

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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PENSIONS? WHAT PENSIONS?

Major legal battles have been taking place regarding private pension funds and the protections being offered to workers.

A case brought to the European court by unions Amicus and Community has had a major boost after the European Commission came out in support of their campaign to prove the government has failed to implement a directive which could have saved the pensions of over 1,000 steelworkers.

The former ASW steel company in Cardiff and Sheerness was declared insolvent in 2002, leaving two funds in deficit. The funds, which should have been protected by a European law to protect workers' pensions when companies are no longer able to provide for the funds are not enough to cover members.

Ex-employees in Cardiff have been told that they will receive only 14% of their expected pension, many of them after paying for 30 years or more into the scheme. In addition, widows whose husbands have subsequently died when they were in their late 50s have received no financial support from the underfunded pensions schemes, whereas, if successive UK Governments had complied with Article 8 they would have received death in service benefits as well as a pension to live on.

The European Insolvency Directive stated in Article 8 that member states should have had a means to deal with such problems set up by 1983, but the directive was largely ignored by the then Conservative party, according to Amicus. Article 8 says: "Member States shall ensure that the necessary measures are taken to protect the interests of employees

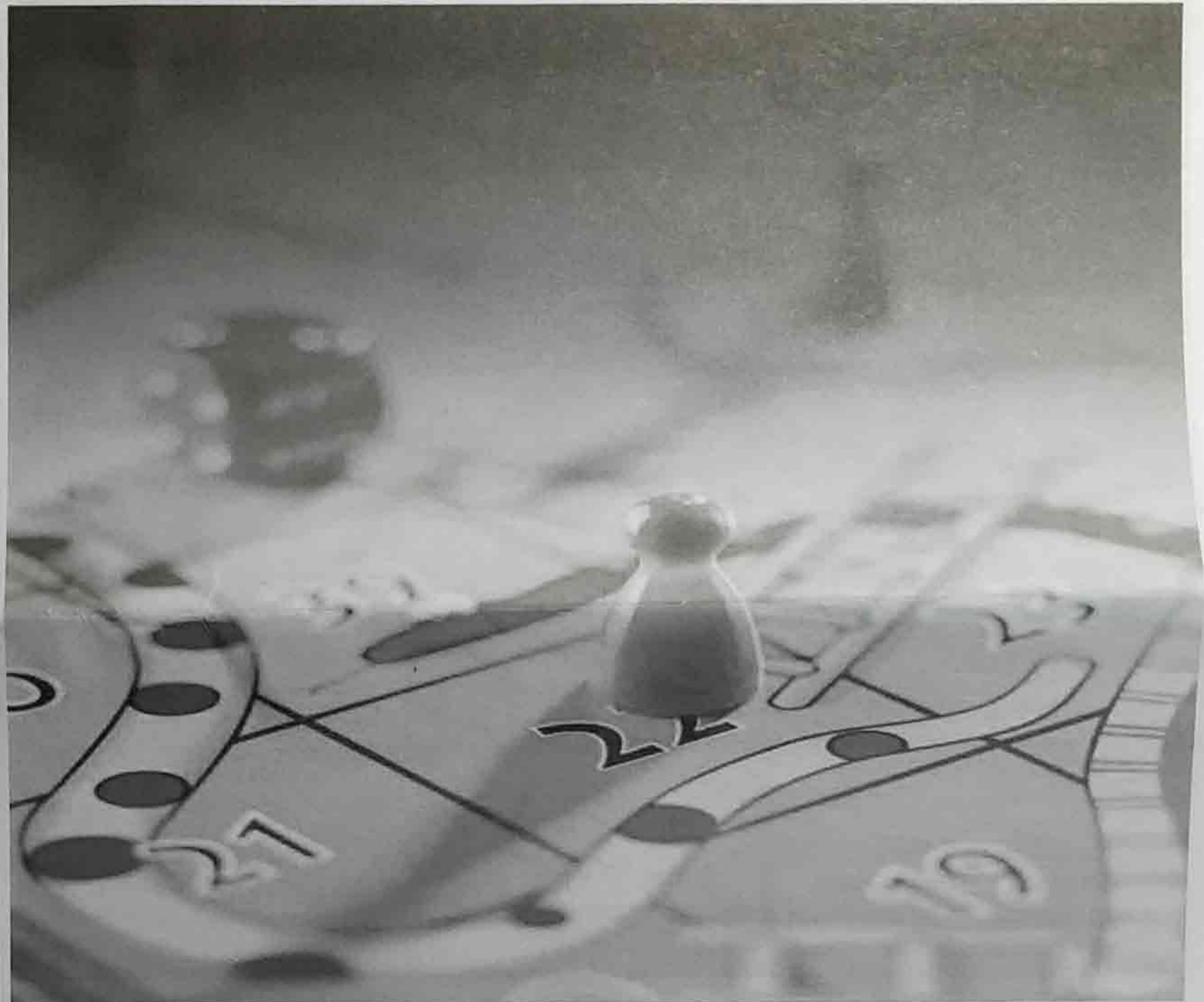
and of persons having already left the employer's undertaking or business at the date of the onset of the employer's insolvency in respect of rights conferring on them immediate or prospective entitlement to old-age benefits, including survivors' benefits, under supplementary company or inter-company pension schemes outside the national statutory social security schemes."

The Pension Protection Fund was subsequently set up in April last year in response to the collapse of ASW and widespread fears of a more widespread future collapse of the pensions system.

The fund however is not retroactive, and the government have said it cannot cover cases of corporate insolvency from before 2005. Under these rules the ASW collapse would not be covered, but the unions are confident that they can prove the government have violated EU law by not preparing a means to protect workers until now and are liable. Amicus have estimated that up to 65,000 workers across the country could be affected by this policy, with pension liabilities amounting to approximately £6bn should they win.

In a statement, the two unions said: "If the PPF does not comply with Article 8 then how can the UK be compliant before that when no effective protection was in place? We believe that Ministers in successive Governments throughout the 1980s and 1990s knew this but cynically hoped that they could get away with doing nothing. Now our members are paying the price. It is a scandal."

The Confederation of Business Interests (CBI) complained in early February that



the expansion of the government's Pension Protection Fund is 'unacceptable'.

Following new analysis of the pension deficit, the government had been advised to increase the size of the fund to £575m,

to take into account a greater likelihood that companies would be unable or unwilling to meet their pension requirements.

The fund, which acts as an insurance system for private pension schemes in

danger of going bust, was originally set up with a requirement that £300m should be raised annually from sections of the business community withholding private pension schemes.

GIS' A ROOF MATE

A major rally on 8th February saw representatives from around the country travel to London to lend their voices to the Defend Council Housing campaign. Over 1,300 people from 90 regions attended the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster.

West Midlands anarchists had launched a push for more anarchist groups to attend the Defend Council Housing rally, as part of a general increase in involvement. They were disappointed with the turnout.

A member of West Midlands anarchists said: "It needed better co-ordination really but we didn't get response from anyone, we sent out the callout three times. It was a good event and very well attended, but it's a shame more anarchists can't get involved nationally.

"We got a lot of people calling us Trots and Leninists for doing this, but we've got to be realistic. Once you've defended council houses and ensured there's decent housing for working class people you can then go further. We've recently put together a pamphlet on this called Defending Council Housing and beyond, which we'll be putting up on our website.

"We need to be managing our own housing stock, not necessarily co-operatives, but collective ownership of housing stock. Co-operatives alone tend to suggest small operations, particularly in Britain, and this has got to be a

major change. At the moment the government are only considering two options."

The process of defending council housing is an ongoing one, and has seen increasingly underhand tactics being used to force the measures through. Repeated votes have been used to break down community resistance even in no-vote areas, according to the group.

"In Birmingham they beat it three years ago, but now the council have put it back on the agenda. They're using new tactics like taking off the 'fourth option', and giving people who have bought their council homes the chance to vote as well. They've spent loads on DVDs and pamphlets, it's overkill," they added.

Votes on the attempt to move remaining council housing stock into

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EDUCATE, NOT MUTILATE

A refuge and educational centre for girls under threat of genital mutilation and forced marriage has been constructed in Narok, in Kenya. The Tasaru Girls' Rescue Centre is a safe house accommodating up to 40 people; it offers schooling in the harmful effects of such traditional practices, and provides positive alternatives to rites of passage that customarily incorporate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

It is pioneered by Agnes Pareiyo, a member of the community group Tasaru Ntomomok, (Safe Motherhood Initiative), who has campaigned on these issues tirelessly for over a decade – earning the title UN Kenya Person of the Year last October.

Outreach involves travelling to rural communities and utilising models of cut and uncut female genitals to show residents, who firmly believe in the necessity of FGM, that the operation

negatively impacts on a girls' health and her future.

Partial and total clitoridectomies are the most common forms of FGM in Kenya. Infibulation – excision of the clitoris and labia minora, with the remaining flesh sewn together leaving a tiny opening for the passage of urine and menses – is most widespread in the North of the continent.

Whilst FGM has been illegal in Kenya since 2001, enforcement by the state has been negligible, leading grassroots activists to initiate educational projects of their own in order to get rid of the practice.

The example set by these women proves that legislation against the custom doesn't automatically eliminate it, and that continuous grassroots action is needed. Indeed, law passed against genital cutting in Sudan in 1946, while the country was still under British

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Home and away

Diving for prize

The group which occupied the North Pool in Bristol last month have begun a further campaign dedicated to bringing the site under the control of the community, as a 'village hall' style space. It has approached councillors on the situation, who they say are sympathetic, and are in the process of consulting with residents nearby to see what sort of role the space should have.

Bristol North currently belongs to 'the people of Bristol' so could potentially be used to re-house a number of different community projects. Three options are currently on the table, including a re-development by the council, selling the building for private offices or flats, or letting a third party become involved.

Although there is no structure in place for the council to deal with community requests, Councillor Jim White, of Redland Ward in the city told the group that the building was in good shape and it was in the group's favour that they had a plan.

Cuts on climate

Following the government's signing of a document admitting the existence of climate change, it has been announced that four research centres involved in scientific investigations into global warming and pollution are to close.

Scientists gathered at the gates of Westminster to brief MPs on the likely impact of the cuts on 8th February. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology works on fields such as energy policy, climate change, GM crops, the ecological condition of rivers and declining fish stocks.

The labs which serve the CEH will close, and around one third of the 600-strong workforce will be fired at sites in Dorset, Cambridgeshire, Banbury in Scotland and Oxfordshire.

The labs, which would need £1.4m in funding to remain viable, will be closed at a cost of £45m.

Transport fought

Both the RMT and Aslef transport unions have gone on one-day strikes over a growing list of complaints about their treatment by London Underground.

Members backed action over issues that include policy on signals passed at danger ('Spads'), health and safety, bargaining arrangements, harassment, discipline, denial of representation rights and imposition of excessive punishments.

The dispute, which comes alongside continuing bad blood between private rail companies who have been attacking conditions and jobs for the workers, saw a six-to-one vote in favour of the joint action.

As we go to press, a separate ballot for strike action is also taking place among a further 5,000 RMT members on London Underground over the company's failure to resolve a wide range of issues.

Profitable losses

Abbey, the major banking chain, has announced thousands of job cuts as the company posts a massive rise in profits.

The newly-sold group has said that up to 2,000 jobs will go in a wide-ranging cut following cost-cutting studies carried out on behalf of parent company Banco Santander Central Hispano. The company has recently been under scrutiny over some of its business dealings.

Abbey have recently announced profits of £596m for this year, after taking a loss of £21m following a shock decision in 2004/5 to axe 4,000 jobs.

Gomez-Roldan, the new Abbey chief Executive said that between 1,000 and 2,000 jobs could go at the company over the course of the next year.

Around the world

EUROPE: Following the continuing repression against the trade union of the Greater Teheran United Bus Company (Serkate-Vahed), an international day of action was organised in numerous countries on 15th February with support from Global Unions and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF).

The Iranian union had called a strike at the end of January in protest at the detention of its leader, Mansour Osanloo, and in support of its negotiation of a collective agreement for the bus company. The action was harshly punished, with hundreds of trade unionists and their families being arrested, and some beaten.

Although many of the arrested trade unionists have been released, the repression has continued. The workers concerned have not been able to go back to their jobs and have to turn up at the Labour Ministry instead. As we write, it appears that over 80 trade unionists, including Mansour Osanloo and all the members of the executive, are still being held at Evin prison in Tehran.

FRANCE: 400,000 people demonstrated against the 'First Job Contract' (Contrat Premiere Embauché - CPE). In order to defeat this plan, which will represent a social setback, Alternative Libertaire is calling for the mobilisation to be extended.



The CPE is supposed to be an open-ended contract (i.e. with no expiry date), reserved for employees under the age of 26, with a trial period of two years. During this period the employer is allowed to fire an employee without justification or, during the first months, without notice and without the 10% 'precarity' bonus. In short, it means more exonerations from overheads for bosses over three years.

This contract is yet another measure of precarity for young people who are already victims of unemployment and poverty. But while it puts pressure on young employees, it also puts pressure on all employees by setting different age groups in competition with each other. It is one of the most regressive measures taken by the government, who understand this only too well and who have decided to accelerate the voting process on it, and may possibly even bring the law into force using Article 49.3.

NEW ZEALAND: McDonald's workers in Auckland, New Zealand have carried out a symbolic strike despite the threats by the company to sue individual workers if they took part in union action.

After the strike, the company retracted their threat issued to sue any of their workers who went off work for it.

The symbolic strike was in response to a number of Unite union members being rostered off by the company on 12th February, when it was agreed the workers would be paid to go to a union stop-work meeting at the Town Hall.

What was initially a meeting to discuss whether or not to take industrial action against McDonalds turned into a symbolic strike after workers who had been affected by the roster changes met and unanimously decided to take action.

A text message was sent out today encouraging people to rally outside the



Queen Street McDonalds' store and 100 people turned up to show their support for the employees, many of whom are on minimum wage.

SUDAN: On 11th February armed police and security forces arrived in 15 cars at Juba University (pictured above) in Bahri, Khartoum, at the request of university officials. Without warning, they began beating, with batons, a group of students who were gathered peacefully in front of the administration building.

During the ensuing scuffle, students set fire to five vehicles, burned three cafeterias, and part of the school library.

A large number of young men and women were arrested. Those who were not arrested fled into the surrounding areas of Bahri. Police followed and over the next few hours rounded up people they assumed to be students taking part in the protest and took them to Um Deriyo Station in North Bahri, Khartoum. The total number arrested was 200 (149 women and 51 men). After an appeal by a representative of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the young women were released without charges. Representatives of the UN mission in Sudan (UNMIS) are being denied access to all those detained.

According to a source for Amnesty International, the detainees have been taken at night to unofficial National Security detention sites known as 'ghost houses', where they have been tortured.

The detainees have reportedly also been deprived of food and denied access to legal counsel and their families.

USA: The CIA's top counter-terrorism official has been fired by the Bush administration. The reason? He opposed detaining al-Qaeda suspects in secret prisons abroad, sending them to other countries for interrogation and using torture.

As can be seen from Bush and Cheney's deep felt opposition to torture which included the latter writing to every congress person and senator reminding them that the US had to use torture and the former announcing that he would ignore the anti-torture legislation passed by fellow republican Senator McCain.

They promoted Alberto Gonzales (pictured below), a White House lawyer who advised them that the US Constitution, the Geneva Conventions, American anti-torture and ratified international treaties against torture did not apply to them. He was made US Attorney General and the head of the Department of Justice, a clear sign that not only is satire dead but also of the Bush administration's position on the abuse of prisoners.



Prison news

New prison abolition group established

Over sixty people from across Britain joined together in London on 28th January to establish a new organisation, No More Prison, determined to fight for the end of prisons. At the Prison Abolition Seminar held in Conway Hall, former prisoners, activists, health and prison workers and academics exchanged ideas and strategies to stop prison building, end child imprisonment and develop alternatives.

Opening the seminar, Professor Joe Sim argued the need for a new abolitionist movement in Britain which distinguished itself from the prison reform group movements that have become entangled with New Labour's law and order project. Sim argued that both the State and prison reformers are focusing on fixing rather than reinventing the penal system. He stressed how the rebranding of jails as places of reform and progress shrouded the reality that prisons remain instruments of pain delivery, and that the collateral damage to prisoners' families is consistently ignored. Sim called upon the seminar to challenge the notion of

New Labour's 'what works' policy and the discourse of the 'working prison' and to ask for debates about what doesn't work, why prisoners' rights and conditions continue to be eroded and why progressive regimes such as those at the Special Unit at HMP Barlinnie in Glasgow and Blantyre House in Kent have either been systematically dismantled or consistently attacked.

In the discussion that followed, John Moore facilitated moves towards establishing a new abolitionist movement in Britain, in which No More Prison planned for an innovative and productive strategy to end the prison estate. No More Prison will be an activist organisation open to all who oppose mass incarceration. More info from alternatives2prison.uk.com

More arrests of anarchists in Barcelona

The repression against anarchists in Barcelona continues. On 9th February, three comrades were arrested in raids by 'anti-terrorist' police. One was released without charge the following day but the other two, Ignasi and

Ruben, remain in prison accused of public disorder and several acts of sabotage, including arson attacks on a bank and on a company exploiting cheap prison labour. Demonstrations held in support of the imprisoned comrades have been attacked by the police and one outside Barcelona's Modelo prison, where they were being held, resulted in them being ghosted. Supporters are calling for urgent solidarity actions in support of Ignasi and Ruben. More info: coordinadora@riseup.net or see presosalacalle.tk

James Borek released

After spending more than two years locked-up for taking part in the 1999 J18 'Canival Against Capitalism', Jim Borek has been released. Jim, from New York, flew to the US to be met by friends and supporters keen to help him celebrate his release.

Palestinian prisoners threaten hunger strike

Palestinian women held in Israel's Telmond prison are threatening to go on hunger strike in protest at their

treatment. The women are often taken as hostages to pressure a male relative to hand themselves in, routinely tortured during 'interrogation' sessions, ill-treated and held in isolation. The 108 women, including a number of minors, are now being threatened with being transferred to Tel Aviv's notorious Ramle prison, in which case they say they will go on hunger strike.

Child abuse rife in British prisons

An independent investigation into the treatment of children in British prisons has found that pain was regularly used to crush 'dissent' and enforce 'compliance'. The investigation was set up following the death of a 15 year old boy who was being 'restrained' by three guards in a privately-run facility. 'Restraint' techniques are used thousands of times each year against children held in custody or so-called 'care', resulting in a child being injured in at least one in five incidents. As well as highlighting the use of 'unnecessarily painful restraint techniques', the investigation also focused on the excessive use of strip-searching against children aged from 10 to 17.

News

ID freely

Iain Mackay analyses the likely course of ID cards following this month's commons vote to impose the £12bn system

Hopes that Labour MPs would develop a backbone and reject the government's more insane plans were, unsurprisingly, squashed when they supported ID cards. In spite of previously admitting that ID cards would not have stopped the bombs in July, the spectre of terrorism was used by the government to pass the bill.

And why do we face an increased possibility of terrorism? Because of the imperialist policies of the government. So one stupid, failed, authoritarian policy is being used to introduce another. Is this what Blair meant by 'joined up' government?

Unless we act, we can look forward to yet another government IT farce with all the familiar features: profiteering by the private sector at the public's expense; inadequate and contradictory requirements semi-met by a technology arbitrarily picked to further political or career needs rather than for suitability to the project; late delivery combined with hugely inflated costs; continuous post-delivery rework; and a system which does not actually do the task it was required to do.

Rest assured, though, ID cards are 'voluntary'. However, once ID cards are introduced, we can expect them to be used in more and more areas of life, making it impossible not to have one. So 'voluntary' will become mandatory quite quickly. Now they are merely linked to passports. That means if you want to leave the country, you will need to get an ID card. Any society which claims to be free should be based on its members being able to move around freely and, if they wish, to leave it.

This was, at one time, considered a key difference between democracies and totalitarian states. However, being

unable to get the necessary documentation to leave the country without also submitting to having an identity card is fundamentally at odds with this. As is the idea that you need to inform the state when you move address.

The government is downplaying the amount of information the new ID cards will hold, but obviously they must hold more information than a passport contains otherwise there would be no point to them. Equally, they note that other European states have ID cards. However, they fail to mention two things. Firstly, these cards are not linked to a national database which stores the same kind of significant personal information Blair wants, nor are they biometric.

As such, they are not really comparable. Secondly, these cards were all imposed by fascist regimes and, consequently, their populations could not resist them when they were initially introduced. That, subsequently, people have got used to them is hardly a great defence for introducing them in the first place. People, unfortunately, often get used to many restrictions on their freedom.

Britain is not, yet, a totalitarian state, although New Labour is continuing the drift towards it started by Thatcher. It is no coincidence that ID cards were first proposed by the Tories (and opposed by Labour) in the 1990s.

That New Labour is foisting them on the public suggests that this is desired by the state bureaucracy. As such, it is about social control. It also, incidentally, confirms the anarchist analysis that while a party may be in office, they are not in power. Rather than change the system, the system will



Charles Clarke has his fingers scanned

change the politicians.

All is not lost, though. We can resist. As anarchists have always argued (and our representatives have just shown),

we cannot rely on others to defend our liberties. We need to look to ourselves and our own strength to resist those in power. As with the poll tax, we can use

direct action to resist ID cards and end them. Anarchists should be at the forefront in organising such a movement.

Diamond geezers

Metronet rail have had to terminate a three-year contract signed just four months ago after an investigation by the T&G union discovered that the awarded company had been ripping off its workforce.

Blue Diamond, which had a turnover of 35m last year, said prior to the awarding of the contract in October 2005: "We want people to be proud of working for Blue Diamond and wearing its name on their sleeve."

The company claimed at the time that they paid 20% over the going rate for contract cleaning as well as providing comprehensive training. However, a 2001 report by the University of London had found that Blue Diamond was, in that year, paying £4.10 an hour to employees (two-thirds of the living wage), with 20 days holiday a year.

The T&G found that Blue Diamond had been paying workers just £5.05 per hour, having agreed with to pay £5.50 on signing the contract, with higher rates for

night work, weekends and higher grades.

Workers on the District, Circle, Metropolitan, Hammersmith and City and East London lines have been affected by the pay dispute, which blew up in January after the union demanded action from Metronet.

The contract is though to be worth over £6m a year to Blue Diamond, and it the first time in two decades that a major contract has been terminated due to concerns over workers' rights.

It covered underground cleaning contracts for 92 stations across London, and directly employed around 400 cleaners. It is thought that around £150,000 had effectively been stolen by the company before the contract was cancelled.

A union spokeswoman has said it is difficult to calculate exactly how much damage was done however: "The workers were doing different shifts at different times and at different rates of pay so it is difficult to estimate exactly how much they have all lost."

Blue Diamond said it was 'disappointed' to lose the contract but it had intended to work towards the £5.50 minimum wage.

Jack Dromey, T&G Deputy General Secretary, said: "Blue Diamond robbed the cleaners, ripping thousands of pounds off hard-working men and women who serve Londoners 24 hours a day. Metronet have done the decent thing, acting promptly and properly to terminate Blue Diamond's contract. The T&G is determined to end the often shameful treatment of cleaners. In London many are migrant workers. This decision demonstrates that contractors who behave badly will no longer be employed by responsible client companies. Blue Diamond did the dirty on cleaners and is paying the price."

Metronet have said that the company's 'commercial strategy' aims to increase the basic wages of cleaners, and reduce the profits of cleaning companies by building in higher wages to contracts.

EDO no go a no-no

A legal case to decide whether under-fire arms manufacturer EDO MBM could take out an injunction limiting demonstrations against the company to pickets of ten or less people has ended in victory for the protesters.

EDO MBM, who manufacture parts for the Paveway bomb system and are involved in the manufacture of unmanned combat air vehicles, have come under high levels of scrutiny over tactics used throughout the case which the judge said were cause for 'grave concern', including intimidation and professional misconduct.

Ordered to seek mediation with the defendants, executives from the US parent company EDO Corp flew in to broker a deal. The first thing to go was the definition of protester, meaning legal restrictions on demos at the factory no longer apply to anyone but those named.

Next the company agreed that if the seven legal-aid defendants agreed not to assault EDO employees then they would

drop the proceedings against them. As legal aid would have been withdrawn anyway if they refused, they accepted, leaving EDO with a bill for £200,000. Other defendants have pledged to continue in open court.

A spokesman for protest group Smash EDO said: "The collapse of the injunction is a major victory for civil rights and the peace movement. We will now be fully able to express our disgust at the presence of a bomb manufacturer in the middle of our community."

In March 2005 EDO applied for an injunction under the Protection from Harassment Act which would have limited the regular pickets of the factory to ten silent protesters on a Thursday afternoon.

The injunction, by its definition of 'protester', initially applied to everyone on the planet. Although the judge refused to impose limits on numbers it confined protesters to a narrow grass verge opposite the factory.

Left bereft in the south?

An adapted Schnews article examines the tide of red supposedly engulfing South American politics

Increasingly some of the 'new left' leaders have been showing their true colours: a love for power, money and a tendency to shaft the more radical groups they relied on to win office in the first place.

At the same time though, the upsurge in support for left wing presidents has created a demilitarised space for some community groups to come together to tackle the common misery which affects the lives of half the continent's population: poverty.

Despite calling 'Que se vayan todos!' (All must go!) to a string of corrupt presidents during the country's economic collapse in 2001, a minority of Argentines did subsequently back Nestor Kirchner for President. Coming from the traditional Peronist faction of Argentinean politics, Kirchner might have refused to bow to all of the International Monetary Fund's demands, but he's still paying off the country's colossal debt.

He successfully managed to co-opt some of the more 'moderate' social movements during his election campaign and now he's clamping down on anti-authoritarian movements such as the piqueteros (unemployed picketers) and workers involved in the occupied factories movement.

With his clampdown on the occupied factories he has shown that his sympathies lie with the corporations which continue to line his government's pockets.

Bolivia, the second poorest country in South America, has recklessly gone and elected a coca farmer and indigenous man, Evo Morales, for President. He's

just announced plans to nationalise the country's gas reserves and redistribute land to poor farmers.

Worse still is the support the Bolivian government is giving to the growing of the traditional coca plant, despite the US government's £80m crop eradication plan. La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, lies at 4,000m above sea level and Coca is given to relieve altitude sickness to new arrivals, just as it is chewed by long distance lorry drivers and even coppers on night shifts. This is not about adding kerosene and sulphuric acid to the coca leaf and making cocaine for export.

Morales has been careful to keep the middle class on board, by tempering the demands of many of his supporting groups. But now he's in power a number of these movements are threatening that if he adopts a more moderate line, they'll organise the type of protests and strikes which ousted two presidents in two years.

The use of social movements for political gain has not gone unnoticed in Venezuela, which was host to last month's Americas Social Forum. The leftie shindig was heavily sponsored by the Venezuelan government and worked neatly as an introduction to the re-election campaign of President Hugo Chavez.

Meanwhile, Chavez always found himself flanked by supporters with a few western ideological groupies in tow. And it's easy to see why. In a country with massive literacy and health promotion programmes which permeate the shanty towns around Caracas and other major cities, people are better off. A positive note for those who possess



HARD SHELL: Protesters cordon off a petrol station in protest at the company's ongoing environmental damage and disregard for civil rights. The demonstration in Islington came ahead of the re-opening of the Rosspoint protest camp in Ireland.

Rosspoint came to the world's attention when the company attempted to build a major pipeline through greenbelt land, against the wishes of the local community. Five local farmers were arrested, and later released, for refusing to vacate their land for the company.

a healthy suspicion of government is the space that has been created for more inspired grass roots action. Despite continuing corruption and the obvious self-interest of politicians, the military are not on the streets as previously.

The regional co-operative movement has never been so strong – occupied factories are breaking production records and essentials like gas, water and electricity are being brought back under public control. But whether by force or covert action, White House Inc. is not

going to sit back and watch its profits dry up. The real question is whether grass roots organisations can take advantage of the current breathing space and become a real force to be reckoned with.

For the full article go to www.schnews.org.uk

Just how tea used to be

Assam and Darjeeling tea estate lock-outs have led to malnutrition and starvation deaths in India this month. The Roopacherra tea estate, or garden, in South Assam has been under lockout for nearly a month after executives abandoned it, leading to the death of a three-year-old girl, Shivani Kalindi, and two workers, Yogendra Kalindi, 22, and Manorama Dev, 60, according to the workers' council.

Shivani had been taken to the garden's hospital on Tuesday evening, but no doctor was available. "Even electricity to the healthcare centre had been cut off," a union member said.

After the death of the girl, workers defied the lockout and began picking and selling leaf to other factories for their survival. The Katlicherra police have registered a case against the "absconding" tea executives and a fact-finding team has been set up to look into the deaths by the Hailakandi administration. Some food was given by the local administration after a

hunger strike by a large group of women workers.

Dilip Singh, president of the garden panchayat, claimed that the out-of-work labour force was scavenging for roots and tubers of plants in the absence of food, as most women and children in the labour colony were suffering from malnutrition related ailments. "We are afraid workers may consume something poisonous without knowing it," he said.

Singh added that the workers' patience was wearing thin and warned of a bigger crisis if the estate management did not change its attitude. Roopacherra tea estate has a 1,400-strong workforce, who have been paid no wages since a lockout was declared on 19th January. The reason cited by the management for the lockout was "flagrant violation of instructions relating to attendance".

Also in early February, a strike was called by workers in Calcutta over more closed tea gardens in the Dooars and Darjeeling.

A spokesman from the Intuc union told a press conference: "Enough is enough. We as trade union leaders cannot be silent spectators when the ruling Marxists are giving false promises of opening the closed tea gardens in north Bengal."

He said families of over 30,000 permanent workers of 17 closed tea gardens are "almost starving". The 2,295 workers of Dalsinghpara tea estate were left in the lurch when the management fled the garden on 9th February, the third garden to be abandoned that day.

Entrepreneur Gopi Nath Das ordered his managerial staff to leave the Dalsinghpara estate. It was pay-day and Rs 8.56 lakh was required to clear the wages. Workers alleged that eight managerial staff members, who told them that they were short by Rs 90,000, left the garden one by one on the pretext of getting the deficit amount from the bank.

Edited from an article by libcom.org

Butchers of Nepal

International organisations have condemned the murders of union and pro-democracy activists in Nepal on the orders of members of the ruling junta. Members of the government's armed forces opened fire on Nepali Congress (Morang District) President Amrit Aryal, town president Kamaksha Parajuli, and political activists Umesh Thapa and Hurrilal Rana on 8th February during municipal polling. Another pro-democracy campaigner was also seriously injured on the same day.

The killings have been followed by concerted efforts to hide the evidence, according to local activists. Nepal has been in a state of semi-civil war since February last year when 'King' Gyanendra seized power in a violent coup d'etat.

The dictator, who has subsequently cracked down on journalists, unionists and social activists using both official and unofficial violence, has been largely ignored by the international community despite widespread evidence of human rights violations including the systemic

torture and murder of political opponents.

Around a thousand activists from all over the country were rounded up as part of a drive to crack a Maoist and pro-democratic insurgency last year. The leftist opposition continues to receive widespread support from the general public, nearly half of whom live below the poverty line.

The self-proclaimed monarch has subsequently issued an official request to opposition groups to restart the "stalled democratic process, in the greater interest of the nation". His call follows a march attended by 3,000 people in the capital, Kathmandu, which saw the largely Maoist crowd calling for an end to his regime.

Rebels have called for a general strike from the 3rd April, which they said would be preceded by blockades on the country's major roads from mid-March.

"The regime is counting its final days," said a rebel statement. "The time has come to make the final strike on the regime that has been isolated and defamed."

Feature

The land is ours

Ellen Kemp reports that 'progress' has not led to the redistribution of land or wealth

Land ownership is not an issue that the Left discusses very much at all. The Parliament of England and Scotland have given ramblers a limited right to roam across open countryside. The fact of increased home ownership has seen the wealth of the middle classes appreciate enormously in recent decades. Since 1979 home ownership has increased from 57% to 70%. This state of affairs is contingent on the amount of land available for house building. The state's planning laws means that land for housing is sold at over-inflated prices by the land-owning classes. For those at the bottom of the social scale even being able to rent or buy a small home is becoming increasingly difficult. As one campaigning organisation (thelandisours.org.uk) states, everyone should have the right to a home, the right to roam, and the right to enjoy the resources of the land.

The growth of home ownership should not however detract from an enquiry into who really owns land. The land-owning class in the UK is hugely wealthy, secretive, and wants to deny you and I access to and use of the land that they own.

On 10th January Peter Snow and his son Dan in a BBC programme called *Whose Britain is it anyway?* sought to unravel the mysteries of land ownership in the UK. The programme was largely based on exhaustive research by Ken Cabill whose book *Who Owns Britain* was published in 2001.

Some facts and figures

The largest institutional landowners are the Forestry Commission with 2.4 million acres, then the Ministry of Defence with 750,000 acres followed by the National Trust with 550,000 acres. The Church of England only owns 135,000 acres, down from over 1.5 million acres in the 1870s. It seems likely that parish vicars took advantage of their control of local church land and sold off vast tracts for personal gain.

The Crown Estate owns nearly 400,000 acres, and is worth over £5bn, with profits in the region of £180m per annum. This body owns land 'in the right of the crown' and pays its profits into the coffers of the exchequer, which in return repays some of the income to the Monarchy for its annual expenses, that is the Civil List.

In theory the monarchy could claim back the Crown Estate for its personal use at any time. The Prince of Wales has an institutional estate, the Duchy of Cornwall, of 141,000 acres; this includes freehold on much of the Kennington area of London worth an estimated £500m. The Queen is also the Duke of Lancaster and the size of this estate is estimated to be 50,000 acres. Finally the Queen has private lands of another

75,000 acres, which includes the Balmoral estate in Scotland. Remember that until very recently the Windsors paid no tax on income from their lands.

The largest private landowner is the Duke of Buccleach with 270,000 acres; and the wealthiest is the Duke of Westminster with 140,000 acres in the UK, 400,000 abroad, but most importantly 300 acres of the richest real estate in the world in central London. In the 1870s his predecessor the Marquis of Westminster, who was one of the wealthiest persons in England, held only 20,000 acres.

Impressed by his wealth Queen Victoria made him a Duke. The family can trace its roots back to a Norman invader Hugh de Gras Veneur who seized land in Cheshire after 1066. The argument of Gerard Winstanley concerning the tyranny of the 'Norman Yoake' and their control of the land still rings true!

There are in the UK over 40,000 people who own land worth at least £1m. Who many of these people are and how they acquired their land is a mystery. Most figures concerning private land ownership are only estimates because 50% of the land in the UK is not registered. The Land Registry only registers land when it is sold. Those who have held estates for generations are under no obligation to tell anyone about their holdings. How did this state of affairs come about?

Some history

The Norman conquest of England in 1066 saw all land taken under the ownership of the monarchy. To this day the monarchy, in theory at least, owns all the land. The Normans changed the ownership of land with the King giving land as tribute to Norman lords and barons and depriving the Saxons.

The Domesday book was the first audit of land. And the resulting system of feudalism exacted free labour, goods and produce and free military service to the land-owning classes for the rest of the middle ages.

The Diggers sought to challenge the 'Norman Yoake' and return the land to common people. As one Diggers pamphlet proclaimed: "Seeing that the common people of England by joint consent of person and purse have caste out Charles our Norman oppressor, we have by this victory recovered ourselves from under this Norman yoake and the land is to be held no longer from the use of them [the commoners]." Their attempts to build communal farms were persecuted by local landowners and the Diggers were dispersed. The Diggers obtained nothing from the new Republic which eagerly sold off Church and Royalist land – the spoils of war – to its own loyal aristocrats. The redistribution of land was so enormous that Charles II under the Restoration could not undo



The mass trespass at Kinder Scout in the Peak District on 24th April 1932

the redefined status quo.

In the 1870s a political argument took place on the question of land ownership between the radical liberal John Bright and the conservative aristocrat Lord Derby. Bright had argued that very few – about 150 aristocrats – owned half of England and that this group used the Corn Laws to stop the importation of cheaper corn. For Bright this amounted to a subsidy to this class. Lord Derby, himself a very large landowner, claimed that land ownership was much more widespread and consequently Bright was wrong. The result was an enquiry into land ownership. In 1872 the British Government published *The Return of the Owners of Land*, which is only the second audit of land to have taken place in British history, the other being the Domesday book in 1086. After two years of gathering all the information the returns found that a million people owned freeholds, about 5% of the population. The ten leading Dukes in the Kingdom owned over 100,000 acres each with the Duke of Sutherland owning 1,350,000 acres. The Duke of Northumberland owned 186,000 acres then and still owns 132,000 acres. Both sides claimed victory, and the land-owning class realised that they had given up too much information about their assets and wealth.

Since 1872 there has not been an audit of the land and the state effectively screen landowners from any enquiry into their activities, and their colossal wealth. The Royal Commission into the wealth of Britain set up by the Labour government just before Thatcher hoped to examine land ownership but found a

paucity of information on the question. Thatcher abolished the commission on coming to power. None of the major political parties in the UK has any policy to redistribute land, with one exception: the Green Party. This situation is indicative of the cosy relationship that those whose arses grace the seats in the Palaces of Westminster have with the land-owning elite. On the other hand the Green Party believes that: "Land, the primary source of all real wealth, is the common heritage. We acknowledge that land is held in trust by human society on behalf of other species and future generations, and that land should not be treated as a capital investment nor traded for speculative profit." One only hopes that Jonathan Porritt CBE; Charles Windsor's environmental advisor inculcates this advice into the prince's ear!

Wealth, land and power

Lord Derby declared in 1881: "The object which men aim at when they become possessed of land in the British Isles may, I think, be enumerated as follows. One, political influence; two, social importance, founded in territorial possession, the most visible and unmistakable form of wealth; three, power exercised over tenantry; the pleasure of managing, directing and improving the estate itself; four, residential enjoyment, including what is called sport; five, the money return – the rent."

Derby's point of view concerning land was not only indicative of the time, but certainly abounds amongst landowners today. The Land Reform Act (Scotland) of 2003 that gives Scots the right to roam and also the right for communities

to purchase land that would benefit them. It caused strong reactions from the land-owning elite, with one of them commenting that "the only countries in the world left with this kind of thing are North Korea and Cuba".

Over the centuries the land-owning class has created vast wealth for itself from its holdings. This wealth has been derived from agriculture, forestry, rents, mining and hunting and sport, and since the latter part of twentieth century, tourism.

They have always pursued their profitable goals against the common interest and at the expense of ordinary people. The Highland Clearances led to the displacement of 500,000 Highland peasants and crofters in the early part of the nineteenth century and being replaced by sheep.

Crofters were denied rights to seaweed, or access to summer pasture for their animals. Enclosure of England's commons and wasteland that began at the time of the Diggers was to last into middle of nineteenth century. Enclosure occurred at a greater rate in those counties where profits were larger, in particular for produce demanded for the ever-expanding urban industrial areas.

Similarly today it is advantageous to grow for profit. In this case not what can be sold, but what is subsidised. Research by Oxfam estimates that the seven largest growers of cereals receive nearly £900 a day in subsidy. This includes the good old Duke of Westminster. In 2005 figures for the distribution of subsidies were published for the first time, the Duke received

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 67 Number 4

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

Due to unforeseen circumstances (which included the total breakdown of one of the editors' computers and another confronted with a big week of extra-Freedom activities), this is a bit of a holder issue. As such you may notice that some of the content has been half-inched from various other publications and sites and either mildly rewritten or cut to fit. This was basically unavoidable.

This combines, of course, with the likelihood that the paper is going to be late again, because we don't have enough reliable people to help with it.

You may be getting a picture here. We're not (with honorable exceptions such as Iain Mackay, Mark Barnsley, Tom Jennings and Svartfrosk) getting through reliable new content we can use, or distribution volunteers we can rely on.

So again, with feeling, we would like to ask that you write. You can write about whatever is going on in your town, whatever issue you think might have been missed. The email and postal addresses are printed below. And we would also ask you to please help with distribution. Call in to the shop any afternoon you can, and there will almost always be something that needs doing, from stamping to envelope stuffing (or even, should you be inclined, looking after the shop).

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 11th March 2006 and the last day to get copy to us (see contact details above) will be Friday 3rd March.

A friend of democracy?

The Bush Junta's proclaimed aim is to spread democracy across the world. It argues that it has learned the hard lesson that the previous US elite's policy of supporting (when not introducing) dictatorships which defend its interests. No longer, it said, would America support repressive regimes just because they were allies.

And boy did we laugh! As Bush spoke those words, the US maintained close relationships to numerous authoritarian regimes across the globe. At best, a few mild words of criticism were raised when certain excesses appeared on the world's media, but the US state continued its long standing policies of appeasing dictatorships when required.

Yet the problem for the US is that genuine democracy often results in unpleasant surprises. Bush, along with other world leaders, was suitably shocked and outraged that Hamas won the Palestinian elections.

The words irony and hypocrisy do not do justice to the sight of Bush and Blair, invaders of Iraq, stating they would not talk to Hamas unless it renounced violence. That Hamas is attacked over violence while Israeli state terrorism is never called what it is goes without saying. The violence of Hamas is decried as terrorist while that of the Israeli army is portrayed as self defence (and war criminals like Sharon celebrated as men of peace). Perhaps Hamas will say they will renounce it the moment the US, UK and Israel do so?

As it stands, Bush's espoused aim of his foreign policy has produced yet another blow. As in Iraq, democratic elections have produced an Islamic government at odds with the US and its plans. So while Bush pushes for elections as a cover for his imperialism, he is blind to the dangers of religious populism in the Middle East.

Not only that, he continually undermines any moderate and secular forces in the region by acting domineeringly himself or by allowing US client regimes to do so (particularly Israel). As a result, the influence of fundamentalist parties has increased, as has terrorism.

Perhaps the Bush Junta now appreciates why the US has always preferred to pick its own leaders or deal with autocrats when enforcing its imperial aims. It saves them the hassle of having to ensure that the elected government is

limited in what it can do and follows US advice (in Iraq, US achieved this by imposing a system of super-majorities). Its reaction to the Hamas victory shows, yet again, to what degree they support democratic values. Democracy is accepted only when it coincides with their views and interests.

Unsurprisingly, given the history of US foreign policy, Hamas is now accusing the US and Israel of refusing to accept the result of a democratic election. According to the *New York Times*, the two states are apparently discussing means to destabilise and bring down the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority by blocking its funding. The aim is to ensure that Hamas cabinet ministers fail and new elections are called.

As with Chile under Allende and a host of other countries, the US is simply rejecting the democracy it pays lip service to in order to collectively punish people who vote the wrong way. While the rhetoric may change, the policies do not.

Iain Mackay

Money business

Whilst the government is seeking to reduce the financial burden caused by those claiming incapacity benefit, and encouraging everyone to work until they drop to remove the need for pensions, the Corporations are fighting to preserve their 'creative' accounting practices to maintain their profitability.

The CBI is insisting not only that the business tax burden be reduced, but that anti-avoidance taxation measures be abandoned. They claim that these proposed actions are a 'covert means of extending the tax base whilst circumventing previously accepted tax principle and practice.' Similarly they oppose windfall taxes.

Company tax avoidance practices result in a considerable reduction in expected taxation income. This reduction is, on average, nearly 6% (and rising) less corporation tax paid by the UK's top 50 companies than is expected. For the year 2004/5 this amounted to £4.6 billion lost tax revenue, and £20 billion in the last 5 years. When extrapolated to the rest of the UK's companies the tax loss could be as much as £9.2 billion per year.

There are a number of reasons for this expected, but unpaid tax. These include misleading declared tax liabilities, information hidden in the accounts in a manner to prevent interpretation, and deferred tax.

Deferred tax accounts for a large proportion of the missing tax, and has risen by £3 billion a year since 2002. It now stands at £36 billion for the top companies. The tax breaks which have allowed this £36 billion tax subsidy to business are the result of corporate tax allowances given to encourage capital investment. However, they are interest free, and have no specified repayment date. In fact deferred taxation provisions can be used whether or not there is any possibility of the amounts owed being repaid.

The European corporate world is intent on presenting a vision of capitalism with conscience, and have introduced CSR (corporate social responsibility) for its finance sector. The European economy is the second largest in the world with a GDP (gross domestic product) of \$8.2 trillion, and therefore has great clout. This voluntary CSR effort has been merely a smokescreen. The finance sector is devoid of any real level of social responsibility; it is unscrupulous, corrupt and unwilling to tackle such issues as climate change, poverty, human rights and sustainable development.

The finance sector:

- Provides havens for the wealthy minority who siphon off cash at the expense of developing countries;
- Places economic benefits above the risks of climate change;
- Provides loans to repressive regimes which fuel bribery and corruption;
- Provides high interest loans to those least able to repay, thus perpetuating poverty whilst reaping record profits;
- Finances projects that threaten human rights; and does not fully assess the environmental impact of the projects it funds.

Additionally competition in developing countries for investment can lead to the lowering of standards.

And so the business world continues its profit quest at will, with little heed for any other consequence. Governments are unable and/or unwilling to exercise any control, and the self-regulation of greed is just a joke.

I.M.

The land is ours

page 5

£799,000 over two years. The highest payout was to a Sir Richard Sutton who received £2.2m. Some small farmers received only £25 and one received 31p! The elite only pay council tax on their houses, as everyone has to do, but nothing on the vast assets they own.

The large landowners who own the estates where hunting and shooting are a major source of revenue have always been keen to keep the public out. The laws of trespass and the use of a private police force – the gamekeepers – have tried to stop people from using land, walking across land and using products from the land.

There were battles between gamekeepers and rambles in the Peak District in the 1930s. At times of economic misery in the countryside in the nineteenth century poachers and gamekeepers were locked into a war. Many poachers who were caught were exported to Australia never to return.

The control of land needs to be wrestled away from the land-owning elite and land made available for houses, to resurrect the environment and to enable access for all. The principles of Winstanley and the Diggers still hold

true today: "Therefore we require and resolve to take both the common lands and the common woods to be a livelihood for us, and look upon you as equal with us, not above us, knowing very well that England, the land or our nativity, is to be common treasury of livelihood to all, without respects of persons."

Gis' a roof

page 1

private or arm's length ownership (ALMO) and off the public books have been restricted to local polling of council tenants, and have given councils large financial incentives to push or stock transfer.

Gemma, from Ipswich, also attended the rally. She said: "It was a big hall but it was packed, with people queuing through the doors. The speakers were calling for a fourth option for housing – which would be direct investment for council housing rather than being blackmailed into accepting stock transfer to access the extra government funds.

"They said at the rally that there is an enquiry going on because the government treasury is looking to reduce funding for ALMOs anyway, so even the blackmail is getting cut."

Educate, not mutilate

page 1

colonial rule, caused a considerable backlash.

Although taboos on the subject and a lack of initiative by governments have made statistics scarce, it is thought that 130 million women worldwide are affected by FGM, with 2 million girls at risk every year.

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Quiz answers

1. It was the scientific name given to the Loch Ness Monster by scientist Sir Peter Scott in the '70s. It is surely no coincidence that it is an anagram of 'Monster hoax by Sir Peter S'.
2. London. Just the thing for popping down to the shops, don't you know. And those roads are terrible!
3. Various US politicians in Congress authorised staff to edit entries in the online, anyone-can-contribute encyclopedia Wikipedia.
4. Al Lewis, who played Grandpa Munster, came from a working class Jewish background in Brooklyn. He had worked on defence for Sacco and Vanzetti, later standing for the Green Party in 1988.

HISTORY OF THE MAKHNOVIST MOVEMENT

1918-1921

by PETER ARSHINOV

The Russian Revolution was the time when the old order was totally swept away. Nestor Makhno stood for freedom, and his struggle to destroy both the old and the new oppressors is as powerful today as it was then. It was in prison in 1911 that Peter Arshinov established a close personal and political friendship with Makhno, which continued after their release, and Arshinov's history of the Makhnovists is undoubtedly the most important source work available.

Now available at £9.90 (post free inland) from Freedom Press

REVIEW

The Future of Media may be reformist, but it is nevertheless a definite must-have for hacks, finds Rob Ray

Fundamentally *The Future of Media* is a reformist book. Though incorporating a number of different writers, some more radical than others, it clings throughout to the notion of fluffy capitalism as a viable alternative to the present state. This narrow line, drawn seemingly in an attempt to give the book a broad appeal, is intensely frustrating – particularly as it is written in a dense format that a wider public is unlikely to engage with.

Written by and for a US audience, it also has problems in fulfilling its apparent aim of arming the reader with enough knowledge to pressure for change when transferring to the UK.

Nevertheless it is a highly useful work, painstakingly covering an enormous amount of ground through the eyes of people with a powerful understanding of how the media operates.

The book divides into five sections. Part One: The Threat to a Free Press, is almost certainly the least useful (though possibly of interest to media students), providing a roundup of media regulation in the US which has little impact on our versions here. *The insights that can be drawn from part one are perhaps in the field of future battles, as Blair and co. attempt to follow in Washington's footsteps.*

Similarly Part Two: Systemic Marginalization is highly US-centric, but is of more use in its analysis of how resistance to capital dominance of culture takes place on the local scale, aided and abetted by communities tired of hearing the same old crap from centralised, homogenised outlets.

Contributor Mark Lloyd has a strong analysis of racism, still endemic in the US media, though his solution of more 'minority ownership' fails utterly to understand the nature of the beast being fought.

While it is true that there is little minority ownership of media, with the argument being that only a tiny minority of radio stations are directly owned/run by non-whites, the situation would be

reversed tomorrow if the next CEO of Time-Warner were from a minority background.

The problem as Lloyd sees it is of a glass ceiling for blacks trying to get to the top, rather than the fact that a few top dogs are making decisions which reinforce the endemic poverty of non-white communities, and militate against self-expression within those communities.

Of more import was the statistic that barely 5% of jobs in a television news-gathering capacity went to non-whites (for comparison, the total working force in television was 20% non-white, down from 24% four years earlier). It is a damning statistic, but the proposed solutions are inadequate, calling for a future 'equal' sharing of power between corporation and citizen which Lloyd himself admits would be impossible through normal channels.

The section is largely saved by contributors Malkia A. Cyril and Barbara Gonzalez, whose recounted experiences of grassroots organising are inspiring and full of good advice in promoting alternatives/pressuring existing outlets to get a voice for the marginalised in society, regardless of who's in charge at Time-Warner.

Part Three: Media Regulation in the Public Interest, is largely of academic value to anarchists, but hugely useful in its findings on the ways in which the major US conglomerates have resisted all attempts to open up their monopolies.

The methods used are complex and thorough, and all credit should go to the investigators who reveal through the course of their work a catalogue of corruption and lobbying despite the best efforts at obfuscation of both parliament and media.

In both cases, clear examples and strong research build up a picture of how and why the media is monopolising, undermining and legislating against all competition.

Particularly in the field of broadcast media – radio, television and increasingly online – the book explains in vivid



detail the massive and continuing rip-off being perpetrated against the (American, in this case) people.

I disagree with the solutions proposed in this section of the book. As a hack, I see no way in which the commercial media can be made accountable through purely legislative pressure, and certainly no way in which it can be made to serve the people. The lines of mutual support between capitalists, politicians and the media are too strong for such an approach.*

It should always be remembered that Labour specifically pledged way back in the '90s to curb the Murdoch press, but conveniently forgot when it became apparent it would be 'The Sun wot won it' come election time.

I was therefore delighted to find, towards the end of the book, a series of alternatives in the field of online media.

In Part Four: Towards a New Media Age, there is a shift in focus to online, and particularly wireless broadband and its vast potential for providing

cheap, high-speed open access for all.

This is by far the most useful section of the book. Coming to it as a layperson, it was the first explanation of how the 'digital revolution' actually works that I've read that has been understandable and largely jargon free.

Not only does the section explain, it informs on some of the most recent goings-on in the arena, and proposes concrete alternatives to a burgeoning corporate dominance of the sector in initiatives such as the Champagne-Urbana wireless project in Illinois (regular readers may have noticed this mentioned on the front page of the early February edition of Freedom).

Section five is useful mainly in finding out what is about to hit in terms of international regulations – not pleasant reading, on the whole, and the organisation of the Left's legal eagles on the issue seems pitiful. The likelihood is that intellectual property laws, backed by bilateral and multilateral agreements emanating from America, will enable

companies to legally steal our cultural heritage where they previously had to do so by stealth or buyout.

As a journalist, I have little hesitation in telling you to read this. For all its faults in finding solutions to the problems of monopoly media and the stifling of alternative thought, the book is an outstanding bible of how the media does what it does and gets away with it, and many of the (non-legislative) alternatives offered show a degree of thought and originality that should, perhaps must, be repeated over here.

* For the mainstream press at least – my ability to say what I want about the government/religion/big business has been severely curtailed in recent years in the name of stopping terrorists who want to curtail my freedoms.

The Future Of Media: resistance and reform in the 21st century edited by Robert McChesney, Russell Newman and Ben Scott, Seven Stories Press, £12.99.

BOOKS

Alternative and Activist Media

by Mitzi Waltz
Edinburgh University Press, £14.99

In an age when communication is dominated by giant international corporations exercising an "all-pervasive mass-media monopoly", Mitzi Waltz examines the ways in which alternative and activist media have opened "cracks in the mass-media monolith through which strange flowers grow."

Although published by an academic press, and intended for use on journalism, sociology and media studies courses, her book is written in a lively and accessible style (apart from the occasional sprinkling of terms like 'counter-hegemonic') that makes it a useful tool for community-based activists.

The first chapter looks at the reasons for the existence of alternative and activist media, and the part they play. Chapter two provides a short history touching on earlier forms of media monopoly, and the role played by technological change in opening up opportunities for alternatives to develop. Chapter three examines the ways in which mass media are consumed, and there are five chapters that focus on the different formats favoured by alternative and activist media, including radio, video, film, print and digital media.

Many of the examples of activist media in action are inspiring, such as the precise summary of the way in which the Undercurrents video collective started and has continued to grow, in spite of having thousands of pounds worth of video equipment smashed by

the police in Genoa. Particularly useful features of this chapter are the details of free online courses, and an emphasis on the importance of effective distribution.

Waltz provides an interesting account of activist cyberculture, and its successes, such as the creation of the non-hierarchical computer networks that enabled activists to expose the dangers of the Chernobyl melt-down. There are also examples of the pitfalls encountered by successful ventures, such as the online alternative community De Digital Stadt, which by the year 2000 had 160,000 subscribers. Unfortunately, because of a flawed internal structure this project was eventually transformed into a consultancy business by a small group of members.

The weakest chapter is the section on radio, which suffers from over-emphasis on US examples of the use of radio, whereas a summary of the successes and failures of community and pirate radio in Britain would be more relevant. It would also have been useful to compare the US experience with that of Europe, where alternative radio stations, such as Radio Alice (Italy) and the French Anarchist Federation's Radio Libertaire have successfully linked radio broadcasting to street activism.

There is a perceptive account of the problems faced by successful alternative media projects, and what happens to them, as they are absorbed into the mainstream. Unfortunately there is no discussion of several important issues that have underpinned and extended the impact of media activism, such as

the free software movement and the development of an information commons.

Predicting the future forms and direction of activist media is a chancy business, but Waltz tackles this partly by anchoring this last speculative chapter in a short but pithy account of the development of Indymedia, and the growing use of new tools like Wikipedia.

This is an important book because it provides a critical overview of alternative and anti-capitalist media in all its variety. The short practical exercises at the end of each chapter are well thought out, and the provision of web addresses, and further reading will help the reader develop the necessary skills to become consciously involved in creating the next wave of media activism.

Martyn Everett

A Sideways Look

During the Great Depression, in the 1930s, shanty towns sprung up across the United States. These informal settlements grew up wherever there was land and building materials. The residents used anything they could get their hands on, from brick and timber to cardboard. These places became known as Hooverville, after the President at the beginning of the depression. Since then the term has become used for any settlement where the housing is regarded as sub-standard.

Part of the government's plans for the southeast, a by-product of Labour lacking any sensible regional strategy beyond devolution, is to put an extra 300,000 homes in the 'Thames Gateway'. This is the area that stretches eastwards from Deptford in South London and the River Lea in East London, effectively all the way to the Thames Estuary. A better description might be 'the Thames Floodplain'. One of the things that 'New Labour' promised was joined-up government – perhaps the people in John Prescott's department who deal with development don't talk to those who deal with climate change? (I bet the former have nicer offices!) In February, the government's Environment Agency (ultimately answerable to Prescott) objected to the plans of 17 local councils (ultimately responsible to Prescott) to allow homes to be built in areas liable to flooding. Insurers have already warned that the Thames Gateway developments might be un-insurable.

I travel around this area a fair bit and there are some very nice developments, where government building standards are exceeded and transport and other infrastructure has been well thought out. However, most of what's planned or being built are either executive homes or little boxes for poor people. Developers are happy to meet or exceed standards where it enhances their chance of a profit, but will cut whatever corners they can for properties that do not sell at a premium. In some new properties, the space standards are so small that furniture that isn't flat pack won't fit. The Institute of British Insurers have recommended that only the first floor and above should be occupied, which is hardly encouraging if the first floor has no space. Perhaps some of those Indonesian developers who make homes on stilts to deal with changes in sea level should be invited in?

Where the government have addressed transport, it is in the form of more road-building, like the proposed Thames Gateway Bridge, which will bring traffic chaos to the borough of Bexley, not improved public transport. Much of the area is now served by crap, expensive PFI hospitals that are difficult to reach by public transport and have far fewer beds than their predecessors. Most people in Kent or Essex consider themselves lucky to live 10 miles from a hospital – many towns in the Gateway area don't have one.

The Thames Gateway may not quite be a Hooverville, but I propose a new

definition – Prescottville. These Prescottvilles are distinguished by their liability to flooding, their inaccessibility except by car, and the fact that they look like shoe boxes. There are few shops and no meaningful centre to the community – everything will be at the local supermarket, which will fit in nicely with the government's plans to have supermarkets run doctors, chemists, opticians, elections and academy schools. It's likely that few jobs will be available locally too, meaning a long commute on over-stretched public transport to a low paid job in a London cleansed of any affordable housing. Welcome to Prescottville – bring your Prozac ... and a few sandbags.

Svartfrosk

Blast from the Past

From Freedom 23rd February 1991, entitled *The Vultures are all Ready to Descend: The undeclared Gulf war between America and Iraq – or, to judge by the media reports, the carpet-bombing of Iraq by the American air force which apparently meets with no resistance – is now also being directed to so-called 'military objectives' in Kuwait itself. After the 'allies' were 'invited' by Saudi Arabia to 'protect' the rulers of that dictatorship and the oil, of course (for a substantial 'fee') and by the Emir of Kuwait and his hangers-on to drive out the Iraqi invaders from their 'beloved' land (also for a substantial 'fee').*

The 'allies' at the time of writing have not yet set foot on Kuwaiti territory – they have certainly contributed to the destruction of Kuwait city and, whatever the propaganda may say about the oil wells being set on fire by the Iraqis, if the 'allies' mean business when they discharge their bombs at the rate of thousands of tons at a time surely some of them must explode on oil wells. What else is a target? Of course, the Republican Army, the crack regiments of Iraq. But they don't seem to be sure that they pin-point even them.

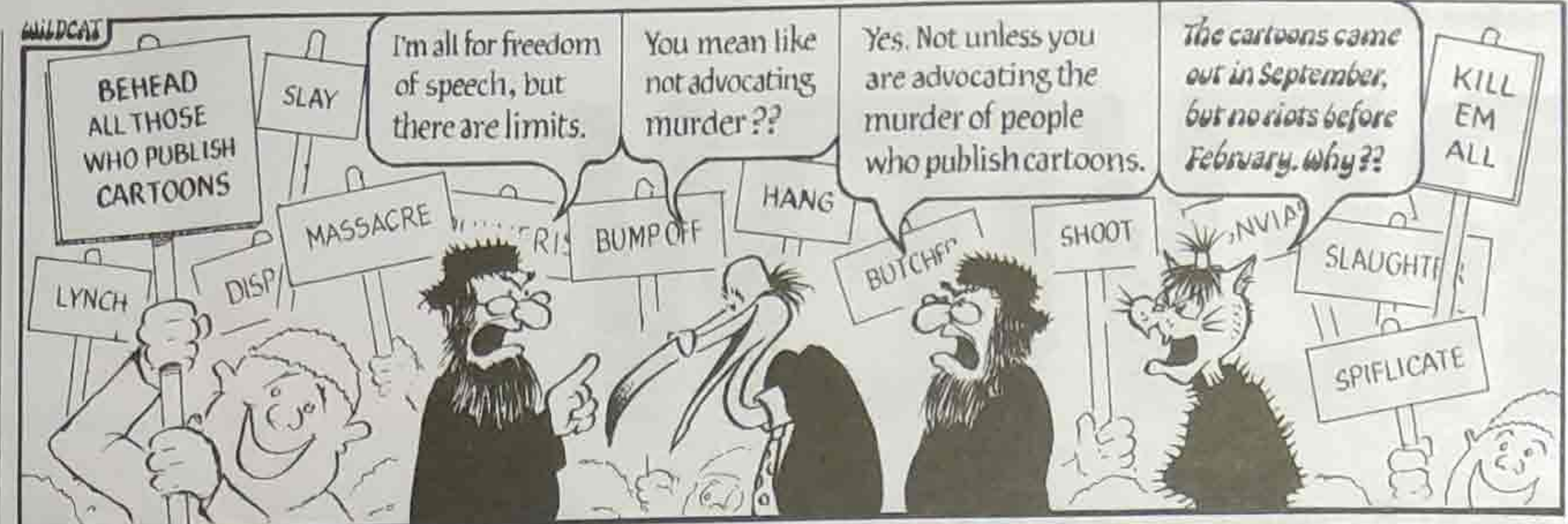
The war that was going to 'liberate' Kuwait, that was going to be over in a day or two, then a week or two, now a month or two, appears to be much more successful in destroying Iraq's and Kuwait's infrastructure. Compared with the 'allies' carpet-bombing in Iraq and Kuwait the reported Iraqi's looting, raping and other 'crimes' in occupied Kuwait will prove to be peanuts when finally the truth about the 'allies' carpet-bombing is revealed.



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Imagine if...

Gordon arrived at the barracks to look over her Majesty's new recruits.

"They are very young aren't they?" he observed, utilising that powerful brain of his.

"Yes sir" the training sergeant responded, "They are schoolchildren. But we shall soon have more than enough to meet your requirements, and the training programme we have devised is excellent. I think this may be the best batch we have ever created."

"And who is this army being devised for?" Gordon asked, excitedly.

The sergeant looked mildly confused. "Why for you sir, and the glory of Britain. Also, no bugger who gets to the age of 18 without having been indoctrinated by us wants to go kill Iraqis using uranium bullets."

As the children marched around, guns in hand, Gordon smiled to himself.

The initiative to offer military training at state schools was one of his, and as a Labour MP, he could think of no better plan than to allow the army free reign over the minds of the young.

He was hoping to double the numbers of the combined cadet force from the scheme, which had thus far been confined to private schools.

He had gone a step further even, on his quest to make sure the army wasn't just made up of 'officers and gentlemen', and had made sure the first areas to receive the scheme would be the most deprived – those which would be the best recruiting grounds.

The best part was that the idea would be funded not just by the state, but by companies (PFI in khakis, as he wryly thought of it).

The little uniformed killers of tomorrow snapped off a salute as they goose-stepped past in perfect formation, and Gordon's chest swelled with pride – he was indeed a statesman.

Listings

until 27th February Past Tense presents an exhibition of radical maps at the vegan Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, London E5

until 20th March To mark the tenth anniversary of the No M66 Campaign, there will be an exhibition at the Basement Social Center, Lever Street, Manchester.

28th February Wombles meeting on 'Prisons: abolition, resistance, solidarity' from 7pm to 10pm at the new occupied social centre, 21-22 Russell Square, London WC1, see londonsocialcentre.org.uk

2nd March Ken Campbell Impro Show at The Performance Club, Inn On The Green, 3 Thorpe Close, London W10, from 8.30pm, newagenda.demon.co.uk/

4th March Seedy Saturday community seed swap at Edmund Kell Hall in Southampton, from 10am to 2pm, email seedysaturday@yahoo.co.uk or call 02380 643813

8th March Dave Morris talks on the history of The Tottenham Claimants Union since 1983, at Wood Green Labour Club, Stirling Crescent, London N22, organised by the Radical History Network of North East London.

9th March The Performance Club with Stewart Lee, Whatsername, Johnny Fluffpunk, plus MC Tony Allen at the Inn On The Green, 3 Thorpe Close, London W10, from 8.30pm, for more info see newagenda.demon.co.uk/

11th March Peak Oil And The Capitalist System, a talk with Adrian Williams and London Anarchist Forum from 2.30pm, the Autonomy Club, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1, for info see eventsandissues.bravehost.com.

12th March The miners' remembered, mark their heroic struggle with a day of events and films at the Common Place, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds, contact maryrosecook@gmail.com for info.

16th March The Performance Club with Mark 'not on the telly' Kelly, Sir Gideon Vein, Jamie Woon, plus MC Tony Allen at Inn On The Green, 3 Thorpe Close, London W10, from 8.30pm, see newagenda.demon.co.uk/

18th March International day of action against the Iraqi occupation, assemble 12 noon Parliament Square, London. 31st March to 2nd April The Anarchist Bookfair in Zagreb (Anarhisticki sajam knjiga) to help organise or confirm participation email ask-zagreb@net.hr or see ask-zagreb.org for info. 2nd April 'Unauthorised' demo against the occupation of Iraq to mark second anniversary of the April 2004 siege of Fallujah, meet 12 noon in Parliament Square, London. A non-violent direct action workshop and legal briefing on 1st April, see www.j-n-v.org

29th April Manchester Anarchist Bookfair at The Basement, 24 Lever Street, from 12 noon until 5pm, for more details see manchester@bookfair.org.uk



The quiz

- Who or what was Nessiteras rhombopteryx?
- According to an AA survey, in which area of the UK are people most likely to buy a 4x4?
- Who got caught amending their Wikipedia entries?
- Which TV grandfather was played by an actor who ran for governor of New York, and once said: "If anything I consider myself an anarchist"?

Answers on page 6

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