much (or little) weight to give to any particular texts.

How far, for example, should one take the pronouncements of 'Proletarian Gob' or 'Decadent Action' seriously or as representative of a substantial element within British anarchism? (And a minor moan – whilst the list of periodicals is very useful, a better indication of the dates

and places of publication would not have gone amiss.)

More generally the fact that this text owes, in part, its existence, to the world of academia, means that the style may be off-putting to some readers.

There are, regrettably, only a few ways to say 'prefigurative', after a while it gets repetitious, and some may find the 'spell out what you're going to say, say it very and then summarise what you've just said' format to be too redolent of the university for comfort.

That said I found it an engrossing and stimulating read, and judging from various questions posted on libcom.org over the past few months, so have other readers. By spelling out exactly what anarchists have been saying and doing, it should provide many groups with the opportunity to reflect on their activities and their writings.

This is not to say that Franks makes any claims to have all the answers or that this book provides the blueprint for running a successful anarchist group. Indeed some may wish to take issue with aspects of his 'ideal' anarchism.

Generally though this is a text I could recommend both to anarchists and non-anarchists as an explication of where British anarchism stands and where it has come from. As ever, if you find the price a little steep, a visit to the local public or academic library should eventually provide you with a copy.

Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: the means and ends of contemporary British anarchisms*, published by AK Press/Dark Star, ISBN 1 9048594 0 2, £15/\$19.95.

A Sideways Look

As I write, Royal Mail has seen a series of one-day strikes by postal workers in support of a pay claim and against proposed cuts. The strikes have been remarkably solid and for many of the workers it is their first experience of industrial action. At the same time customers have been protesting about closures of Post Offices.

At the heart of both these disputes are the changes being forced through by the government and European Union. Postal services are no longer allowed to be state monopolies – some countries such as the Netherlands have already sold their post office off. It is being driven by big business, who want the cheaper prices brought about by private companies attacking workers' terms and conditions. For ordinary customers, or indeed small publishers like *Freedom*, prices have rocketed. Only large volume users like utilities, government departments and mail order companies can access the discounts offered by the various competitors to the Post Office. The changes are wanted by them, as a means of passing a higher proportion of the costs of postal services onto other customers, a process that the government has been happy to encourage.

Royal Mail is forced to 'compete' with the likes of TNT for all valuable business mail, but its competitors deliver their mail pre-sorted to local delivery offices for the postmen and women to deliver on the 'final mile'. The very well paid Post Office bosses are trying to use this process as a way of getting postal workers to accede to pay cuts and changes in working practices, which is why they have been on strike. The competitors are allowed to use the post office so that they don't need to go to the expense of setting up their own delivery services.

Local post offices are being closed because the government has decided that they should be profitable, rather than a public service. Already many sub post offices have closed and branch offices transferred into corner shops. Now the government want over 70 crown offices (main centre post offices) to transfer inside WH Smiths. They hope paying pensions and taking car tax would be a good substitute for the loss of DVD sales. Post office counter staff are hardly well-paid, but they earn more than an assistant at WH Smiths, and get a pension of sorts. In suburban Bexleyheath, in the suburbs of London, the overcrowded, busy post office is to close and move into the local WH Smiths. Smiths currently sells its DVDs upstairs, so there'll be a lift when the Post Office is set up there, but what will happen when it breaks down? A lot of the customers are elderly, or disabled; funny that, it being a public service used by people who often don't have access to banks!

It's not just suburban offices, either.

Many major cities like Newcastle and Southampton are affected, as well as major regional towns and even offices like the Charing Cross one in central London, where the only local WH Smiths is a tiny branch inside the railway station.

The services provided by the post office are not the first to be privatised in this way, but it's a bit mealy-mouthed of the Labour Party to talk about issues like access to banking and financial services for the poor when they are the ones undermining that access with yet more privatisation.

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Imagine if...

Gordon Brown looked over his figures for casinos, and tutted.

The august Scotsman, so long the son of puritan parents, struck through the idea with a steady hand.

"It is simply too much of a gamble to be taking with the moral fibre of this country" he groaned.

Around him, his advisers looked startled. Hailing from the world of business, they had no scruples at all about gambling, pensions, savings, workers' wages and jobs – one way or another they'd wagered pretty much everything it is possible to wager. Sure, sometimes everyone else lost, but the important thing was, they always won.

"Are you sure about this Gordon?" One of them queried. "I mean, gambling is a huge money-spinner, basically all you do is watch suckers walk in, give you their money and walk out."

Gordon grimaced. "Aye, but what about the human cost?"
Again, his advisers were flummoxed. For centuries now, a huge human cost had been willingly extracted by a succession of Prime Ministers and businessmen for the sake of the profits which kept them in luxury goods. Gordon himself had foisted any number of costs on the mass of people who could least afford them, driven down living standards for the majority and introduced them to poverty and its old associate, crime.

"You don't think there's a bit of inconsistency here Gordon?" One of his more forthright aides asked.

"No. Exploitation for profit is fine. Exactly the same exploitation prohibited by the bible is not."
Gordon snapped. "That's the problem with you atheists, no clear thinkers."



The quiz

1. What did Shirley Williams describe as "the last chance for Britain to find a democratic, moderate but radical alternative to revolution"?
2. According to Marco Mostert of Utrecht University, what change in fashion provided a boost to medieval literacy?
3. Who said "friends have told me that I have ruined my reputation by inventing a medical inhaler... I suppose I shall have to stand the disgrace which is said to wipe out all credit that I might have had for inventing killing machines"?
4. Who, while proud of the weapon he invented, said "I would prefer to have invented a machine that people could use and that would help farmers with their work – for example a lawnmower."

Answers on page 6

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UK inequality

page 1
with no regard for inequality or injustice. The task is to ensure any emerging political resistance becomes consciously anti-capitalist as people realize the wealth gap they are subject to is what capital thrives on and that they can successfully challenge its determined discrimination.
For UK poverty research see www.jrf.org.uk

Listings

until 29th July A-Camp 2007, an anarchist summer camp in Austria, for details see a-camp.info

4th August Glasgow's Radical Independent Bookfair project from 12 noon until 10pm at Kinning Park Complex, Cornwall Street, for more info see ribproject.org

10th to 13th August AR2007 International Animal Rights Gathering 2007 will be held at Appelscha in the northern Netherlands, near to a forest with camping, on the day before (9th), there will be an Animal Rights march through Amsterdam, focusing on fur and vivisection targets, see ar2007.info
11th August Worthing Anarchists Summer Gathering from 11am to 5pm, Camp Titnore, Durrington, followed by social.

14th to 21st August Camp for Climate Action – after the success of last year's at the Drax Power Station, this summer the camp will take place at a location near Heathrow Airport to highlight airport expansion and the role of the aviation industry in carbon emissions and climate change, for more info see climatecamp.org.uk

19th to 24th August No Borders Camp in the Gatwick area, a space to share information, skills, knowledge and experiences, and to plan actions together against border controls, for more email g-anbc2007@riseup.net or visit <http://noborders.org.uk>

27th to 30th August Smash EDO Summer Action Camp, direct action against the war machine, with workshops on effective campaigning, actions against EDO MBM and lots of fun together, call 07875708873 or see smashedo.org.uk

11th September Disarm Desi, a day of actions against the Defence Systems and Equipment International (DSEI), the arms sales expo held every other

year at East London's ExCel Centre, see dsei.org for more.

19th to 24th September Gatwick area No Borders Camp, a space to share information, skills, knowledge and experiences, and to plan actions together against the system of border controls, see <http://noborders.org.uk>

7th October South Place Ethical Society talk on Shelley and Freethought by James Herrick at 11am, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1, see ethicalsoc.org.uk

27th October Anarchist Bookfair 2007 at Queen Mary & Westfield College, Mile End Road, London E1, from 10am to 7pm, with books, speakers, workshops, meetings, films, creche, exhibitions, food, and so much more, see anarchistbookfair.org

3rd November 'Bash the Rich!' march on David Cameron's house in Notting Hill, London, see londonclasswar.org for details.

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