

FREEDOM

26 JUNE 2004

50P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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ALL COME TUMBLING DOWN ...

The commission investigating 9/11 has reported it had found no evidence that Iraq and al-Qaida co-operated in the plot or had any sort of “collaborative relationship.” This bluntly contradicts persistent White House assertions before, during and after the war. Even more incredibly, even after the commission’s findings, both Bush and Blair insisted that Saddam had links to al-Qaida. Little wonder the Bush administration stonewalled the creation of the commission to begin with and pursued a reluctant approach to co-operation with it.

Which leaves the last excuse, that the invasion was to liberate the Iraqi people. And, like the rest, the facts have demolished it. According to a recent a Coalition Provisional Authority poll only 2% of Iraqis regard the occupying forces as liberators. This is devastating for both Bush and Blair as both assert that future generations of Iraqis will thank them for liberating their country. The current generation sees things differently, with 92% recognising that the self-proclaimed ‘liberators’ were, in fact, occupiers. Quite brutal occupiers at that, given that according to 54% polled all Americans behaved like the guards at Abu Ghraib. 55% said they would feel safer if the 138,000 US troops left immediately, 55% agreed and 41% wanted the troops to leave immediately.

But why be surprised that the wishes of the Iraqis are being ignored. The wishes of the public back home are listened to with equal care. Whether it is on the war or the privatisation of railways or public services, the public is finding out what anarchists have long argued: government does not exist to ‘represent the people’ or ‘allow them to have a say in the way the country is

run’. Whether it was the bourgeoisie or the Bolsheviks, the idea that the masses should govern themselves was rejected and power was centralised into a few, safe, hands.

The votes of the people exist to give the illusion that they are sovereign, that they have a say. In practice ‘democratic’ governments amount to little more than elected dictatorships. Blair has joined such notables as Trotsky and Lenin in openly admitting his hostility to the norms of democratic theory and practice.

In response to Labour’s worst election results since world war one, Blair displayed a self-righteous defiance which would make Trotsky blush. “No politician can afford to be deaf to the voice of the electorate,” he declared, before proving he was. He rejected every protest vote. On Iraq, he refused to apologise and repeated the mantra that he will be “shown to be right” and that the majority of the people were (like the facts) wrong. On privatising public services he stressed that it is “not the time to change direction” but, rather “to change gear” and go “further and faster”! On Europe, he tried to undercut the UKIP by pledging to defend even more strongly “industrial flexibility.” This would protect UK business against giving workers some rights so limited even continental Conservatives find them acceptable.

Those politicians who launched the illegal war in defiance of public opinion need to pay a political price for it, if only to discourage future acts of aggression. Yet Blair has shrugged off the protest vote as easily as the millions marching on February 15th last year. He knows that few will vote for the pro-war Tories (decades of leftist ‘vote labour without illusions’ nonsense paying



off). The limitations of electioneering are obvious. Easily ignored protest votes every few years are hardly a means of holding politicians accountable, particularly as it just replaces one elected dictatorship with another. Millions know that the differences between the parties are minor. Indeed New Labour’s anti-Tory rhetoric increases as its policies converge with those of Howard’s party. Little wonder more and more people abstain at election time.

There is a real need for an alternative, one which only anarchism can provide. Ultimately, politics is too important to be left to politicians, subject as they are to the pressures of big business and the state bureaucracy. We need a new working class movement based on using direct action (strikes, blockades, boycotts, occupations, etc.) to make politicians and bosses aware of what we want and that they cannot ignore us. Given the dismal legacy of radicals using elections,

such a movement must be anti-parliamentarian and rooted in popular assemblies in our workplaces and communities. It must counterpoise direct democracy to representative democracy, action to platitudes, hope to despair.

Such a movement does not exist yet and will take much time and energy to help create, but it is our only real alternative to make our lives better and, eventually, replace this system with a more humane one.

LONG HOT SUMMER

Things are hotting up on the industrial front. The first quarter of this year saw forty stoppages. During the whole of last year just 133 disputes were recorded – the lowest number on record. In 2003 150,600 workers joined picket lines, compared to 942,000 in 2002. In the 1980s the figure averaged one million. In the first three months of 2004, 135,000 workers went on strike – almost as many as the whole of last year and more disputes are in the pipeline.

On the railways RMT members have voted for a series of one-day strikes to defend their pension scheme, improve the employer’s current 3-3.5% pay offer and reinstate free rail travel for workers, a benefit taken away after privatisation.

In the civil service union members are gearing up to fight Gordon Brown’s plans to slash 80,000 jobs. The job cuts are part of Labour’s so-called efficiency drive. 40,000 job losses have already been announced in the Department for Pensions and Work (DfPW) and Inland Revenue. PCS union general secretary Mark Serwotka argues “in virtually every government department that we represent we can make an argument that there needs to be more staff.” Serwotka though has also indicated that he is willing to negotiate with the government over the cuts. This is a big mistake. The Financial Times reported earlier this month that he “has offered the prime minister and chancellor a way

out that would allow them to avoid the high risk strategy of trying to push through reform in the face of union opposition.”

Any suggestion of compromise is a disgrace given the number of jobs Labour plans to slash in the name of so-called efficiency. Labour’s real aim is to pull the rug from under the Tories who had planned to cut jobs if they got in! The fact that PCS can even contemplate negotiating is nothing short of a disgrace. This is yet another case of a union putting its organisational interest, in this case influence with the government, ahead of their members.

PCS members though have shown they are willing to fight even if their

general secretary, ironically one of the so-called ‘awkward squad’ isn’t. Forty-eight hour strikes are expected to take place in the DfPW, part of a long running and bitter pay dispute dating back to last year. In fact the union has not yet settled 2003 pay deal and the current action is about this year’s pay rise! The fact that the dispute has already dragged on so long is a sign of the failure of limited action. Union militants should be calling for all out action over pay and job cuts.

Elsewhere postal workers have threatened strike action and the higher education (HE) union Natfhe are considering balloting. Last month fire fighters walked out without bothering

to ballot to defend rest times. In the NHS ambulance workers in the north-east have voted for action following the introduction of Agenda for Change (AfC), the government’s new NHS pay system. This follows a walk out last month at City Hospital Sunderland again in response to AfC. Anger against the AfC, which will see some staff lose up to £8000, is building amongst health workers. Four of the seventeen unions in the NHS – Unison, Amicus, T&G and the smaller Society of Radiographers all hold ballots on the agreement later this summer. Militants are campaigning hard for a no vote.

All in all, it looks like it’s going to be a long hot summer for the government!

Home and away

FREEDOM

Volume 65 Number 13

Anarchism

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

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

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

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

Why don't you?

A non-violent direct action collective in Tyneside, Why Don't You?, produce a newsletter called Think Globally, Act Locally. To find out more contact PO Box 1TA, Newcastle NE99 1TA or email whydontyou@post.com

Mail order

We've had a few problems with our mail order service, which has been seriously understaffed and stretched to the limit and consequently some of you may have been waiting a little bit longer than usual for your book orders. We now have a new person on the case and everything will now be back on track.

Our new and improved book catalogue is now in progress. When it's ready, subscribers will get a copy with their paper (non-subscribers can get a copy by sending in an sae).

Antifa stickers

Several issues ago we advertised stickers from anti-fascist group Antifa, due to demand they are currently having to reprint more and all those who requested them will receive them soon. www.antifa.org.uk

Contact details

Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
Tel/fax: 020 7247 9249
www.freedompress.org.uk
Enquiries: info@freedompress.org.uk
Copyright: copy@freedompress.org.uk
Subscriptions: subs@freedompress.org.uk
Circulation: circ@freedompress.org.uk
Freedom Press Distribution:
distro@freedompress.org.uk

Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 10th July 2004 and the last day to get your copy to us will be Thursday 1st July (see contact details above for where to send your letters/articles). If you are interested in writing regularly for Freedom we want to hear from you!

News from the inside

Slavery claims denied

Retail Chain Wilkinsons in an email to the Campaign Against Prison Slavery (CAPS) have denied profiting from forced labour in Britain's prisons.

"Wilkinson does not directly contract any work with the Prison Service, however a very small number of our suppliers do have commercial links with the Service. In fact of the 25,000 products stocked by Wilkinson, less (sic) than 50 are produced involving Prison Service labour. "This work is carried out as part of the Prison Service's programme of maximising opportunities for inmates to be rehabilitated once released. New skills and work experience is viewed as part of this process. "In the few instances where our suppliers do use the Prison Service, the payment for the work carried out is the same as that for any other contractor and Wilkinson does not profit from this association in any way.

"It would be inappropriate for Wilkinson to comment on the relationship between the Prison Service and suppliers. However the Prison Service stresses that its policy is to charge a fair market price to the manufacturer for such work. It strives to ensure that any contract does not adversely impact local employment opportunities and offers prisoners the opportunity to gain valuable skills and work experience." CAPS responded by highlighting "the fact that prisoners are forced to do this work," and asking the question "if fewer than 50 of their products are

packed by prisoners, then it can't be hard for them to drop those products!"

And of course forced prison labour does "adversely impact" other employment since it undermines the wages of all other workers and destroys wage-paying jobs.

See www.againstprisonslavery.org

Get out of jail free

The Legal Defence & Monitoring Group (LDMG) have printed a new edition of 'No Comment - The Defendant's Guide to Arrest' ... with money from the Met!

The Metropolitan Police were forced to pay damages of tens of thousands of pounds to anti-royal demonstrators for false arrest and imprisonment and breach of human rights. Some of that money has been used to print this handy guide to avoid getting banged up - namely by keeping schtum.

Copies can be obtained free by sending an SAE to No Comment, c/o BM



Automatic, London WC1N 3XX. Alternatively you can download it at www.ldmg.org.uk

DSEi searches appeal

The LDMG would like to know; did police search you in London during the DSEi arms fair last September? Liberty needs your search receipts ASAP for the second stage of a High Court legal battle against the Metropolitan Police. For info call 0207 378 3653 or see www.liberty-humanrights.org.uk

Inmate death linked to lack of medication

Tom Newman, a 61-year-old first-time offender, died in Pentonville prison only 60 hours after he arrived at the jail. An inquest earlier this month found that he had died after being denied his daily medication. Relatives of Mr Newman had repeatedly contacted prison authorities with concerns about his health - even to the point of offering to deliver the medicine themselves. This was not permitted, and Mr Newman's family were told a prison doctor would see him.

This never occurred, and so yet another person has been killed in jail by state negligence. A Prison Service spokeswoman saying she "very much regretted" Tom's death has been little comfort to his family.

Child killed in 'training'

A teenager at the privately run Rainsbrook Secure 'Training Centre' (another fluffy name for a prison) in Northants was killed by guards on 19th April this year.

The three guards responsible - employees of a subsidiary company of Group 4 - have not been suspended, although the use of the 'restraint' applied to 15-year-old Gareth Myatt has been banned.

He was four days into his twelve-month sentence and was pronounced dead at Coventry Hospital.

Porridge no more

Last month Dumfries Prison in Scotland removed free porridge from inmates' breakfast menus. Now if prisoners want porridge for breakfast they have to pay £1 for the privilege. As a reference point, prison labour wages average around £8 per week.

Threats were raised of a canteen sit-in, but a Prison Service spokesman dismissed these.

Action Directe

Further to the report in the last Freedom, here are the addresses of French anarchist-oriented urban guerrilla group prisoners:

- Joëlle Aubron, 2174 k and Nathalie Ménigon, 2173 j, CD Bapaume, Chemin des Anzacs, 62451 Bapaume cedex
- Georges Cipriani, 4364/1239, M.C. d'Ensisheim, 49, rue de la 1ere armée, 68190 Ensisheim
- Régis Schleicher, 9484, QI C.P. Clairvaux, 10910 Ville-sous-la-Ferté, J-M Roullan, 330 341S D5 G431, QI maison d'arrêt, 7 avenue des Peupliers, 91700 Fleury-Merogis

LISTINGS

Bristol

30th June throw a spanner in the works of the war machine. Meet 7.30am at the MoD, Filton Abbey Wood. Contact june_30th_2004@yahoo.co.uk
Every Sunday the Kebele Kafé from 6.30pm, cheap vegan nosh, chats and vibes at Kebele, 14 Robertson Road, Easton

Ireland

25th to 26th June Just when you thought it was safe to go somewhere hot for your summer holiday, George Bush comes to Ireland: Domoland Castle, Co Clare (very close to Shannon Warport, oh yes). Details of the protests planned at www.ambush2004.org

London

26th June London Anarchist Forum open discussion on 21st Century Anarchism at the Autonomy Club at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1
30th June Five Leaves Publications book launch with Colin Ward, David Goodway and Dennis Hardy at The Gallery, 70-77 Shawcross Street, EC1 form 6-7.30pm
8th July South London Radical History Group meeting: 'Deptford Infidels', talk with Terry Liddle at 8pm, Use Your Loaf, 227 Deptford High Street, SE8, admission is free/donation.

19th to 25th July Disarm Farnborough Airshow. For details www.dsei.org or contact 07817652029 or Disarm DSEI, BM Box 3679, London WC1N 3XX
27th November Anarchist Bookfair at

ULU, Malet Street, WC1 from 10am to 7pm. See www.anarchistbookfair.org
Every Wednesday the LARC Library from 1pm at 62 Fieldgate Street, E1.
Every Friday vegan café at Use Your Loaf, 227 Deptford High Street, SE8

Scotland

1st to 4th July Green Anarchy in the UK, Gathering of the tribes at Bilston Glen Anti-Bypass Protest Site, near Edinburgh. Contact 07747606558 info@bilstonglen-abs.org.uk or see www.bilstonglen-abs.org.uk
23rd to 24th July The Wickerman Festival, between Dundrennan and Auchencairn. Spiritualized, Levellers Acoustic, dance tents, children's area. www.thewickermanfestival.co.uk

Surrey

16th to 18th July Guilfest. Contact 01483 536270 info@guilford-live.co.uk or see www.guilfest.co.uk

International

26th to 28th June Anti-Repression Gathering around the Aubonne Court case, Geneva, to support two climbers whose rope was cut by police during a blockade against the G8 summit in Evian last summer. For more info see www.aubonnebridge.net
1st to 9th July Annual Ecotopia Biketour will ride from Vienna to The Netherlands with a stop-over at the Towards Carfree Cities IV conference in Berlin. See www.thebiketour.net
31st July to 7th August A-Camp on the

Kesselberg near Erkner, 25km east from Alexanderplatz, Berlin. The Kesselberg is a self-managed place in the woods. Contact by mail at A-camp, c/o A-Laden, Rathenower Str 22, D-10559 Berlin. For info see www.acamp.tk or www.kesselberg.info

Nationwide groups

Anarchist Federation
Box 2, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.afed.org.uk
Antifa
Box 36, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.antifa.org.uk
Class War Federation
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX
www.classwaruk.org
Earth First!
www.earthfirst.org.uk
Industrial Workers of the World
PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ
www.iww.org.uk
Solidarity Federation
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
www.solfed.org.uk
For details of smaller and local groups see www.enrager.net/britain

Social Centres

Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE)
17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh
www.autonomous.org.uk
The Cowley Club
12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA
www.cowleyclub.org.uk

Freedom

84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.freedompress.org.uk
Kebele
14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY
www.kebele.org
Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)
The Basement, 78a Penny Street, Lancaster
www.eco-action.org/lancaster
London Action Resource Centre (LARC)
62 Fieldgate Street, London E1
www.londonlarc.org
Occupied Social Centre
159 Fortress Road, London NW5
www.wombles.org.uk
Printworks Social Centre
58 Albion Street, Glasgow
www.glasgow-autonomy.org
The Rampart
7a Rampart Street, London E1
SUMAC Centre
245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX
www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/
Use Your Loaf
227 Deptford High Street, London SE8
www.squat.freeserve.co.uk/
useyourloaf.html
1in12 Club
21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 2LY
www.1in12.com
56a Infoshop
56 Crampton Street, London SE17
www.safetycat.org/56a

Britain

RESPECT: failed and finished

Despite their claims the SWP and George Galloway's foray into electoral politics was a washout, says Richard Griffin

In last week's European election Respect got just 1.67% of the vote in the nine English constituencies. This is six times less than the Greens and only slightly more than Scargill's Socialist Labour Party got when it stood for Europe in 1999. It is also 550,000 fewer votes than the BNP.

Reading Respect's web site though you would think they had won the election. Apparently their derisive vote actually means they are now 'a serious national party' and they have 'broken through' with a 'tremendous result'. So tremendous that in the Euro constituency I live in they got less votes than the Senior Citizen's Party!

Despite the sort of superlatives you would expect from a SWP front the reality is clear – like the SWP's previous electoral front, the Socialist Alliance (SA) Respect has failed. At least the SA got a councillor elected two years ago in Preston (mind you that is the only person they got elected!). That's better than Respect has managed.

To be fair Respect did slightly better in a few inner city areas with large ethnic minority populations than their national average. In London where they put their most effort in they got 4.8% of the vote. It is clear though if Respect stood in the general election it would get even fewer votes than the 1.67% it managed this time.

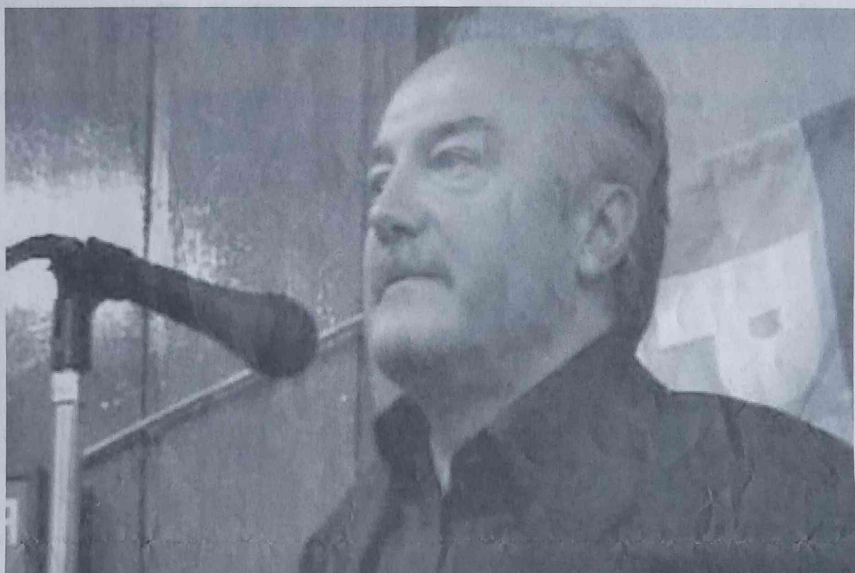
Despite its claims the simple truth is that Respect has made no headway. What it has done is spend £300,000

plus (that's over a pound for each person who voted for them!) It has also wasted a lot of activists' time and energy. There is little doubt that Respect like other SWP fronts has absorbed energy out of radical politics. A number of the people who campaigned for it perhaps believing its claim that it was going to deliver Blair a devastating blow will be disillusioned.

The socialist left in Britain is dazed, divided and confused. On the one hand working class people are angry with Labour. On the other they persistently refuse to vote for groups like Respect. This is probably why Galloway et al spent so long courting Muslim communities and the middle classes. In its attempt to pick up votes from Muslims it compromised the 'E'(quality) and 'S'(ocialism) in its title holding, for example, meetings where men and women were segregated and taking no position on choice for women.

No doubt Respect will limp on at least until a new electoral bandwagon rumbles along it can jump on. When that happens Respect will be dumped just like the SA was.

Respect's failure in the European and London elections of course come as no surprise to anarchists. Nor will the disarray that the socialist left is in. Anarchists know that while people are angry with Blair and his pro Bush and pro business party, they are not stupid. They can see through a sham. Respect is an organisation built on sand, with



Gorgeous George in action

no real roots into working class communities. The decline of Labour as even a reformist power on the left along with the retreat of trade unions as a political force has created a power vacuum that at the moment the Greens seem best placed to benefit from.

While the socialist left will continue

to push electioneering anarchists need to present a different vision. One that is not based on handing power over to elected representatives. The anarchist movement needs to unite nationally. The movement needs to engage with local communities. We need to be active in our workplaces and unions. In social

centres, allotments, and food co-ops. People may well be interested in anarchism but if we cannot organise and get our message over they will gravitate to organisations like Respect. The European elections show what a waste this would be. We need to reach out.

In brief

HSBC job losses

Michael Geoghegan, the new head of HSBC UK, has decided to axe 3,500 jobs, mostly from their global HQ in Canary Wharf. The cuts come on top of 4,000 people already marked for the drop, adding up to 7,500 job losses in a year. Rob O'Neill, a spokesman for UNIFI, the bank employee's union, said in the Times: "We are furious with this latest round of job cuts. This is terrible news for staff and customers."

A thousand posts are going to be created in branches across the country as token compensation, but even taking this into account, over 15% of the company's total work force will go.

Freedom has no love for banking institutions or those helping them to grow, but these are ordinary workers being dropped to save a paltry £90 million a year (HSBC made over £7 billion last year alone). The money will be directly leached out of the British economy and into the pockets of big shareholders, making us all substantially poorer in the long run, particularly as most of these jobs are not disappearing, but relocating overseas. The 4,000 cuts

announced last year are going to India, Malaysia and China. Geoghegan's predecessor Sir John Bond warned these will not be the last seen at the company.

HSBC cite new regulatory procedures worldwide as a major reason for their job cuts, but the question has to be asked why more complex procedures require less people to sort through them.

WAG Tesco demo

The Walthamstow Anarchist Group held a successful demonstration outside the Tesco store at Bakers Arms recently in response to the company announcing a trial reduction in sick pay benefits. Staff and shoppers alike were very supportive of the demonstration which saw about a thousand leaflets detailing the situation distributed.

Not happy with making £4.4 million profit a day out of staff and shoppers, greedy bosses at Tesco have decided to trial this scheme of cutting sick pay for staff for the first three days they are off. Sickness of four days or more will require a doctors note. One elderly Walthamstow grandmother handed a leaflet summed it all up: "The greedy bastards."

This scheme is being trial in ten existing stores and ten new ones over the next twelve months, on a 'voluntary' basis (and we all know what voluntary means in this sort of situation). Tesco staff in other stores – don't assume that you are safe from it. If the trial works for them then bosses will undoubtedly attempt to introduce the scheme to all stores. This is bad news not just for Tesco staff but for all of us. Tesco are one of the UK's largest private sector employers, with almost a quarter of a million staff. If they bring in this measure permanently it will be a green light for all other private sector employers to follow suit.

That a food retailer is pioneering a policy of forcing staff to come in and serve shoppers when they are ill speaks volumes about what they think of health and safety and the wellbeing of us all.

Staff: organise to take action against this measure – strikes, go-slows and mass sickies will see the back of it.

Shoppers: hit them where it hurts and take your money elsewhere until this trial is abandoned, and give them back your loyalty card – they obviously don't

understand the meaning of the word. Taken from issue 9 of The Underdog, out now and available from WAG. Contact them at info@walthamstowanarchy.org.uk or 07881 288 889

Norwich bookfair

Norwich's first annual book fair took place in the city centre last week, drawing hundreds from across the country. The fair, based in the pavilion of Waterloo Park, featured stalls from SolFed, the Anarchist Federation, Freedom Press and many more. Books available ranged from general fiction and socialist literature to highbrow history and Anarchist economics. T-shirts, hats, cakes and music were also available. Upstairs, live music from bands such as Norwich Ska group 'High and Mighty' was played indoors, along with short films from Indymedia such as 'Crowd Bites Wolf' and the well named 'Hardcore Riot Porn'.

Discussion groups featuring figures from the Wombles, Theatre of War and Indymedia on topics such as autonomous worker's centres, upcoming regional events and media relations took place

on a large balcony in the sunshine.

A torrential downpour nearly finished off the event prematurely in the morning, with roads into town getting hail before the skies cleared in the nick of time.

The only real sticking point was the website help for drivers, which suggested turning left instead of right at the crucial moment, leading several people to head out into deepest Norfolk.

Although a double booking meant the event was two hours shorter than anticipated, it was well organised, with excellent vegan food, Zapatista coffee and a lucrative win-a-beer raffle.

Community police and park wardens were highly active through the day, apparently because a football tournament Norwich Anarchists had put on earlier in the month was too noisy and they were worried music might be played. They seemed to enjoy lounging outside in the sunshine for a few hours though, so it seems like a good time really was had by all.

In general the event was fun and friendly, and Tug, a member of Norwich Anarchists, seemed confident that it would happen again next year.

French wildcat spark

Public sector electricity workers walk out across France against privatisation plans, reports Rob Ray

French electricity workers started off a day of protests against their government on the 15th June by shutting down five power stations as part of a wildcat strike. People saw televisions switch off and train stations close at rush hour as an orchestrated series of power cuts swarmed across France from Bordeaux to Limoges.

Around 70,000 people from Electricite de France (EDF), the state energy monopoly, are fighting privatisation plans, led by Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT) unionists. CGT, a pro-Communist union whose membership is majority based in the energy sector, is going head-to-head with the government to try and stop a piecemeal sell-off.

Top government figures want to auction 30% of EDF's assets to the highest bidder, angering unionists, who have spent the last month taking increasingly direct action to protest. 37% of French power is already open to competition.

In response twelve MPs from centre-right party Union for a Popular Movement – a pro Chirac group – had their supplies cut personally, including the home of Industry Minister Patrick Devedjian, who asked whether it was parliament or 'the street' who decided things in a democracy, and Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

Around 12% of the total output in France was affected during the 24 hour shutdown, which follows a similar stoppage last month. A separate action also saw much of the GdF (French Gas) closed.

Although electricity workers are currently well treated by the state, with guaranteed jobs for life, retirement at 53 on a 75% salary and discounted electricity costs, sell-offs across the channel have shown the problems that lie in store if they don't fight back.

In Ipswich's Wherstead Park, the UK home of Powergen, staff numbers have been cut from over five thousand a few years ago to less than a thousand today. Building work on new offices has stopped, and old offices are instead rented by other companies. More jobs are expected to go as call centres are relocated to India. Steve Winckless, who worked as a temp at the mammoth HQ, said: "it's like a ghost town there, you can practically see the tumbleweed where thousands of people used to work."

Meanwhile prices have steadily risen, with companies citing maintenance and upgrade costs to watchdog body Ofgen – Powergen have hiked rates twice this year alone. Yet no impact has been made on increasing problems of supply (it is predicted that there will be regular power outages across Europe by 2020) while company profits have skyrocketed despite a supposed increase in competition.



Around the world

Poland: anarchist internet radio activist murdered

Radek, an anarchist from Torun and animator of the alternative internet radio www.ulicznik.net was murdered on Wednesday after being thrown out of a train when going to a concert. There has been unclear information stating that he might have been killed by neo-nazis but this is yet to be confirmed. A friend who he was travelling with him is reported as missing.

Israel/Palestine: new anarcho-syndicalist initiative set up

A recent meeting in Israel/Palestine has kick started a project to building a genuine revolutionary syndicalist organisation to unite Israeli and Palestinian working classes.

Recognising the state-owned Israeli trade unions and the corrupt Palestinian Authority unions as doing nothing but compromising with big capitalists, allying themselves with 'progressive' bourgeois and organising

all-out betrayal of the workers, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative has been set up. The ASI is fighting for international unity between workers, joint struggle of Palestinian and Israeli workers against Zionist imperialism and the Arab reaction of headed by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Islamists.

They are asking for affiliation to the International Workers' Association and in the next month they intend to introduce their manifesto.

Turkey: anti-NATO activities

Turkish Anarchists, anti-authoritarians and anti-militarists planted a cactus outside Istanbul's Hilton Hotel to protest NATO and police repression against anti-NATO military activists. Afterwards, the group distributed leaflets in town publicising the Black Bloc being for the demonstrations happening on the 27th, 28th and 29th of June.

Anti-NATO activists including anarchists, anti-militarists and

peaceniks did another action called 'Shroud does not have a pocket' (an Anatolian proverb). This action was held in front of Istanbul-Sabanci Towers (belonging to one of the biggest capitalist corporations in Turkey) to protest NATO summit sponsor firms and ties between international capitalism and NATO. The activists tried to give the shroud having a green pocket to the security personnel. At first they rejected the offer but later accepted after being told it was a gift! After reading their declaration titled 'Shroud does not have a pocket!' the group left for a nice cup of tea. More actions are in the pipeline ...

Anarchists, anti-authoritarians, anti-militarists and libertarians around Turkey are organising these activities under a coordination group 'Libertarian Coordination Against NATO'. Already ten different anarchist groups/collectives/circles/periodicals have signed the BlackBlock/KaraBlok declaration. For more details see Libertarian Coordination's website: <http://haziran2004.cjb.net/> It

includes info in about 20 different languages!

Russia: new anarcho-syndicalist website

The new site of the Konfederatsii Revolyutsionnykh Anarkho-Sindikalistov (Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists – KRAS) is now online.

On the site are contacts for Russian anarcho-syndicalists; KRAS and AIT/IWA programmatic documents; history of the KRAS; texts on the history and theory of anarcho-syndicalism, communism of workers' councils and the self-organised workers'; articles and work of Russian anarcho-syndicalists, V. Dam'e and M. Magid. <http://www.aitrus.narod.ru/>

Zimbabwe: forty women activists arrested

Forty members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (Woza) were arrested for holding a meeting without prior police consent. Woza spokesperson, Jenni Williams, confirmed the arrests happened before the start of the meeting.

"The women were arrested on Wednesday while they were still preparing tea before the start of the meeting at Matshobane Community Hall in the western suburbs," said Williams. "They were bundled into several trucks before being taken to Western Commonage police station where they were detained."

A police spokesperson confirmed the arrest of the forty women and said they will be charged with contravening Section 24 of the Public Order and Security Act (Posa) that requires organisers of public gatherings to seek police clearance first. "The women are being charged under Section 24 of Posa and are expected to appear in court as soon as all the paper work on their case has been done," said the police spokesman.

This is not the first time that police have swooped on the militant women group. Last year police arrested and beat up several women who were congregated to celebrate International Women's day on 3rd May.

Feature

Fat is a class issue

You're not just 'big boned', you're a victim of capitalism and the state, suggests Martin H.

For many years feminists have fought around the politics of fat. Women, and increasingly men, are bombarded with the message that being thin equals being attractive. Getting thinner and staying that way is a multi-million pound industry. And in the light of the recent Commons Health Select Committee Report on obesity, it would seem that there is a real need for it. There isn't, of course, but obesity as an issue needs more examination.

The Select Committee were scathing about the 'epidemic of obesity' facing this country. The Ministry of Transport was even attacked for not coming up with a walking strategy – one foot in front of the other, perhaps? The reasons for this growth in obesity are complex and pundits of every stripe were quick to rush in, with Tebbit famously blaming it on the breakdown of family life and gay marriage.

The report claims around 22% of Britons are obese and that childhood obesity especially is on the rise. Generalising, people take too little exercise and eat too much fatty food. This is exacerbated by children not learning how to prepare real food, either in schools or at home. Advertising helps the big multinationals sell more of their unhealthy products to us, and, in an uncanny echo of the McLibel case, is targeted at children. The Labour Sports Minister even backed a scheme whereby schools got sports equipment if pupils collected thousands of chocolate wrappers.

However, several questions need asking about all this hype, even if it does have the pleasing affects of reigning in soft drink and fast food companies.

Are we really overweight? And if so, what do we do about it? When humans were evolving, their diet probably had a lot in common with other apes – fruit,

seeds, nuts, berries, roots – and meat, fish and honey when we could get them. Foods like these – rich in protein, amino acids and sugar – were a rare treat for our distant ancestors and will have given them a physiological buzz. As anthropologist Chris Knight said of cave paintings, "they weren't painting nuts".

Today, we still get that buzz, which is why chocolate or cream cakes or a fry-up help cheer us up.

For most of humanity's history, its diet consisted mainly of fruit, vegetables, nuts with the occasional meat, fish and honey. Grains and other starches would have been eaten, but not in the quantities we do today, nor to the exclusion of other types of food.

The end of that scarcity of the foods we get a buzz from is a relatively recent phenomenon, if only for a small minority of the world's population.

We no longer need to go to all that effort and danger to achieve it – we can pop out to the shops and buy it. Effectively, we are genetically conditioned to want these foods and unless we show some restraint, or run out of money, can quite easily bulk up. That in itself is not necessarily a problem, though you'd never tell from the succession of middle-aged men with paunches on television telling us to eat less. Regular exercise, or lack of it, is a more important indicator of overall health.

It was only a couple of years ago that government ministers were worried about anorexia and that everyone (but young women mainly) looked too thin. The largest scale survey of obesity, conducted in Norway over an interval of nine years and involving over a million people, found that those who were overweight by up to two stone (13kg) lived longer than those who were the 'ideal' weight. Quite where the ideal weights might come from, and whether the diet-food marketing



companies had any input to them I just don't know.

In the period of the last twenty five years, roughly the length of this survey, people getting bigger is only one trend. Obesity may be up 400% over 25 years, but car and television ownership doubled in the same period.

Inequality exploded, with the gap between rich and poor racing apart in the 1980s in particular. The nature of the work that was done in this country also changed, with physical jobs like mining being decimated and the growth in often-sedentary service sector jobs like call centres. Car culture, while not at US levels, is still ridiculously embedded with most journeys being relatively short and the people who make them not even considering the health benefits of walking. The huge increase in inequality has had a knock-on psychological effect on those at the bottom of the heap. If every message you get from society around you is telling you you're worthless, then the psychological value of comfort food outweighs any effect on your body, particularly if your esteem is already low. The overweight middle classes

have the self-esteem to want to do something about it, coupled with the means to pay for it, like joining a gym or driving to out of town leisure centres. Or buying expensive 'diet' foods.

Orwell famously observed that "a millionaire may enjoy breakfasting off orange juice and Ryvita biscuits; an unemployed man doesn't." Many people, particularly if they live on edge of town estates, may find they inhabit a 'food desert', where there are no fresh foods available for miles. Again, this is only a problem if you don't have the means to get to where it is available.

Even if the poor want to eat healthily they face an uphill struggle. As with most things, the burden falls heaviest on women, particularly those with families and on a tight budget. Juggling commitments with time and not enough money means that properly prepared healthy food becomes a lot more difficult. So, we can work out why some of us are getting fatter, even if we're not as fat as we're made out to be.

For once, there are solutions to this problem that anarchists can contribute to without waiting for the revolution.

Most anarchists are conscious of the food they eat, whether as vegetarians or vegans, or just because they don't trust the food industry. While I don't think we should be telling people what to eat, we have things to share on what is good, how to cook and prepare, and how to share what's been produced. There are cafés associated with most social centres in this country and even some allotment schemes. Critical mass and organised rambles show we are conscious of the need for exercise and the need for it to be safe. And one of the best ways to improve your self-esteem is to be involved in struggle! The government isn't willing to enforce stricter labelling and more wholesome ingredients, and a lot of the response to this debate asks whether the government ought to be involved. Labour are so sensitive to allegations of the 'nanny state' and don't give a thought to the tremendous power of corporate advertising.

A lot of this is common sense – it seems funny that while governments can do so little where a bit of self-reliance and mutual aid could do so much.

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Editorial

One of the pleasures of the recent 'Super Thursday' election results was watching New Labour's Cool Britannia bullshit blow back in its face. When Blair and co came into office they embarked on a strategy of constitutional modernisation based around the introduction of devolved government for Scotland and Wales, the restoration of a strategic authority for London, and a limited reform of the House of Lords. Alongside this went an attempt to re-forge a 'British' national identity based on the notion of England, Scotland, Wales and the north of Ireland as a 'British' archipelago. As always with New Labour, this re-branding of Britain had an ulterior agenda. A government delivered into office on the back of two decades worth of anger at the Tory agenda, determined to use the 'nation' as a shield against the deepened divisions of class which would result from its low-wage, pro-privatisation policies. The Flag of St George would be used to bind over the gaping wounds of Blairite inequality.

The 'national interest' required £6 billion to be spent on the war in Iraq, and the national interest would be the justification for the cuts, which would have to follow. Enemies were defined without the asylum seekers supposedly waiting in Sangatte to leach off 'our' welfare state- and within the threat of Muslim terror in every mosque. All of this in an attempt to hide the fact that the real enemy of the 'British' working class - capital - was being fattened by Blair and the working class's expense.

New Labour's 'reward' came on Super Thursday. The UK independence Party were the only real winners, 20% of its electorate were former Labour voters and 45% former Tories. The 'Cool Britannia' pose has cost New Labour dear. Its patriotic rhetoric has cut against its pro-Europe agenda to such an extent that it has fed the growth of the UKIP. Voters distrust Blair so much that even our very own 'Mr Orange', millionaire sleaze merchant, Robert Kilroy-Silk, can seem like a clean pair of hands.

All of this presents a challenge to the left. It is always assumed that 'progressives' should support the European Union. This is bullshit. The EU is a bosses' club and a junket for second-rate politicians. It reeks of corruption. European Monetary Union was the pretext for a European wide attack on welfare and wages. The EU is no more and no less than a Europe-wide free trade zone policed by a Europe-wide security apparatus, with its borders closed to the poor of the rest of the world so that it can better exploit the poor of eastern Europe. There is nothing about it which anyone who claims to be committed to the working class can justifiably support.

When the anti-Europeans say that embracing the EU constitution will lead to an abandonment of national sovereignty, they are correct. Why should the left-supposedly committed to deepening democracy- sign up to an agenda designed to reduce even the 'democracy' we are allowed? It would be a fatal mistake to allow the likes of Kilroy-Silk and the bug-eyed Frederick Forsythe to set the anti-EU agenda. We need to be able to fight on more than one front-to resist a bosses' Europe and the notion of national identity per se. We also need to be able to distinguish between anti-parliamentary politics and opposition to voting as a strategy. If we're offered a referendum on the EU constitution, why not use it to fight for a massive working class 'No' to Blair and the CBI's pro-EU dream?

Commentary

GM extra

Iain McKay ('Good moaning', 12th June) wants to know if I am really asking us to support the introduction of a crop, etc., etc. I am not. The system of manufacturing herbicide-resistant crops, and drenching fields in herbicide, is too inimical to wildlife to get my support. It may be okay in America, where three quarters of the land is wilderness and arable farms are seen as factories, but not in this country, where there is no wilderness and our only wildlife is in farms and gardens. The GM crops I welcome are those which improve the chances of wildlife, for instance crops which are resistant to disease and make poison sprays unnecessary.

In the same sentence, Iain says I claim the test of GM fodder maize "proves its safety". I make no such claim. In matters of safety, as Iain put it in an earlier letter, "we can't be sure". Given a machine, rockpile, foodstuff or anything else which is suspected of being dangerous, the best anyone can do is test it rigorously, and if the suspected danger does not appear, assume that the thing is safe for practical purposes. Just one instance of actual harm done would show the assumption to be wrong, but "we can't be sure" is a philosophical truism of no practical value.

The British field trials, of herbicide-resistant cropping systems, showed amazingly and appallingly that in the case of fodder-maize, systems already in common use did even more damage to wildlife. This left the government with no reason not to grant a licence for herbicide-resistant fodder maize. The anti-GM crowd demanded that the government should ban it anyway, a demand which is plainly incompatible with anarchism. Iain McKay, an anarchist who is usually quite thoughtful, reiterated this demand in Freedom (20th March). I wrote saying it was not an anarchist demand. In the subsequent exchange of letters, I have defended an anarchist attitude, while Iain has ignored the anarchist case, and gone on about the unknown dangers of GM.

Let's have it out in the open. Is Iain really asking us to support a ban on GM crops, regardless of whether they are harmful or not?

Donald Room

On Bakunin

Paul-François Tremlett (Commentary, 12th June), in his exegesis of Bakunin's ideas, makes much of their rootedness in nineteenth century thought.

These ideas (of human progress, mediated through scientific inquiry and technological innovation; the leading of humanity out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of rationality), Mr Tremlett seems to suggest, are of a sort of 'period' interest to us, now - a historical curio.

He cannot have been reading the Commentary column of Freedom very regularly; nor have attended, say, the London Anarchist Forum very frequently over the past few years. If he had, I can assure him that it would not have been long before he encountered people who appear, still, to pin most of their hope for humanity on the march of science and technology (a recent correspondent to Freedom assured us we would one day "... worship the genes").

Later in his piece, Mr Tremlett calls attention to the somewhat redemptory tone Bakunin uses in describing the veritable 'promised land' represented by the soon-to-be-realised ultimate triumph of human progress.

Again, this is *still* the underlying feeling one gets from many of the apostles of 'progress' one meets today. If the language they use is less redolent of nineteenth century Christianity than Bakunin's, it is simply that they have been less exposed to Christian ideas and language than a reasonably educated person of Bakunin's time would have been.

The kind and degree of faith (I use the word advisedly) that they repose in material progress is, if anything, more unrealistic than are most intelligent religionists' hopes of salvation through religious belief.

In terms of evidence for the above: human societies, since the rise of agriculture/civilisation/ industrialisation seem, at each stage of development, to have produced at least as many mechanisms for the immiseration and control of their populations as for their happiness and liberation. In addition, there is and always has been an irreducible element of the tragic in any human life, properly examined. All this the technophiles seem unable to accept.

By contrast, a good deal of religion has within its cannon several millennia of meditation on the human condition, and more modest expectations as to the degree to which that condition might be ameliorated. Common to a number of religious traditions is the belief that one way to bring about any such amelioration is through a 'turning of the heart', a change in the individual attitude towards, among other things, the world and one's fellow humans. This latter notion still seems not to have occurred to some professed anarchists as being a pre-requisite for an anarchist society.

Finally, a sophisticated, thoughtful religionist is quite likely to assign a speculative, symbolic value to religious doctrines of redemption, salvation and afterlife. Whereas, some of the apostles of progress that I have encountered within anarchism hold *their* salvation myth as something akin to a holy writ.

Alfred Todd

Respect

Apologies to Paul Maguire if my article of 29th May didn't have the in-depth analysis of RESPECT's politics and shortcomings he wanted. In my defence, I had only 600 words to sum up several different parties, Respect wasn't the focus of the piece and it was in fact satire, not serious comment. Well done to him for writing his own analysis though, and very thorough he was too, though I think he overestimates the nature of Muslim co-operation with RESPECT, which will be neither lasting nor indicative of any political 'awakening'.

Rob Ray

I don't know if Paul Maguire is a naïve individual speaking for himself or the mouthpiece for a cynical leftist group but it's certain that what he proposes runs against every conceivable anarchist principle.

The essence of anarchy is individual freedom drawn out of a communistic society; nowhere in Paul Maguire's endorsement of the Respect front does he come close to articulating that goal.

Under present circumstances anarchists explicitly reject that state and any attempt to reform the state by means of either democracy or coup d'etat, which would seem to conclusively cancel out any participation in the left in general or the SWP in particular.

Anarchists also explicitly reject all religion because they see them as institutions which defend the ruling class

by disguising social conditions through hierarchical spiritualism, this rejection would seem to cancel out any alliance with the barbaric, anti-human, mediaevalist imperialism of Islam. Finally, and most importantly, anarchists reject capitalism and the class system which perpetuates it; this cancels out any proposed cross-class political alliances with wealthy businessmen and racketeers such as George Galloway.

In recent issues of Freedom there have been calls for tactical voting in elections, I think this is excusable if basically incorrect but what Paul Maguire proposes goes way beyond all that and the end goal of his 'socialism' appears entirely divorced from anarchist ideas and practices. The SWP/Respect are not building on the anti-war movement as Paul Maguire says, they dispersed and destroyed it, just as they destroy every-thing they appropriate, anti-globalisation for example, and wreck everything they don't. Their state function consists of nothing more than the channelling of spontaneous popular dissent into useless politics. They refuse the anarchist conception that the struggle against capital is a struggle of social-economic positions and not of political issues and institutions.

It is important when challenged by the left that we hold our ground and stick to our principles. Just because it is election time we shouldn't run around like headless chickens, grasping at some or other patched-up legitimised political 'alternatives' that capital generates for us. If there are still anarchists that do not understand how Respect is the left wing of the state and that it has nothing to do with a future society but is entirely wrapped up with current formations of power, then things are in a pretty bad way. Nevertheless we shouldn't be too panicked by Respect's 'advances', if it had any significance at all it would have done better than one percent of the vote. Let's face it, nobody likes a lefty, nobody likes to be taken for a ride, people see that as the left's attempts at populism, their recruiting via issues, are a rip-off and a gimmick. As a strategy for power it is simply unethical, dishonest and illogical to modify or downplay political opinions so as to recruit 'muslims' or whoever and then later hope to subvert them into a more appropriate party line at a later date, it is also a strategy that is unlikely to succeed. I do not see the significance of muslim youth as Paul Maguire does, on the contrary, our priorities are the atheists in the 'muslim' community and atheists across the Asian world, their rejection of god will necessarily lead to a rejection of all imposed authority. My message to those who are tempted by leftism is: don't panic, hold your nerve, hold your principles, you do nobody any favours by siding with those you know to be wrong, their moment will pass, it is passing now. Bye bye Globalise Resistance, Socialist Alliance, Anti-Nazi League. Bye bye Respect.

David Quick

I was horrified to read Paul Maguire's letter in the last Freedom (12th June 2004). Whilst I agree that the editorial critique of RESPECT could have been better, it was still far closer to anarchist ideas than his letter! George Galloway and the SWP have done very little to progress working class politics, and the RESPECT coalition was nothing more than an attempt to profit from the anti-war movements widespread support and drag it even further away from direct action into purile electoralism. He should know better!

John Walsh

Drugs hell

This letter may well be a bit late, the article that I am referring to being more than a month old. However, I was more than a little bit disappointed to see not a single reply to Marie Jean's article on current drugs legislation (1st May). It was tiresome in the extreme to see the same old anarchists perspectives rehashed and spewed out like the worthless bile that they are in the pages of Freedom, and to also go completely unchallenged. Surely anarchist thought has moved on slightly since the days of Malatesta. The latest issue of Freedom has a survey asking in what direction Freedom readers would like to see the paper move. How about forward?

Anyway, after reading the aforementioned article, I was interested to note that in the following issue Richard Alexander stated that it was "incompatible with anarchism for anarchists to demand that the government allow GM products." Now, having picked up my understanding of anarchy from within the pages of Freedom, I may not be best qualified to comment, but someone else must see a discrepancy here? Surely the same arguments in a political theory should apply to both drugs and GM?

Let's see how that would work in practice. On the one hand, allowing GM products would benefit big business. What do you imagine would happen with the decriminalisation of cannabis? Thousands of blissed out hippies smoking? Their own home-grown, or a Starbucks-Style chain of Cannabis Cafés? The laws of consumerism suggest the latter. And what about Smack and Crack, the ultimate Marketable Products? Would Anarchists give these to business too, or suspend their anti-state intervention principles and regulate the buying and selling of these drugs? Bit of a minefield if you ask me.

On the other hand, the banning of GM crops. According to Marie Jean's article, this would lead to criminals moving in to sell these products ('cos once they're banned we'll all have to try the, just to see what we're missing out on) and support groups having to be set up (her reference to Alcoholics Anonymous being set up as a direct result of prohibition is her most cretinous statement - ask any AA member and watch them laugh their heads off). Now, is anyone else a bit confused?

Now that I've got that off my chest, on to more relevant issues. Perhaps in the next issue of Freedom, you should do another survey. 'How do our readers propose anarchists can reverse the damage done to our movement by Kitten from Big Brother?' Hahahahaha! You must be thanking Jesus, Buddha, the prophet Mohamed and David Blaine all at once that she only lasted a week. It has to be mentioned!

Stevy JR

Quiz answers

1. They supported it. Presumably critically but without illusions.
2. It's the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employees) Regulations 1981. They govern what a new employer can do if they take over the business of another and are most often cited when services are privatised, though they apply in mergers and buy-outs as well.
3. Nelson Mandela
4. When it was set up, it was the proportion of unemployed. It was to rise much higher!

REVIEW

Rich Cross looks at the new anthology of Crass lyrics and analyses the contributions of the band to British anarchism

In 1982, as the rise of anarcho-punk continued apace, Crass – the band who served as the movement's catalysts and collective figure-heads – republished the collection of essays that had accompanied their fourth studio LP *Christ: The Album* in book form, hoping to attract the attention of those "that might like the ideas but can't stand the music."

It was an acknowledgement of one of the many paradoxes which surrounded anarcho-punk: that the same music and counter-cultural practice which made anarcho-punk so compellingly attractive to many, also repelled many others who found the subculture's output unlistenable and unfathomable. For those left puzzled or unmoved, its calls for 'anarchy, peace and freedom' remained inaudible. And yet, if the collective behind Crass had chosen to rely on the written word alone, it's probable that their message would have languished unread on the shelves of back-street radical bookshops.

"In attempts to moderate us they ask why we don't write love songs. What is it that we sing then? Our love of life is total, everything we do is an expression of that. Everything that we write is a love song." Crass – Yes Sir, I Will

Some of those determined to 'congratulate' Class War for supposedly reinvigorating and challenging the anarchist movement in the mid-1980s (with a politics no less romanticised or utopian – in its own way – than Crass's own) remain reluctant to acknowledge anarcho-punk's own vital contribution to British anarchism's resurgence. For all its uncertainty over the dynamic connecting personal and collective 'revolution', and its contradictory class politics, anarcho-punk at least insisted that radical individual practice had to inform and underwrite social revolutionary ambition – a truism that many who went on to abandon

'lifestyle-ism' in pursuit of simpler picket-line politics had later to relearn.

However contested the legacy of Crass remains, there can be little doubt about the enormous significance of the subculture that the band inspired – not least to a fractured and declining anarchist movement in danger of being eclipsed on all sides as the 1970s burnt themselves out. At a time when traditional anarchist events might attract only the battle-hardened few, and anarchist publications were struggling even to maintain their existing readerships, hundreds of thousands of fresh young militants were immersing themselves in the febrile political and musical culture of anarcho-punk. Certainly, a good few of those caught up in the excitement of the movement were more interested in the noise and the shocking imagery on display than the intricacies of the politics. And yet a significant proportion of those excited by the political responses which anarcho-punk demanded, sought to make good on their new commitment to the anarchist cause. This belief encouraged the growth of a network of bands and fanzines committed to combatting the commercial corruption of punk, and to recapturing its true subversive potential.

The publication by Pomona of a comprehensive anthology of Crass lyrics, gives those who weren't around at the time (as well as those who were but who couldn't stand the racket) a chance to explore the contours of the band's political and poetic vision. Those looking for strategic clarity or for bullet-point political platforms were always going to be disappointed by anarcho-punk's manifestoes, but for visceral and passionate denunciations of the alienation, exploitation and war-lust of world capitalism (and the fragility of the war-state in the event of our collective rejection of its authority), little anarchist writing of the time can come close.

In *Love Songs*, Crass's usual corporate responsibility for the band's output is suspended, and the authors of the individual song lyrics are revealed for the first time. This actually serves to prove that most members of the band



did contribute to what was a genuinely inclusive writing process. For those who know the material, there are some interesting surprises: American poetess Annie Anxiety is revealed as the authoress of the stunning *Shaved Women* from 1979; while much of the most militant material from 1984, when the group's residual pacifism was under acute strain, is shown to have been written by Pete Wright and Gee Suss, as well as Penny Rimbaud.

In his introduction, Rimbaud combines a thoughtful and sometimes witty account of the band's work, with an exploration of anarcho-punk's reverberations in the present day, and a

contemptuous dismissal of the anarchist pretensions of punk 'celebrity' Mr J. Rotten. A preface by Pomona's Mark Hodgkinson reflects unsentimentally on what it was like to be a young participant and observer caught up in the original anarcho-punk wave.

In 1983, Crass's own frustration with the 'inadequacy' of their work saw the band record, and tour with, the first truly deconstructed punk concept album, *Yes Sir, I Will*. The political impact of this creative decision was decidedly uneven, and in retrospect it can be seen as heralding the start of the movement's own endgame. For Crass, fervently "concerned with ideas, not

rock and roll," the music was only ever a delivery system – yet that medium sometimes obscured the message, and Crass came to feel trapped in a role that was alien to them. Crass's hope – that punk rock might be moulded into a force strong enough to challenge the foundations of the state – might ultimately have been unrealisable, but the lyrics collated in *Love Songs* serve as a fitting testament to the vigour of anarcho-punk's world-changing ambitions, their power undiminished by the passage of more than twenty years. *Crass, Love Songs* (Hebden Bridge: Pomona, 2004), pay no more than £9.99. www.pomonauk.com

BOOKS

A Voyage to New Orleans by Élisée Reclus translated and edited by John Clark and Camille Martin Glad Day Books, £10

Élisée Reclus was one of the most prominent anarchists in nineteenth century France, both as an activist and as a theoretician. He started to use the term only a few years after Proudhon had been the first to adopt it. He and his brother Elie were radicalised by the events of the 1848 revolutions. Aged 21 he attempted to raise a revolt in their home town. It was a complete failure

and he was forced to leave the country for England.

After a largely biographical introduction, the central section is that of the title. It takes a while to get going, the first half is a description of the journey. It starts with a sea voyage and Reclus, at 23, already shows the powers of observation and almost poetic style which were to lead him to become an eminent geographer. There is then the journey up the Mississippi. A couple of times they got stuck on mud banks and had to send for a steam boat to pull them off. He finally arrives in New Orleans where his powers of social observation

and commentary show. He discusses the widespread corruption and drunkenness. He doesn't have much time for 'Yankees', considering them coarse and abrupt, although he admires their energy. They have been overcome by commerce. He is very conscious of the conditions of the blacks (who in the manner of the times he calls 'Negroes'). He hated racism and was appalled by a slave market. (This was about eight years before the Civil War – not that that did much to change conditions in the South.) He had a job as a tutor to the children of a plantation owner. He never really fitted into Creole (French

dialect-speaking) society. They liked and respected him but never fully accepted him as they were too clannish. This experience confirmed his hatred of slavery and after a couple of years he felt he had to leave to travel in Latin America.

The next section is his correspondence home to his brother and mother. Here his humanity comes out. He comments widely on social, economic and political matters. The final section is an essay by John Clark surveying Reclus's views on a wide variety of issues, including environmentalism. Following his travels,

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Books

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Reclus returned to France where he was heavily involved with radical politics. He also developed his international reputation as a geographer. In the repression after the Paris Commune he was jailed, and was due to be deported but following public outcry his sentence was reduced to ten years' exile in Switzerland. Here he came into contact with the Jura Federation and the international anarchist movement. He spent the last part of his life in Belgium where he died in 1905 aged 75.

David Peers

Available from Freedom for £10 (add £1 towards postage and packing in the UK, £2 elsewhere).

What is Anarchism?

by Alexander Berkman
AK Press, £10

I expect many readers will already have (or read) at least part of this book, as parts of it have previously been issued by Dover, Freedom Press and Phoenix Press, amongst others, in various editions over the years, since its first publication in 1927. This version is a republication of the 1937 edition originally entitled 'What is Communist Anarchism?' complete with the introduction by Emma Goldman together with a new intro by Barry Pateman.

Alexander Berkman is one of anarchism's better known 'heroes', having attempted the assassination of a murderous US capitalist, done time for anti-war activities in the USA, then been deported to Russia in time to document the destruction of the revolution by the Bolsheviks and then live out his remaining years as an exile before finally committing suicide in 1936 rather than become a burden on his colleagues due to his failing health. Oh, and he was Emma Goldman's partner for a while too and helped on Mother Earth and then issued his own paper The Blast! Berkman was a totally committed anarchist all his adult life and this book can be seen as a summation of his ideas of what anarchism (and more particularly communist anarchism – he dismisses other variants such as collectivism and individualism as unworkable) was all about; the critique of the state, capitalism and organised religion; and what an anarchist revolution meant and how an anarchist society could work.

I doubt if anyone would claim Berkman as an 'original thinker' on the subject. He was, rather, representing the mainstream of anarchist communism as it then was. He had experience of 'propaganda by deed' and 'revolution by dictatorship' and he was firmly opposed to both in any shape or form. His critique of the state and capital are fairly basic – but then this book was intended for the ordinary workingman (and such sexist language has been retained throughout although it is clear

that Berkman obviously intended the term to refer to all workers, male and female) rather than an intellectual audience and the text is written in the form of a discussion with an interested outsider.

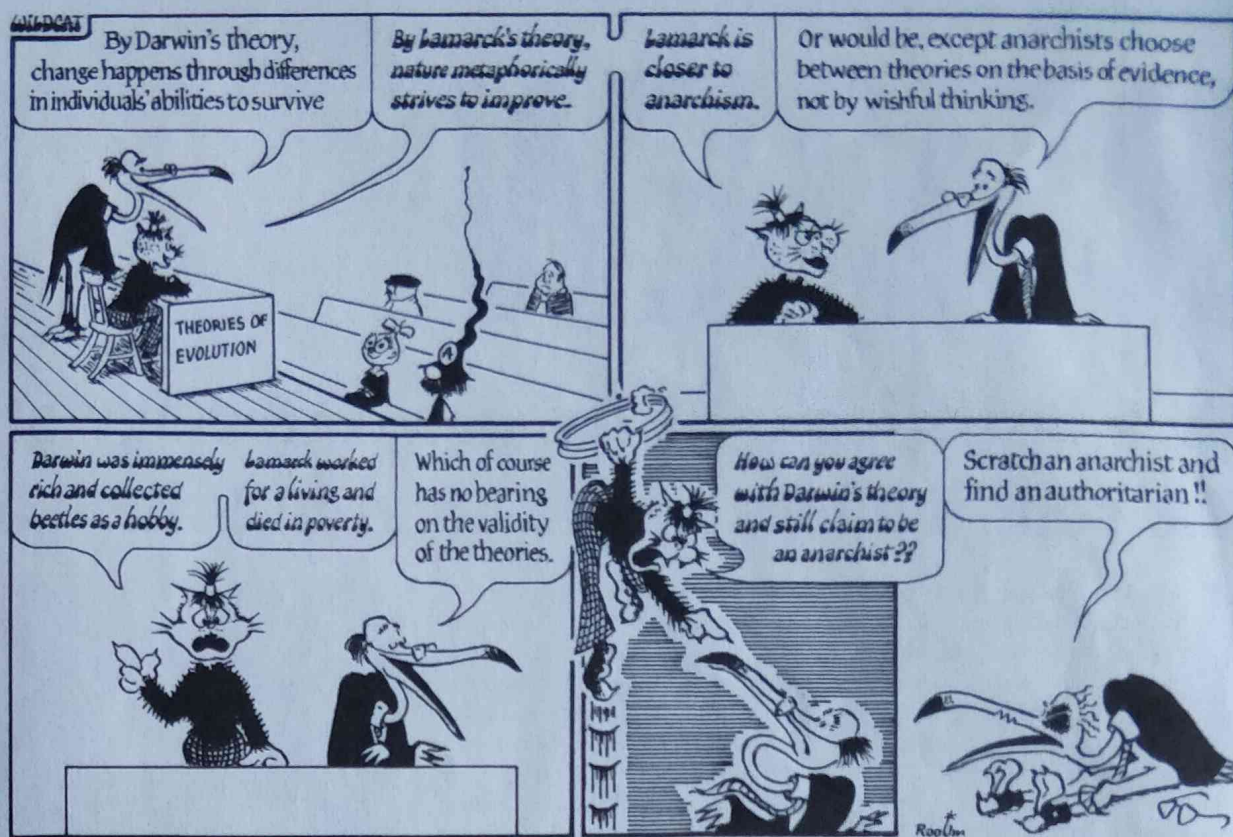
It is to be expected that the language and historical examples that Berkman uses now look pretty dated. The ideas in many respects, of course, remain valid, but the book no longer functions as it was originally intended. It is a classic text and one that hopefully will serve more as an inspiration for a similar text for the 21st century. Where Berkman scores heavily, for me, is in his description in the later chapters on the Russian Revolution and how it was defeated by the political party that claimed to embody it, the Bolsheviks. His first-hand experience and bitterness shows all too clearly that the Bolshevik road is the road to disaster for any social revolution.

As he clearly states on page 185: "If your object is to secure liberty, you must first learn to do without authority and compulsion. If you intend to live in peace and harmony with your fellow men, you and they should cultivate brotherhood and respect for each other. If you want to work together with them for your mutual benefit, you must practice co-operation. The social revolution means much more than the reorganisation of conditions only; it means the establishment of new human values and social relationships, a changed attitude of man to man, as of one free and independent to his equal; it means a different spirit in individual and collective life, and that spirit cannot be born overnight. It is a spirit to be cultivated, to be nurtured and reared, as the most delicate flower of a new and beautiful existence."

In short, the means will determine the ends and if one wants a society based on equality, mutual aid and liberty, one has to start practicing it before the revolution actually happens, during the revolution and after. It will not happen all by itself, it has to be done by the people concerned.

As for the actuality of a social revolution, Berkman didn't claim to be clairvoyant, but drew some fairly common sense conclusions from the Russian experience and from the logic of the situation. Quite simply, any successful revolution will need to keep people fed, clothed, sheltered and engaged in essential productive work from the start. It will need to be organised from the base on a federal basis, with the emphasis on as much self-sufficiency as possible, especially if the revolution takes place in a restricted geographical area.

Whilst one has to agree with this, one does now wonder just how practicable this would turn out to be. With the internationalisation of production (and services) with the corresponding destruction and/or removal of previously existing productive capacity, not to mention the uneven and unequal distribution of natural resources, one



wonders just how far a country such as Britain could be self-sufficient in the event of a revolution. Whilst it is true that a certain amount of productive capacity could be reassigned to essentials, so much of the raw materials and food supplies, not to mention energy resources, are imported, a revolution would be hard pressed to meet the basic needs of people here without rapidly arranging some forms of overseas trade or barter. (And what exactly would be able to export?)

However, that wasn't the situation when Berkman was writing this book, primarily for an (Anglo-Saxon) American audience and one can't really fault the book for that. It does however mean that present day readers may find his faith in the 'toiling masses' ability to overcome all such problems somewhat difficult to believe.

That said this is definitely one book that deserves the title of 'classic', and one that hopefully will inspire a new generation of activists to write their own updated version. As for this text, the layout and printing are excellent, with only a couple of typos (doubtless left in for people with nothing to do but pick nits) with one glaring error in Barry Pateman's introduction where, on page viii, he states that Alexander Berkman "died on 28 June 1926, three weeks before the Spanish revolution broke out". How that howler got through I don't know!

So, even if you've got a previous edition of Berkman's book do yourself a favour and get a copy of this and give it another read and then start thinking about how you'd go about writing a better and more up-to-date version!

Recommended (with a caveat that the language is dated).

Richard Alexander

Available from Freedom for £10 (add £1 towards postage and packing in the UK, £2 elsewhere).

A sideways look

It seems that the notion that oil will run out (which ought to be self-evident) is gaining ground. Last year the Economist used the story on its cover and it also featured on last month's National Geographic. The experts all disagree, of course, but only in terms of when. Optimists like Exxon-Mobil believe that it won't run out for seventy years. Pessimists like the Oil Depletion Analysis Centre think it's already peaked and we're downhill from here. Good news for primitivists, perhaps?

The oil industry and capitalists generally are pinning their hopes on enhanced technology to be able to extract a greater proportion of the oil from the reserves; at the moment it is only 30-35%. They also cling to the belief that higher prices will make inaccessible reserves worth exploiting, like the oil-bearing shales of Western Canada. Commentators with a bit more of a sense of ecology are hoping that capitalists will see the potential new markets in alternative energy sources and invest in them. All well and good, but time is running out and I see few attempts to come to terms with what oil depletion might mean for everyday life, particularly in the resource-hungry rich world.

The abundance of oil has created whole industries (plastics and petrochemicals), enabled industrial farming with its dependence on fertilisers and created a pattern of human settlement completely dependent on mass transportation (suburbia). The entire world economy is highly sensitive to oil price fluctuations. Self-employed truckers recently blockaded ports and highways in California when the rising price of diesel threatened their livelihoods. A mere hint of fuel blockades has the supposed 'Iron' chancellor 'reconsidering' raising duty on fuel. Budget airline Easyjet have seen their profits hammered from just a small price rise in oil – but do they really think that when it's truly scarce it's going to be used for flying the middle classes to their second homes in Provence? Tesco has seen profits soar by squeezing producers and ruthless use of the supply chain. Low transport and packaging costs are crucial to their entire way of doing business – and the same is true of internet retailers. Watch the price of fuel – and plastics – rise and you can guess who the cost will be passed onto.

Not that anyone with power is addressing the other big problem associated with oil – global warming. This may be because, like Exxon-Mobil and George W. Bush, they don't believe there's a link. However, this week the geologist who is the new chairman of

Shell admitted that the threat of climate change "makes him very worried for the planet."

It may be that they are following the dictum of economist John Maynard Keynes, who said that in the "long run we are all dead", at the time an argument for economic intervention and against just assuming that everything would work out. That long run may be shorter than they think.

Svartfrosk

Freesheets



The Underdog
issue no 9
June 2004

Now onto its ninth issue, this excellent bulletin from Walthamstow Anarchist Group is full of local news and reports from local campaigns, such as campaigns against mobile phone masts and plans for turning the old cinema into a church, as well as advice on surviving at work, and a piece on the Mental Health Act.

One of the best things about it is the way it presents anarchist ideas – they come across as fresh and relevant without seeming dull or dated, such as the 'Wot anarchists fink' section on the back. It succeeds in taking local issues and then putting across the anarchist perspective on them, which probably explains its popularity in the area, you can pick up copies of The Underdog in local shops, pubs and supermarkets and even a kebab shop.

This is a brilliant example of what local anarchist groups can do to raise their profile in their areas and is well worth reading. To receive each issue of the Underdog send six stamps to WAG, PO Box 35832, London, E11 3WT or you can download it from their website at www.walthamstowanarchy.org.uk

The quiz

1. What was the view of 'Militant' (now the Socialist Party) and the SWP when troops were sent into Northern Ireland in 1969?
2. What is TUPE?
3. About whom did South African communist Joe Slovo say, "(he) contradicted the Marxist theory of history, which is that historical forces and not individuals determine events."?
4. Where does the name of the One in Twelve Club in Bradford come from?

Answers on page 6

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