

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

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PFI FIRM RIPS OFF MILLIONS

EXCLUSIVE

Freightliner, a rail haulage firm bought from the government by its management in 1996, is to be sold in a move that will generate a multi-million pound profit for individuals and investors. Unions and transport advocates have been left fuming at the massive risk-free profit generated for its owners, amid claims that the company was undersold by the last Tory government, and then plied with government subsidies in an attempt to keep it in profit.

Originally sold to a consortium comprised of the management team of British Rail's subsidiary Railfreight Distribution (RfD) and city investors Electra and 3i for £5m, the company is now being sold for £96m, making a healthy 1,820% profit. The management team, owners of roughly one third of the company are set to pocket £28.8m between them, with individuals such as CEO Alan Galley and Finance Director Dough Downie pocketing up to £5m.

Ironically, the transformation of RfD into Freightliner is pointed to as a rare success of the railway privatisation project, having transformed an operating loss into a £14.8m profit last year. Alan Galley was even awarded an OBE in 2003 for his services to the British Railways.

The management team that 'transformed' RfD into Freightliner was the same that had previously run the company as a state owned loss. Profits came easily with £75m in state subsidies

since privatisation and the inevitable attacks on working conditions. Train drivers for the company earn just £6 an hour and often have to work fifty to sixty hours a week at unsociable times. Investors have been keen to invest in a seemingly risk free project, with the government prepared to pick up the slack in lean years, and maintain the infrastructure upon which the company depends.

Rail unions denounced the sale plan as yet another example of privatisation acting as a licence to print money, ASLEF national organiser Andy Reed observed that "since it was privatised, it has become nothing but an asset to enable rich people to grow richer. The public has been robbed, and the last Conservative government stands accused of handling stolen goods." Bob Crow, leader of the RMT, added to the indignation "this is daylight robbery, Freightliners was built up at taxpayers expense, flogged off at a fraction of its real value and then still fed huge sums of public subsidy. Now it is being sold on to make a handful of individuals £30m richer."

Since privatisation, the government has found itself throwing increasingly huge subsidies at profit making railway companies. In the last year before the sell-off the public sector invested £1.325bn in British Rail, a figure that had reached £3.8bn by last year. Revenue has increased only slightly and diminished services were reported almost across the board.

Jack Ray



Over 10,000 people took to the streets of Washington DC on 20th January to demonstrate during the inauguration of George Bush. Almost ignored by much of the world's media, thousands of protesters lined the parade route, but many thousands more were prevented from reaching assembly points by a massive security operation. There were several marches, a critical mass bicycle protest, breakaway marches, building occupations and rallies. At several points police used batons and large amounts of pepper spray to keep protesters back from the parade route as some fencing was removed and security entrances blocked (see pictures above). Protests continued into the evening with the arrest total running into the hundreds. For further information and more pictures of what happened take a look at www.indymedia.org.uk

DEPRESSING

Lies are 'truth'. The broadcast media in the United States are notoriously conservative, formulaic, conformist and monolithic. This is partly because outlets are concentrated in relatively few hands. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) continues to attempt even greater concentration and restriction of media ownership. It will be worth watching to see who is appointed as new FCC chair after the departure of Colin Powell's son Michael. This is a powerful position, and Bush can be expected to appoint someone to try to more effectively suppress dissent, push state propaganda,

and ensure increased commercial advantage for media corporations.

It's dangerous enough for state and corporate propaganda machines to elevate trivia and use highly selective filtering and slanting of information to generate permanent fear in their audiences. Yet more harm is done when the state tries to manipulate 'consumers' of news covertly, without apparent sanctions. This can happen in part because of a climate in which the political establishment repeatedly tries to brand all radio and television as 'left wing'. Much as the neo-conservative regime calls war 'peace', slaughter 'progress' and debt 'fiscal success'.

It would be one thing if the mass of daily disinformation merely reflected the wilful, semi-voluntary attempts of the media to support the state. But when the state actively sets out to abuse media channels to promote its agenda, another line has been crossed. Last month just such a series of crimes surfaced.

Armstrong Williams is a widely syndicated columnist and commentator. He prides himself on his advocacy of 'Christian and conservative values' and the 'restoration of morality in our society', and has been called "one of the most recognised conservative voices in America." Now he admits that he took \$241,000 from the US government to promote Bush's No Child Left Behind Act.

In a public 'apology' Williams then wrote: "I agreed to run a paid ad on my syndicated television show, promoting the Department of Education's No Child Left Behind Act. I subsequently used my column space to support that legislation. This represents an obvious conflict of interests. At the same time, I understand that I exercised bad judgement in running paid advertising for an issue that I frequently write about in my column."

Yet he somehow still tries to have it both ways: "People have used this conflict

► page 4, column 3

COP SHOP SQUATTED

Stepnay's Arbour Square police station in London has been occupied by over twenty squatters. The station, notorious in its day, was lying unused, but has now been converted into a community living space and social centre housing art and musical events.

Still owned by police, plans were under way to sell the site for luxury flats, but this has been put off until a one day 'fast-track' hearing can be held on 23rd March.

Barney, from the Advisory Service for Squatters, said: "They were granted an adjournment because it's not quite clear whether the people are entitled to it."

The building is thought to be haunted by the spirit of a policeman who committed suicide there in 1941, and urban legends tell of secret caches of smuggled goods from the days of the blitz. There are tales that underneath the building is a tunnel leading to the old Thames police station, where corrupt policemen would hide goods.

The squatters, who are there on slightly more legal business, have put up notices proclaiming the building is full, and citing their right to be there. In a possible nod to their building's past, they have raised a skull and crossbones up the flagpole.

Running their own generators, the group sleep in one section and run social events in the other. The group have held the site for over a month so far.

Until recently the police used Arbour as a police dog training area.



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FREEDOM

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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

Yet again it looks as if this issue will be late arriving with subscribers, although it will be available in the bookshop from the date it's meant to be out. Apologies for this. As described in previous issues, we still have a heating problem in our office and whilst the paper was nearly on time for going to the printers, work and studying commitments of members of the editorial group have delayed this. We're still on the look-out for new articles. If you think you'd interested in writing for us please get in touch with us via the details below.

If writing isn't what you're interested in doing then you could help us distribute the paper. We're aiming to be selling the paper at two upcoming demos in London, the 19th February anti-Olympic one, and the 19th March anti-war one. If you're going to either of these demos and fancy giving us a hand then please get in touch! If you can't make the demos but are still interested in selling the paper then why not order a bundle of papers and sell them in your local area, get in touch with us for details.

And don't forget, you can now take out or renew your subscription to Freedom online on our website.

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Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 19th February and the last day to get your copy to us will be Thursday 10th February (see contact details above for where to send your letters/articles). If you are interested in writing regularly for Freedom we want to hear from you!

News from the inside

Freedom for prisoners

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

Wrongly convicted mother denied compensation

A woman who spent eighteen months in prison, convicted of the murder of her two infant children, and who was subsequently cleared by the Court of Appeal, has been refused any form of compensation by the Home Office.

Angela Cannings, who always claimed her children died through cot-death, had her conviction quashed last December after key medical evidence against her was discredited. Despite the fact that the Prosecution commissioned and paid for this evidence, and used the doctor responsible for it as a so-called 'expert witness' in the trial, his nominal status as 'independent' allows the Home Office to evade a claim for compensation.

Commenting on the decision, Angela Cannings said, "It's not about money,

it's about how someone has to be held responsible for what happened to my family ... I do feel with my case and with reference to other cases that after everything we have been through – the trauma and the devastation and we are still living that – someone has to be held responsible."

Cops face charges for death of Mickey Powell

Eight Birmingham cops are to be prosecuted following the death of 38 year old Mickey Powell nearly eighteen months ago. They're not being charged with murder though, or even manslaughter, but with 'wilful misconduct in public office'. Two other cops, who have already been charged with common assault, are to face further charges.

Michael Powell, a father-of-three, died after collapsing at Thornhill police station in Handsworth in September 2003. Police had been called to his mother's house in the Lozells area of Birmingham. He was struck by a police car during 'a struggle' to arrest him, but was taken to Thornhill Road police station before being taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival. An inquest found that he only suffered minor injuries from the collision and it was unlikely to have been the cause of his death.

New Polish prisoner

Sebastian Ksiazek is a Polish prisoner

serving six years for alleged armed robbery of a shop (which seems to have belonged to a cop.) He is interested in receiving any anarchist or punk literature, and has a basic understanding of both English and Russian, as well as Polish. Recently Sebastian has had some problems with the prison authorities after receiving some anarchist magazines, being accused of trying organise sabotage in the prison, but he is in good spirits. It is possible, but not certain, that Sebastian will be released on parole in a few months. In the meantime you can write to him at: Sebastian Ksiazek, Nowosolska 40, 61-171 Poznan, Poland.

Inaki Garcia Koch released

Spanish eco-activist Inaki Garcia Koch has been released from prison after completing his sentence. Inaki served just under five years for his alleged role in the sabotaging of the controversial Itoiz Dam construction site. His co-defendant, Ibai Ederra, remains inside and is still in need of solidarity. Please send letters of support to: Ibai Ederra, Carcel de Pamplona, C/San Roque. Apdo. 250 31080, Iruenez, Pamplona Navarra, Spain.

Aachen Four trial to be held in March

The trial of the four comrades arrested in Aachen, Germany, is due to begin on

March 23rd and is scheduled to take more than a month. Hearings will be held on the 23rd, 24th, 30th, and 31st of March, the 1st, 7th, 13th, 20th, 22nd, 27th, 29th of April, and the 4th of May.

90 year old anti-war protester jailed

Lillian Willoughby, a 90 year old wheelchair-bound quaker was sentenced to a week in prison by a New Jersey judge. She was arrested for taking part in an anti war blockade of a courthouse and refused to pay the \$250 fine. "I've been arrested before but have never spent time in jail" Lillian said, "this is the start of a great adventure."

Tsunami 'victim' found in British jail

Relatives of a Salford man, thought to be on a three-month holiday in Phuket, Thailand, contacted the police when they did not hear from him in the wake of the recent disaster in the area. However, they were surprised to discover, that he was not in Thailand, but actually locked up in a British jail, serving a short sentence, and had told them he was on holiday to avoid embarrassment and being sacked from work. Even more surprising though, was the police's claim that his imprisonment rendered 47 year-old Mark Doogue 'safe and well'.

compiled by Mark Barnsley

LISTINGS

Bristol

Every Sunday the Kebele Kafe from 6.30pm, 14 Robertson Road, Easton. For info call 0117 9399469

Gateshead

11th to 13th February Labour Spring Conference – inside the conference Neo-Labour tell us how caring they are while announcing proposals to crack down on dole scroungers and immigrants, the unions wring their hands and do fuck all. Outside the People of Gateshead get to have armed police and random stop and searches to make them feel safe.

Glasgow

18th to 20th February G8: Direct Action Trainers' Workshops organised by Seeds for Change Collective. In the run up to the 2005 G8 Summit in Scotland, a series of weekend workshops for activists who want to share their direct action skills. By the end of the workshops you'll be able to run direct action training sessions to stimulate action in your community and help other activists prepare for effective action at the Summit. For info call 0845 458 4776, email DATW@seedsforchange.org.uk or see http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/diary#oxlangla

Gwent

27th January An entertainment evening organised by Gwent Anarchist Group with bands, films, bookstall, etc., from 7.30pm at Le Pub, Caxton Place, Newport. For more info or to check out the latest copy of Gagged contact gwentanarchists@yahoo.co.uk

London

5th February Peace News Party at The Ramparts from 4pm till midnight, with Penny Rimbaud (Crass), Leon Rosselson, and much more. See www.peacenews.info/events/party.htm
8th February Tsunami benefit, with the Blockheads, comedians Mark Thomas and Rob Newman, circus acts, etc., at the Hackney Empire, £10. Tickets and details call 020 8985 2424

12th February Kyoto Climate March, assemble 11.30am at Lincoln's Inn Fields, or for Bicycle Ride Protest meet 9am at the Thames Barrier (south side) to go via Greenwich (about 10am) and London Bridge (about 11am) to Lincoln's Inn Fields. For info call 020 8855 3327 or see www.campaigncc.org
12th February Valentine's Make Love Not War Party at St George's Circle Community Centre, 49 Tufnell Park Road, N7. European Cultural Forum crew with discussion and workshops followed by short films, then the dancing happens from 8pm to 3am.
24th February London AF discussion evening, on political violence, from 7pm at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1

Newcastle

11th to 13th February Projectile: an anarchist festival of film and ideas, exploring the past, present, and future of anarchism. For more info see www.projectile.org.uk and also page 7.

International

27th February to 6th March Olive Cooperative tour of Palestine, looking at the environmental effects of the

Occupation. See www.olivecoop.com

26th March The Tenth Annual San Francisco Bay Area Bookfair, from 10am to 6pm at Golden Gate Park, Ninth Avenue and Lincoln Way
6th July Global day of action at the opening day of the G8 Summit. See www.agp.org or www.dissent.org.uk
18th to 20th March Zagreb Anarchist Bookfair. See www.ask-zagreb.org
21st March Destroy the arms trade, international day of direct action. See www.dsei.org
10th April Valencia Anarchist Bookfair. For info see www.valencialibertaria.org

Nationwide groups

Anarchist Federation

Network of anarchist-communists
Box 2, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.afed.org.uk

Antifa

Militant anti-fascist organisation
Box 36, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.antifa.org.uk

Class War Federation

Class struggle anarchist group
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX
www.classwaruk.org

Dissent

A network of resistance against the G8
www.dissent.org.uk

Earth First!

Ecological direct action network
www.earthfirst.org.uk

Industrial Workers of the World

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

Solidarity Federation

Anarcho-syndicalist organisation

PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
www.solfed.org.uk
See also 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

The Rampart

7a Rampart Street, London E1
SUMAC Centre

245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX
www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/

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

News

The Greenwash Guerrillas

The fourth Greenpeace Business Lecture took place on Tuesday 25th January 2005 at the Royal Society of Arts and was delivered by Lord Oxburgh, Chairman of Shell. Greenpeace Business said in advance that "The lecture will focus on the future of oil companies in the light of growing evidence on the dangers of climate change."

Wearing protective radiation suits and wielding top-of-the-range (home-made more like) greenwash detection and clean-up equipment, the Greenwash Guerrillas were on site to declare the event a 'Toxic Greenwash Hazard'. Passers-by and would-be attendees were advised to move away from the building, while those insisting on entry were warned that direct physical contact with the levels of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR) anticipated could cause long-term damage to spiritual health. Not to mention the likelihood of becoming a bit-player in a Shell-choreographed CSR soap opera. Sadly, none took this advice – perhaps the gas masks made it too hard to decipher.

A banner reading 'TOXIC GREENWASH HAZARD' (with the 'A' of 'GREENWASH' as an oil derrick pumping out flames and clouds of CO2) was tied to the railings of the very fancy Royal Society of Arts. One operative detected high levels of greenwash below street level. "They're smuggling Oxburgh in through the sewer!" cried another, a theory which could not be verified at time of writing.

At one point, who should be seen stepping from a black cab but Dr Robin Bidwell, Chairman of Environmental Resources Management (about whom, see our spoof website of a few years back at www.erm-concerns.com). He expressed no regrets for his company's complicity in laundering BP's Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, and wouldn't be drawn about the number of contracts with BP had been lost since his offices were occupied in 2002/3.

Soon after, the freezing Guerrillas were thrilled to feel the heat of righteous indignation coursing through their veins as a Shell public relations representative emerged onto the steps and began to instigate a little dialogue. "Oil companies can save the planet, (if their shareholders will let them)," he declared, before being wrapped in hazard tape through which he kept spouting top-drawer corp-speak, swearing on his mother's SUV that Shell was 'trying really hard', and 'really, really cared' about the climate. The GG's were stunned into silence by this bare-faced display – either that or they were smart enough not to be lulled by the prospect of 'having their say' at the big mahogany boardroom table of power. (One who was tempted had to be disinfected by a less credulous colleague.) Rumours that this Shell rep was a plant to create a little frisson of a full and frank exchange of views are a shocking barrel of lies.

Let The Greenwash Guerrillas know what you think. Email Mal Branded or Jude Boynton from London Rising Tide at london@risingtide.org.uk, write to them c/o 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES, or telephone 07708 794665. For more info see londonrisingtide.org.uk or risingtide.org.uk

Asylum clampdown

Politicians are 'tough' on immigration, but are asylum seekers the problem, asks Nathaniel Catchpole

Both the Tories and New Labour unveiled new immigration policies this week, including increased deportation of asylum seekers, quotas, offshore processing centres and Australian-style points systems.

Increased deportations equate, according to the Conservatives, to 24-hour surveillance on all forms of travel in and out of Britain.

Quotas create a set number of legal immigrant places per year, rendering all others automatically illegal. The measures have been attacked as unenforceable, as it wouldn't stop immigration but simply drive a larger proportion of it underground.

Offshore processing centres would run along similar lines to the infamous prison ship HMS Weare, which has been threatened with closure thanks to its truly appalling living conditions.

Points systems set a number of points that can be 'earned' through being young, skilled and/or rich, allowing in only high scorers.

Policy differences between the two parties are negligible, although Labour couch their language in terms of inviting asylum seekers in while the Tories use strong anti-asylum rhetoric.

Neither party however have addressed the reason why businesses stay so quiet on the subject. It's much cheaper to outsource manufacturing and other industries like call centres and software engineering to places with potential economic migrants, than it is to pay the same people to do those jobs here. Immigrants are the main source of

labour keeping our schools, hospitals, transport system and construction industry going, often with low pay and few employment rights. Illegal economic immigrants, by far the easiest target in terms of unpopularity, often end up working in the food processing and service industries, keeping labour costs and prices down for British companies and consumers. Nor are asylum seekers – often prevented from working at all and forced to live on meagre public incomes, despite in many cases being very skilled workers – the reason why there are insufficient resources for the working class.

Many people are victims of poor political or economic conditions in their own country, then exploited by people traffickers, then by unscrupulous UK employers. Those who really live off our labour – employers and landowners – and who happen to be the same people that come up with immigration policy decisions (supported by corporate media distortions) are the only people with something to gain from restricting immigration. It's an easy and convenient way to divide the international working class against itself, distracting from the daily appropriation of wealth that they carry out every day in all countries. Global capitalism and international conflicts cause the need for migration in the first place – both appropriate resources away from where they're needed into the hands of a very small elite – leaving the working class with both material and political insecurity or outright domination.



To improve our own situation we need to work towards organising our communities – including all people who've recently entered them – and linking those communities across geographical and national boundaries against those who both restrict our

movement and enforce various levels of scarcity on us.

Regardless of their location the international working class has the same interests and artificial national borders do nothing to reconcile those interests.

IT go home

The government have decided to spend anywhere between £18-£31 billion over the next ten years on a new computer system for the Health Service. The department of health said: "The National Programme for IT is bringing modern computer systems into the NHS to improve the patient experience."

The new system is to be designed following similar plans over benefits, passports, child support and air traffic control. But in every one of these cases the systems have gone wrong, and way over budget. Regardless of whether you trust the government to run a £30bn IT system of sensitive and personal information, it's not the government that runs does this, they're 'outsourced' to private companies. Two of the businesses involved are Ovum, who specialise in "Advising on the commercial impact of technology and market changes in telecoms, software and IT services" and Gartner who "will provide market intelligence of the global IT marketplace." Neither have previous experience of NHS practice.

At the heart of The National Programme for IT (NPFIT) is a new booking system for appointments called 'Choose and Book' which is supposed to offer patients

a choice of when and where their operation will take place. NPFIT is to go nationwide by the end of this year, along with the Integrated Care Record Service (ICRS), which will be a national medical database of all NHS patients.

NPFIT trials have not gone well. This week the National Audit Office said that in the pilot scheme only 63 out of an expected 205,000 hospital referrals were successfully made using the booking system – it is supposed to cover 17 million patients and 617 million prescriptions annually when it comes online.

The British Medical Association (BMA) has expressed concern that the system could compromise patient confidentiality and warned GPs against taking part in the trials. Only 27% of GPs have said they are willing to use the Choose and Book system. The system is so flawed that anyone with access to the system can access any patient's records and make changes. One senior physician involved in the project said: "It's a system that's just asking to be abused."

Under David Blunkett, it was planned that national defence would be linked to the database.

For more information email brighton_against_databases@yahoo.co.uk

Nazi wanks self to death

A well-known member of the National Front (NF) has been found dead in a store cupboard. Kristian Etchells, who acted as the white supremacist group's public face in Oldham, was discovered with a picture of a woman in a school uniform on the floor and a kettle cord around his neck.

The 29 year old got the lowest number of votes of any party when he stood to be a councillor in Oldham in May 2003 – just 62 people.

Two months previously, he had threatened an Asian taxi driver. After putting a sticker on the driver's car, he pulled a knife, shouted "you want some of this?" and ran off. He had landed himself in prison by October after following it up by egging two women.

Despite this, he wasn't a leading light of NF, Unite Against Fascism's Oldham branch representative said: "He's been in them on and off but hadn't been doing much lately. He was a follower rather than a leader. He just jumped on the bandwagon."

The coroner, Simon Nelson, decided that Etchells had not meant to kill himself when he got in the cupboard with his kettle. He said that "the more probable explanation is that he decided deliberately

to place himself in a situation where he might achieve some form of sexual gratification."

An Oldham BNP organiser said that "Nationalists don't tie a ligature around their throat and toss over a picture of a schoolgirl, regardless of the age of the 'model'." He added "I've known about this for months but I was hoping the details wouldn't come out and if the truth be known there were a lot of details omitted from the story."

One NF supporter posting on the far-right Stormfront website said: "Well at least he died with a picture of a woman in front of him."

NATIONAL FRONT

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The bunkers' union

In the struggle for free public transport in Sweden, anarchists have organised fare-dodgers unions in major cities across the country

The campaign Planka.nu – 'Free ride now!' in Swedish slang – has more than any other syndicalist activity during the last years drawn attention to itself and generated debate.

So, then, what is the campaign exactly? Planka.nu was started by Swedish Anarchosyndicalist Youth Federation (SUF) in Stockholm and has recently expanded to include groups in Gothenburg and Helsinki.

The goal of the campaign is free public transportation, which certainly isn't an unrealistic demand. The Stockholm underground is already financed partially by taxes, but many politicians for ideological reasons want to raise fares and lower the taxes. Planka.nu have been widely debated. To encourage bunking, or 'free riding' the Plankakassan, or P-kassa, has been set up. The P-kassa is a kind of solidarity fund that is open to everyone who pays a fee of 100 SEK (about £7 per month). The fund then pays the fine of 800 SEK for those who get caught.

In Stockholm the P-kassa got started when the price of the monthly pass was raised to 500 SEK in the autumn of 2001 and right now it has around 700 members. The group in Gothenburg hasn't been around as long as the one in Stockholm but has yet got well over a hundred Gothenburg inhabitants to join by paying the monthly fee at the Syndicalist Forum.* It's generally young people who join the fund, but the overall response has been overwhelmingly positive.

There are plenty of middle-aged single mothers with a lousy financial situation who have been joining and are thankful for the initiative.

We are not only demanding a fare free subway. We are making the subway fare-free by making it easier to free ride. This is part of the idea known as 'autoreduction', meaning the self-reduction or prices. In the autumn of 1974 hundreds of commuting workers in Turin noticed that the bus tickets had drastically become more expensive. They did not accept this and instead printed their own tickets that were sold by trade unions at the old price. Soon this first wave of autoreduction had stopped the price increase in the whole region. This form of struggle spread and workers started autoreducing their electricity bills. Autoreduction committees collected the electric bills, put the trade union stamp on them, and then cut the price in half before the fee was paid.

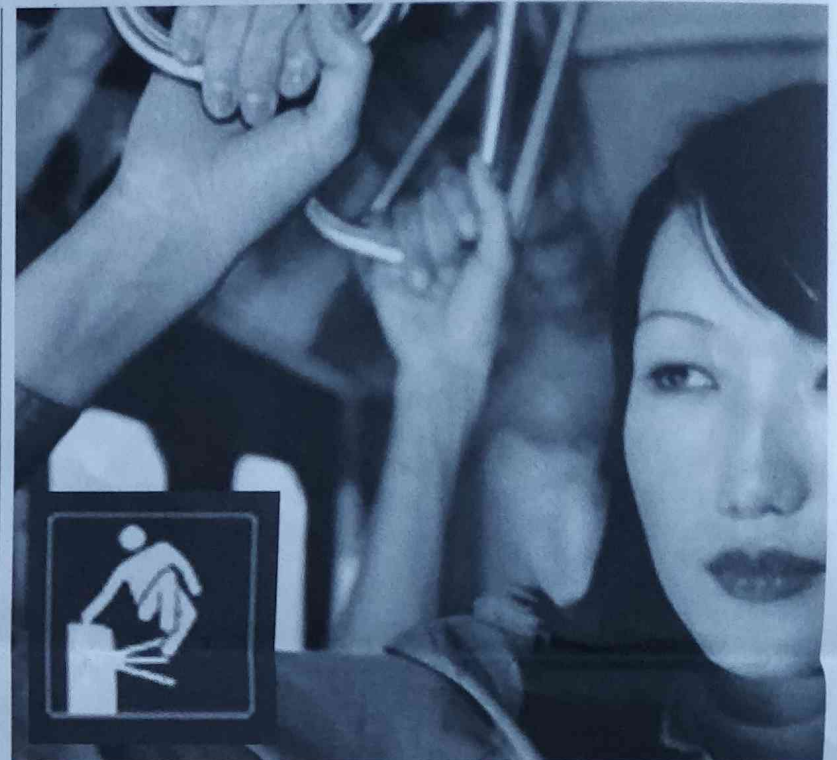
Housewives as well as trade union organised workers at the electricity companies were important participants in this explosive struggle that was heavily condemned by the Communist Party. The grassroots movement was later taken over by the trade union management, which after an agreement with the government started to fight the unruly autoreduction movement.

There are syndicalists that have questioned what tax-financed public transportation has to do with trade union struggle. The connection becomes apparent however if you look at what

consequences increased fares have on the workplaces: when it becomes more expensive to live it becomes harder to be unemployed or employed by the hour; we have to work more, and are generally forced to have to accept lower paid jobs and perhaps also keep a low profile at work, with respect to organising.

The struggle for free commons, for things to be free of charge – public transportation, healthcare, culture, leisure activities and the likes – are linked to the struggle at the workplaces. The time we spend travelling to and from the job should be considered as part of the working day, even if it is unpaid. Public transport is a part of the 'social factory' and reduced travel costs (as well as reduced costs of other kinds) are as important a part of the class struggle as higher wages. Just as a strike in a workplace is a way of forcing a company to pay higher wages, free riding should be seen as a fare strike to force politicians to lower the prices. There is simply no other option for them if people refuse to pay. However if we obediently continue to buy monthly passes even though they're already way too expensive, then prices will continue to increase.

The counter argument that free riders make it more expensive for other travellers is common but incorrect. It simply doesn't work that way in a partially tax financed monopolised market. On the contrary a fare strike is an efficient way to limit the price increase. Besides, public transport financed by fares is an



insane waste of resources – tickets, ticket lines and checks cost at least half a billion SEK a year in Stockholm alone. That is clearly money that could be used for better purposes than making life miserable for poor people. Fare free public transportation would mean considerable redistribution reform: many people would benefit economically from a small tax raise replacing the ticket system, while a small group of high income earners would lose.

The goal for Planka.nu is to make the public transportation into a common, something that is free for all to use.

Swedish Anarchosyndicalist Youth Federation (SUF), International Commission www.suf.se

* The Syndicalist Forum is an anarchist social centre and local union office of the anarchosyndicalist union SAC in Gothenburg.

For more information on the Planka.nu campaign, see their website at www.planka.nu

Sovereignty at work

The week before the election took place, the US military was proclaiming its plan to keep 120,000 troops in Iraq for the next two years. This was according to Lt. Gen. James J. Lovelace, Jr. He admitted that the number could fluctuate depending on the circumstances, but clearly Iraq will have a substantial US military presence for some time.

What is strange is that this announcement of a 24-month-long continued military presence occurred before the will of the new ('sovereign') parliament can be determined once it meets in mid to late February? According to the occupiers rhetoric, the US is in Iraq at the pleasure of the representatives of the Iraqi people. Currently, these 'representatives' are US appointed puppets but the elections are meant to be free. To proclaim such long-term plans just before the election gives a clear perspective where power actually lies in 'liberated' Iraq.

The occupiers are obviously hoping to present the new parliament with a

fait accompli. Whether they will be disappointed is a moot point, although it would be interesting to see their response if they were. Or what would happen to the \$1.5 billion new US embassy in Baghdad. Which leaves \$78.5 billion for some other stuff.

Yes, the Bush Administration has decided to ask for another \$80 billion in new funding for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is on top of the \$25 billion in emergency spending that had already been approved for the current fiscal year and would push total 2005 funding for military operations and equipment to a staggering \$105 billion. The government had said it would need another \$25 billion when it asked for the original \$25 billion extra funding meaning that the final \$80 billion request is more than triple the original request.

Not bad for a conflict which Bush declared over on 1st May 2003.

Halliburton's profits should be healthy for some time to come.

Depressing

→ page 1

of interests to portray my column as being paid for by the Bush Administration. Nothing could be further from the truth." Because "People need to know that my column is uncorrupted by any outside influences. I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for my bad judgement, and to better explain the circumstances."

In addition to distorting his already poorly-informed output in favour of the legislation, Williams was required "to regularly comment on No Child Left Behind during the course of his broadcasts," and to interview Education Secretary Rod Paige for television and radio spots that aired on his shows during 2004. He was also expected to urge other journalists to promote similar positions.

Saying in a column on 10th January that "this will never happen again," Williams seemed unaware of the wider picture: that a state which pays to dress propaganda as news is far more guilty than he. Nor is a 'conflict of interests' a fair way to describe his actions. They were those of a secret, paid, government

agent dishonestly passing himself off as a neutral commentator for CNN and dozens of television and print organs.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) last year criticised the government for using video news releases, or VNRs, to promote its controversial Medicare 'reforms'. Similarly, the Office of National Drug Control Policy used Gourvitz Communications (who make a typical VNR for about \$20,000) to preach on the dangers of marijuana. For example, the 'news report' advised parents and guardians to make sure that they "keep [children] busy so they don't have too much free time on their hands."

The GAO called these instances "illegal use of taxpayers dollars" and "illegal government propaganda." Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting's Steve Rendall comments, "[This] began ... in the Clinton administration with anti-drug messages that were being worked into television dramas and such. From my understanding, besides the media ethics question... this is illegal ... on a couple of different levels ... Because the government is using taxpayers' money without ... congressional permission to run these operations. [Also] it is illegal

for the US government to run propaganda campaigns that are not identified as – or to run campaigns selling policy that are not identified as coming from – the government. We saw in the mid-eighties, for instance, the Office of Public Diplomacy was shut down because it was found that it was secretly propagandising the American people. This is not that much different."

In the days following the revelations about Williams, four other things happened: first, a group of insignificant media and democratic party lobbyists put out their customary appeals to supporters to 'urge' the government to stop this practice and 'press' the FCC to conduct an investigation. Second, scapegoats were sacked at CBS for running a story about Bush's national guard service record before the election. Thirdly, the mainstream propaganda organs vastly and laughably under-reported the huge protest events and actions at the inauguration on 20th January. Business as usual.

And most ominously the propaganda machine stepped up the drumbeat to demonise Iran as the greatest threat to world peace. War is indeed 'peace'.

Louis Further

Feature

Labour's lies

Gay rights in Britain were not handed down from above but fought for and won – a lesson worth remembering today, argues Joe Morris

On 18th November 2003, the Thatcherite law that banned local councils and schools from discussing homosexuality in a positive light was repealed. That was three years after the age of consent was lowered from 18 to 16 for gay and lesbian teenagers.

In 2003 the Labour government discussed allowing same sex partners to have a civil wedding that would allow us to have the same tax breaks or entitlements that straight married couples enjoy, including access to a partner's pension. It would also mean that gay couples would have the same rights in property and inheritance laws for the first time ever.

This seemed like a huge step, and in many ways it was. It wasn't until 1994 that homosexuality was 'decriminalised' and given the age of consent of 18. Lowered from 21, which had been the age of consent since homosexuality was finally 'legalised' in 1967. They were at least talking about it. It was a step in the right direction, publicly. The Labour government was being seen as a force for social change and Barbara Roche the Minister for Social Exclusion and Equalities said, "Change would send a strong message against homophobia."

But of course all this is bullshit! The age of consent was not a Labour idea. It was forced on the Labour government by the European commission of human rights who told Tony Blair that the "discriminatory age of consent [was] unlawful." When the legislation was finally passed it had an 'abuse of trust' clause in it, which directly linked homosexuality to paedophilia.

The same Labour government then refused to amend the draft Charities Bill to make equal opportunities a condition of charitable status, effectively saying it is okay for charities to discriminate against gay men and women.

To further their campaign of institutionalised homophobia, the Labour government has repeatedly refused to crack down on homophobic hate crimes, including vetoing an amendment to the Crime and Disorder Bill in 1998.

Labour then exempted religious bodies from the new laws against homophobic discrimination in the workplace. This means that religious-run institutions such as schools, hospitals, care homes and hospices are free to discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workers without consequence.

In 1998 the government vetoed an amendment to the Human Rights Bill, which sought to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Only one Labour MP defied the Labour whip and supported the amendment. All the other 'left-wing' and even openly gay MPs either abstained or voted against protecting these basic human

rights for gay men and women.

In 1997, then again in April and July 1999 Labour blocked legislation to stop discrimination against gay people in the workplace by refusing to support the Sexual Orientation Discrimination Bill and thwarting similar amendments to the Employment Relations Bill. In other words, defending the right for bosses to sack gay workers.

Labour made claims leading up to the last election that they were clamping down on homophobic bullying in schools, but the vast majority of schools still have no specific anti-homophobia programme. While gay youth are being victimised by their schoolmates, the schools are being allowed to get away with doing nothing!

That's the situation as it is, yet the Labour government consistently claim that homophobia is decreasing and that equal rights is a 'cause for all'. The Labour government, just like the Tory governments before it, has lied and cheated about gay rights. Tony Blair has unflinchingly attempted to win the support of middle class voters and with gay issues it has been no different.

Queer as Folk

Where does all this leave gay people? With attacks from the 'left' and also the right it is hard to say. According to the leader of the British National Party, he has exposed our secret agenda as an effort to "target children both for their own sexual pleasure and to enlarge the homosexual movement."

Of course we should pay little attention to the ramblings of the far right, but one thing that I found interesting about that sentence was the idea of a 'homosexual movement'. A movement of homosexuals! It conjures up images of leather clad YMCA style bears waving prosthetic penises in the faces of unsuspecting on lookers while shouting, "we're here, we're queer and we're not going shopping". That or Peter Tatchell attempting to arrest Robert Mugabe for human rights offences and getting punched in the face by a bodyguard.

If you look around, both at the gay community and at the portrayal of gay men and women on television, you will see that the 'homosexual movement' is a group of beautiful people all having sex with each other and idolising themselves through their choice of hair cut and latest designer tight jeans. Open any gay magazine or go to any gay club and you will see it first hand. Beautiful men, clean and well shaped; dancing together, taking the latest designer drug and talking about the newest gossip.

The gay community has a lot to answer for in this respect. It has created a culture which oozes alienation and isolates anyone who does not fit into the well packaged stereotype, whether it means to or not is irrelevant. In turn



More militant times – fighting to defend Stonewall

it fractures and weakens the gay rights ticket by defining what it means to be a homosexual in such an unrealistic and consumer driven way. This sub-culture that has been created, where gay men and women seem to have opted out of participating in other parts of society generates nothing more than apathy towards the situation facing the gay community. We have gay clubs, gay cruises, gay bars, and gay parades.

If we look back at the history of the gay community, even to the start of the 1969 Stonewall riots where transvestites and gay men fought with the police who tried to raid the Stonewall nightclub, or even back to the 1980s where the gay community fought a relentless campaign to stamp out HIV we can see that it was once a community of action, a community which sort to change the oppression and persecution of same sex relationships. Now, it's no longer a community even openly caring about these issues, but a community of trendiness, wealth and sex.

When David Morely was fatally beaten to death by three young men; for the fact he had sex differently, there was no acts of defiance; people made no noise at all. Brain Locke, a spokesperson for the peaceful direct action group Outrage! said of the gay community, "there is a great deal of anger and sadness." Where? There were no demonstrations, no acts of unity or attempts to make people understand what was happening, instead the friends and family of David Morely were left to mourn, the press covered the story briefly and it was forgotten.

A lot of this is put down to fear. Locke said in the same statement "people are afraid in the sense they think, 'It could have been me'." A man murdered because of his sexuality and the gay community's

reaction is 'It could have been me'. Of course it could have been you! Hate crimes and homophobia are on the increase, regardless of the Labour lies. In Scotland alone, the latest report show that homophobic attacks have increased by 90% in some regions. But fear doesn't play the only factor. Apathy, in my opinion is the major cause for the lack of action taken when the gay community is under attack.

Gay pride?

Capitalism and its rulers have done well to create what they have, but our ideas on homophobia – as with all forms of domination – are monopolised by those in control. Throughout history our ideas and actions have been defined by those who control the society we live in. From the slave trade to the present day, from the biblical attitudes towards the role of women in society until the present day and the progressed quasi-religious repression of same sex attractions, have all contributed to our present day attitudes. Even those attitudes in the gay community.

Last year the Gay Pride march attracted some 400,000 gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. That's a massive amount of people who had come out of the closet and proudly said: I am who I am! It symbolises something. But the point of the march changed. The organisers officially renamed it and called it a parade rather than a demonstration. Why? What does that mean?

I often come into discussion with people who say, "I don't mind gay people, I just don't know why they have to shout about it." This opinion is well and truly fitted securely in the status quo. The so called liberally caring don't mind gay people as long as they can't see or hear us. I usually counter it with

an argument defending the rights of homosexuals to object to oppression, now, I'm beginning to feel the same. What is it we are marching for? David Morely? Defiance of anti-gay legislation? The answer is no.

The gay community seems to have lost perspective on what is going on in society, instead choosing to have a 'gay parade' where officers of the Royal Air Force have a recruiting float and where business people can rake in the pink pound at the pricey music festivals. The organisers are attempting to take the political edge out of the march in order to create an 'event' where they can make money. We are not to demonstrate against the likes of Tony Blair because that will generate little profit. Instead we are to go on a parade, a gathering and a music festival.

The only semblance of anything remotely political at the 'parade' was activists of Outrage! handing out flyers highlighting the failures of Labour to protect gay rights and calling on people to "write to their MP and to the Equalities Minister, Patricia Hewitt."

The end of gay oppression will never come through writing to your MP or going on gay parades, or as Stonewall organised in New York, an 'equal rights walk'. It will come from actively resisting the legislation set out by liars and power hoarders like Tony Blair, who's sole concern is to win elections, not to protect our rights. Fighting domination requires acts of radicalism. The gay rights movement began with acts of defiance and it will only get our oppression on the table if we continue with it. By taking matters into our own hands we are creating the necessary conditions for ending these forms of domination. If they won't do it for us, which they won't, we must do it ourselves.

Editorial

One of our pet hates is the way Leninists systematically rewrite history, particularly when anarchists are involved. Whether it's the Italian factory occupations of 1920, the Makhnovists during the Russian Revolution or anarchists in the anti-capitalist movement, the standard Leninist line is either to ignore us, or failing that, to distort our ideas, activity and influence.

The classic example of this is the Haymarket Martyrs. The standard Leninist line is to either call them 'radicals' and/or trade union leaders or admit they were anarchists but fail to mention their trade union activism. This is because in the Leninist perspective anarchists fall into two categories: 'individualists' who reject 'collective class struggle'; or 'syndicalists' who accept that struggle but are doomed to failure for rejecting 'political organisation'. That most anarchists embrace both collective class struggle and political organisation simply does not compute, and consequently goes unmentioned.

A more recent example of this historical revisionism caught our eye in the January 2005 issue of the Socialist Workers Party's Socialist Review magazine. In an article entitled 'Happy Birthday Big Bill', Mike Davis commemorates the birth of the radical union the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), and the usual writing-out of anarchists from labour history is shown. He mentions that "the most eloquent speech of the convention" was made by Lucy Parsons, who "made it clear that this new solidarity also had to include working women, 'the slaves of slaves'." Davis describes her as an "ex-slave" and "widow of Albert Parsons, one of the Chicago radicals executed for the murder of a policeman in Haymarket Square."

Strangely, Davis does not bother to mention that this "most extraordinary [figure] on the American left" was an anarchist. And it would have been nice if he had mentioned that her husband was also an anarchist and, furthermore, was executed after being framed.

He does inflict on us "the common stereotype of the Wobblies as romantic hobo anarchists" before dismissing it by arguing that the IWW was "an extraordinary melting pot of international revolutionary traditions." Yes it was, because of the influence of such anarchist unionists as Albert and Lucy Parsons and the syndicalist movements in Europe. The Marxist movement of the time was covering its reformism with revolutionary rhetoric and the IWW was part of a global revolt against it.

Davis ends his account with the "government repression and patriotic vigilantism during the First World War." He fails to mention the destructive role of Leninists within the IWW in the post-War period. Following the orders of the Communist International, the US Communist Party worked within the IWW in an attempt to combat its 'syndicalism' and 'dual unionism', tie it to Party leadership and dissolve it into the reformist American Federation of Labour. Combined with the repression, this political manoeuvring ensured that the IWW became a shadow of its former self. It would be nice if Leninists mentioned their role in the decline of an organisation they praise so much (and whose ideas they reject).

Today the IWW is doing pretty well for a 100 year old. It is growing again, as its brand of libertarian unionism is proving to be as relevant today as it was in 1905.

See www.iww.org.uk

Commentary

Michael Murray

Many will remember with fondness Michael Murray who died last week after a short illness at the age of 81. I first met Michael around twenty years ago when he started attending the London Anarchist Forum, at around the time his wife, Rosemary, died. He had been reading his father's book collection and through this had discovered that he was an anarchist. He had turned 60 - I was half his age but, like other younger people who came along to the LAF, I was drawn to the way he thought, his very practical approach to anarchism and his enthusiasm.

Starting life at Whiteway (the Tolstoyan community) Michael became an apprentice silversmith, bookbinder and stained glass-maker, in the William Morris Arts and Crafts tradition. His working life was varied, but money-making seemed to have been a secondary consideration. Together with Rosemary he was involved in Montessori schooling, the early London city farms and play-schemes in parks. His main occupation was as a silversmith. He was always keen to take on apprentices and to share his craft because he saw it as a means to an independent and fulfilling livelihood. He undertook projects to convert derelict buildings into workshops for craftspeople and set up the Crafts Commission.

His five children were grown up, successful and independent, and Michael saw his approaching retirement as a wonderful liberating opportunity. He became involved in project after project, often without outward signs of success, but using every opportunity to spread his simple message that people can do things for themselves, by themselves. He was involved in motorway protests, campaigns to rescue parks and canal-side walks from development, and the like. He never completely gave up silversmithing or work with the Crafts Commission, and he frequently used a small area of land adjoining Freedom Bookshop as a workshop for his metal-work with the intention that others would come and join in and learn.

One of his campaigns was to save a sculpture from the hands of developers. The sculptor, Anne, and Michael fell in love and married last year. They were as devoted as a couple could be. Michael's positive nature was infectious. He told people who he came into contact with that he was an anarchist and an optimist, often in the same breath. For him the two were sides of the same coin. But he did not need to tell you. He did not spend his life putting the world to rights from an armchair. Michael remained youthful, walking wherever he could and taking up cycling again when he

was 80. He was always excitedly planning, giving practical advice, enthusing over a book, a new-found treatment, a recipe. Something of his spirit will live on in all those who came to know him well.

Tim Francis

Twenty years on

The twentieth anniversary of the return to work of the miners after the Great Coal Strike of 1984-5, and to mark the closure of Hatfield Main NUM Branch after 86 years of struggle and service, there will be a rally and social around the theme 'Where have we been? Where are we now? Where are we going?' with union and community speakers. It will be held at The Fox in Stainforth, Doncaster (venue to be confirmed) on 5th March 2005. Speakers include rank and file members and officials of the NUM and of the Doncaster pit communities, and women's support groups.

The event is organised by Hatfield main branch NUM and the Mining Communities Advice Centre, and sponsored so far by Maltby NUM branch and Lancashire Area NUM, Doncaster region Unison and in conjunction with other left and labour movement organisations.

If you can assist with a donation, contact Hatfield Main Branch NUM Fund, 16 Abbeyfield Road, Dunscroft, Doncaster DN7 4AF

Dave Douglass

www.minersadvice.co.uk

New Group

Interested in helping set up an anarchist group in the East End of London (Whitechapel/Hackney)? Contact AF c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street London E1 7QX

Bunch of cults

A sixteen year old self-styled Satanist who has just been convicted in Edinburgh of hideously murdering his girlfriend when he was aged fourteen, has been linked to the Goth music scene of Marilyn Manson, Nirvana, etc., and its 'satanic' offshoots. One question has to be asked - has he been judged as a cold, calculating fully fledged Satanist, rather than a juvenile teenager led astray by a fashionable 'cult' peer group? As a fourteen year old he was reputedly a heavy cannabis user and for some, cannabis can produce psychotic states of mind.

Whatever the circumstances, anarchists' and libertarian communists' advice to young rebels is not to be attracted to profit led 'satanic' cults, but to organise against exploitation through local anarchist (and/or green) groups.

a comrade, Edinburgh

Asylum problem

My name is Jose Pinon Rodriguez, I am from Cuba and at the moment myself, my wife and daughter are in the UK seeking asylum.

I worked as a representative of the company Cubazucar in the UK, and my office was located in the Cuban Embassy in London. After March 2003 when the Cuban government placed 75 people in jail because of their ideas against the government and sentenced to death three young men because they stole a boat to leave the country without having a fair trial, I disagreed with those actions and expressed my opinion about them.

From that moment we started having problems at the Embassy, to the point where we decided to ask for asylum

because they wanted to send us back to Cuba, and we knew that if we were to go back we would face jail time as freedom of speech is not a concept accepted in Cuba, particularly when you confront a government's decision like the one stated above. In August 2003 we asked for asylum. We have come to know that our house in Cuba was confiscated by the Cuban Government and issued to someone else, this is one of Cuba's laws in effect, as when you overstay your permit visa, all your properties are confiscated.

At the moment we have been denied our appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal mainly because they considers that if we go back to Cuba we will not face any problems, in spite of the fact that there is a law in Cuba (Penal Code, law 62) which establish in its Section Fifth Article 135.1 that "The employee who in a mission in a foreign country, abandons it or refuse to return, incurs a sanction of privation of liberty of three to eight years". Taking into consideration that I was a representative of a Government company, this article applies in full to my situation all the more considering my political opinion.

We also received a letter from the Home Office in which they consider our application for asylum refuse so they ask us to leave the UK. The Cuban Government does not accept people to return to the country ones they have been consider a deserter so we are in a very difficult situation here because we do not have place to go and we are not accepted in UK.

I am able to provide new evidences to make a fresh application, but at present we do not have legal representation.

If you require any information about our case we will be more than happy to send it to you. We can be contacted by the e-mail at josepinon61@hotmail.com and also by phone at 07950547673.

Jose M. Pinon Rodriguez

Tsunami aid

I am currently trying to raise funds for the cost of my trip to help with the tsunami relief effort as part of a group of Native American Medical Workers. We will be working directly with the people affected.

I hope to be able to set up clinics and a teaching program for a corps of health promoters who will be recruited from the local populace and trained to help their own people. We are going to Thailand and then to Bandeh Aceh.

Those of you who know me may be asking why I would go where so much mainstream help is already going, or why focus on this when every day thousands of children die from the direct effects of poverty and the wars supported by US policies kill thousands more.

There are 250,000 known dead from the tsunami. Did you ever wonder why so many of those folks had built on the flood plain? The vast majority of those killed by the tsunami were those same people who are always most at risk, the people economically oppressed by the industrialist materialist system and displaced by wars.

Most of the relief efforts now under way are tied to or going through the very governments that have created or at least colluded in creating the conditions that placed these people in the path of the Tsunami to begin with.

Doc Rosen

Further info: I spend about four to five months a year working pro-bono in the developing world setting up motore De Salud projects (often in conflict zones) and working as a StreetMedic and do

not have the money for the fare or the supplies myself.

Supporting info (shows he is who he says he is): Doc is (apart from one of my teachers and an 'uncle') a very experienced and dedicated medic. He was one of only two medics at Wounded Knee in 1973 when AIM (American Indian Movement) held off the federal government for 71 days!

He is a renowned doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, which has especially positive results for treating PTSD and other trauma related psychological damage.

He is also skilled in setting up, training local people and running clinics in remote regions. For many years he has been involved in doing exactly that in Guatemala, where the indigenous people have been under attack by the state for decades. As a 'streetmedic' and anarchist for thirty years, he has been involved in providing medical support for street confrontations including the Black Panthers, women's Reclaim the Night marches, and the anticapitalist mobilisations of Seattle and Quebec City.

Since the first hours of the tsunami, the Indonesian government has used the devastation to further their interests in controlling Aceh, where there has been a long-running struggle for self determination. This includes controlling which areas, and under what terms, receives aid and medical support. I am sure that Doc would be able to not only figure out what was going on, making use of his experience of similar state manipulation in South America, but have the courage and integrity to ensure that those most at need of his skills would receive them.

This is a call-out for solidarity for our fellow human beings, both in a time of devastation from a natural disaster, but also in their struggle for autonomy and self determination against imperialism.

If you want to ask me any questions about Doc, please feel free to email me at sei531@yahoo.com

Alice

There's one DIY space in the UK where you can get zines like: Slug & Lettuce, Profane Existence, Maximum Rock n Roll, Heartattack, and R.T.B., music from labels like: Broken Rekids, Active, Skuld, Havoc, Malarie, Flat Earth and Mortahate, books from AK Press, Freedom, Rebel Press, and many others!

So visit:
The 56@ Infoshop
56A Crampton St, SE17
Elephant & Castle, London
Open Thurs, Fri and Sat afternoons.
www.safetycat.org/56a/

56@

Quiz answers

1. The anarchist Sail Mohamed with his friend the singer Sliman Kiouane. Sail went on to fight with the Durruti Column.
2. The US cut its food aid to Angola, citing the cost burden of milling its surplus GM maize.
3. He questioned a 'donation' to Berkeley by a GM giant and then discovered that GM maize was seriously polluting Mexico.
4. In 2003, an appeals court ruled that it wasn't against any law, rule or regulation to distort the news. As the compensation had been based on the journalists' whistle-blowing, Fox, whose slogan is 'Fair and balanced', got off.


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REVIEW

Vera Drake vividly portrays the paradoxes of backstreet abortion without passing judgement, writes Tom Jennings

Director Mike Leigh's latest effort continues his career-long depiction of ordinary British people struggling with intolerable situations, examining the effects of mundane circumstances on personality, relationships and the strategies we fashion to cope. Much of his work illuminates troubling social issues in the fine grain of individual pain and intransigent immediate environments. Vera Drake likewise tackles head-on the implications of backstreet abortion – and even though the film (like Leigh) is emphatically pro-choice, it has been acclaimed equally by liberals, feminists and religious and conservative opponents (including in fundamentalist America and Catholic Europe. Vera Drake is dedicated to Leigh's midwife and GP parents). So it's worth outlining first the broad contours of an approach able to sidestep easy categorisation and pat political prescription.

Early television work hilariously caricatured the grotesque aspirations of 1970s suburban new middle classes, puncturing the pretensions arising from their socio-economic (and other) insecurities. Leigh heightened the vicious comic effect via a tortuous scripting, improvisation and rehearsal process involving cast members endlessly exaggerating individual tics and stock phrases to the point of outrageous stereotype. Realism, naturalism and complexity in the acting seemed sacrificed to exploitative melodramatic excess – courting accusations ever since of misanthropically ridiculing hapless victims (especially lower class characters, given the long and continuing history of contempt reserved for us in most UK mainstream and 'alternative' comedy).

But, despite posing considerable dangers for his progressive and humanistic intentions, Leigh's method developed into a unique cinematic technique reflecting more generally on the hopelessness and despair inherent in contemporary society. Stories of abject damaged souls juggle personal inadequacy, social fragility and economic necessity. Emphasising complicated class positions and mobility (rather than the traditional 'kitchen sink' industrial working class), Leigh hints

that we are all fucked-up and stuck – money, status and power merely altering the parameters of complacency used to avoid acknowledging it. Nevertheless, the most cruelly lampooned working class characters often have more potential – for empathy and generosity and as catalysts of change. Precariously balancing destructiveness towards self and others with small victories and revelations, room to manoeuvre is carved out – thanks to social networks that facilitate a loosening of the external repression of conformism and the internal repression which forges rigid and defensive patterns of behaviour and expression. The drama is always harrowing, though, and Vera Drake is that in spades.

A Low Vera

Diverging from Leigh's usual conventions in two important ways, the new film is not contemporary but set among the claustrophobic interiors, postwar privations and equally constricting social mores of 1950s North London. Also, the eponymous heroine (a powerful performance from Imelda Staunton) and her close-knit, devoted family have none of the visible flaws and conflicts that usually get hammed up. Vera seems perfectly happily adapted to her multiple social support roles: paid to clean middle class households, housewife, carer for bed-bound neighbours and relatives ... and backstreet abortionist. Narrative tension looms from the illegal and secretive nature of the latter; meanwhile all activities are conducted in the same brisk, cheery, routinised manner, with clichés and homilies many will recognise (e.g. the ubiquitous 'nice cup of tea'). The arrest, trial and prison sentence of this selfless altruist is a personal tragedy mirroring those of various desperate pregnant clients she 'helps out' (because no one else will) – differing conspicuously from the daughter of one of her employers, who sails through the official rigmarole available to those able to pay.

The sequences depicting both classes of abortion scenarios are meticulously true to real-life experiences – and the staging, visual design and camerawork



accurately evoke the general mood of ordinary daily life at the time. According to a friend who suffered both types shortly before abortion was legalised in 1967. However, Vera's method – flushing the uterus with soapy water – is shown as relatively benign; but is actually just as agonising and life-threatening as knitting needles, etc.

The film aims to propose, as minimally as possible, the grass-roots ethical quandary of unwanted pregnancy and the woman-centred communal knowledges and practices which have evolved, in all of recorded history, in response. The choice of period avoided unnecessary complications – such as the profiteering and otherwise corrupt conduct accompanying the involvement of feral medics and criminal organisations as demand skyrocketed through the 1950s and 60s (only suggested by procurer Joyce [Heather Craney] who, unbeknownst to Vera, charges clients two guineas for her services).

And the Drakes' sheer humdrum respectability – almost to the point of the complete absence of anything resembling opinions or conscious reflection – undercuts all questions of ideology, religion and other moralising discourses which tend to saturate and conceal the immediate physical and emotional dilemma facing the women involved.

Vera's dignity and equilibrium unravel when confronted with the gravity of her actions, with the film demonstrating that no solution can be found in simplistic moral terms. The suffering of women stripped of control over bodily reproduction will inevitably be exacerbated by the cruelty of organised coercion – therefore safe abortion is a pragmatic mortal necessity. However, neither glib permissiveness and liberal rights nor the moral fascisms of religion, State, political correctness or the cosy bulwark of respectable righteousness can wish away the trauma and anguish of decisions to terminate potential human life. In a current

climate of reactionary clamour for certainty encouraged by diverse powerful political interests, these are both important messages. But Vera Drake also resonates strongly with Leigh's underlying preoccupations – the contradictions between the surface cleanliness of conformity to social norms and expectations and the messy reality of people's lives. The negotiation of these gaps and fractures flirts with frustration and farce in blending honesty and directness, spontaneous warmth, conviviality and generosity of spirit. Most of all, the chances of mobilising these resources in working through life's quagmires increase the further down the slippery slope of class stratification you go – less encumbered with maintaining face, taste and superiority. But, crucially, only if the Drakes' stultifying paralysis – suffocating debate and difference under a blanket of bourgeois decorum – is collectively resisted.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

FILM, CULTURE AND IDEAS

Newcastle and Sunderland are hosting the first Projectile festival of anarchist film, culture and ideas, running from Friday 11th February to Sunday 13th February. The event starts with a mini-conference in Sunderland for anarchist academics and people researching anarchist history and ideas on the day of the 11th. A three-day film festival at the Side Cinema in Newcastle kicks off that night, and is accompanied by a full programme of talks and a cabaret night at Newcastle's Bridge Hotel.

Amongst the film festival highlights will be the UK premiere of Antonio Sau's *Aurora de Esparanza* (Dawn of Hope), freshly subtitled in English by the Projectile collective. This 1936 film

is one of just a handful made in revolutionary Spain. It will be introduced by Stuart Christie, and followed by a discussion with Christie about anarchism in Spain, his own *Red Years, Black Years* documentary film project, his latest book, and more.

A brand-new documentary by Chris Reeves will also premiere at Projectile. *Ten Days That Shook the World* is built around footage from the 1994 anarchist gathering in London, and should be well worth seeing.

Also getting its UK theatrical debut is *The Cockettes*, a tale of DIY drag in 1970s San Francisco and the corrupting influence of cash. See www.projectile.org.uk for a full list.

Speakers will present a wide variety of views from different parts of the anarchist-libertarian communist spectrum. Stewart Home will be discussing art and politics, anarchism and direct action will be the subject for Alex Plows and Ben Franks, Dave Douglass will take on anarchism and industrial action, Mark Barnsley will lead a session on the prison industrial complex, and workers' self-management and mutual aid will be Stephen Shuktakis' topic. There'll be plenty of time for discussion, too, not just talking heads, and selection of book and info stalls to browse.

On Saturday night, we'll be taking over the Bridge Hotel for what's being billed

as "an eclectic evening of entertaining anarchy." Stewart Home will be back to do a reading, Dave Douglass will be singing, comedian Bob Boyton will be showing off some new material, Andy Hardie and the Free Radicals will be doing some politicised swing; and spoken-word artist Patrick Snape caps off the evening with words and projections.

A three-day pass is on offer for (if you're unwaged) which includes the cabaret night. It's also possible to buy tickets for individual films or the cabaret only. All of the talks are free of charge. For more information, email Projectile at info@projectile.org.uk or leave a message with the Side Cinema at 0191 2610066. For full listings see www.projectile.org.uk

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The Top Ten

Here's Freedom's Top Ten Antifascist Movie Moments, as chosen by the users of enrager.net/forums

- A time to kill:** Molotov cocktail, 1; KKK grand wizard-dragon thing, 0.
- Romper Stomper:** a gang of fascists start beating up some Asian guys only to be attacked by nearly a hundred Asian factory workers who lay into the wankers, chase them back to their squat and burn it to the ground.
- Django:** 57 KKK-esque racist southerners getting gunned down by a Gatling Gun. What more could you ask for in a film?
- The Great Escape:** full fucking stop.
- 51st State:** When Samuel L. Jackson gives some Nazi skins some pills which they think are a new super-strong form of ecstasy but is actually a highly powerful laxative and they shit themselves. Utterly appalling film but it has got Samuel L. Jackson in it ... No Pasaran!
- O Brother Where Art Thou:** John Goodman's Klan character gets crushed to death by his own burning cross when our heroes liberate a black man from a lynching.
- Blues Brothers:** Jake and Elwood drive through a Nazi rally forcing them to jump off a bridge into a river.
- Land and Freedom:** the militiamen shoot the priest: the bloody papish idol-worshipping grassing fascist paedo bastard!
- Casablanca:** German troops are in Rick's and Victor Lazlo inspires the band and the whole bar to sing La Marseillaise.
- Indiana Jones trilogy:** some classic scenes, a fat Nazi getting his head chopped off with a propeller and Indy shooting ten Nazis with a luger.

Black Flag update

The last meeting organised by Black Flag was a success. A new, bigger, editorial collective has been formed and has decided to maintain the magazine in its current format for the time being. We are aiming to produce a new issue for May this year as well as the (traditional?) one for around the time of the London Anarchist bookfair.

It was decided that each issue of the magazine will have a theme, the first being on the current state and future of the British anarchist movement. This can cover any and all aspects of the movement, for example workplace and community organising, social centres, how we organise as anarchists, our media, the role of the national federations and so forth. If you have any ideas on this subject, please let us know. Hopefully this can produce a positive debate and move us towards a better libertarian movement in the near

future. Future themes will be announced in due course.

As well as articles related to the theme of the magazine we are also looking for articles on other subjects as well as the usual reviews and reports. For example, we are looking for an article on the IWW to mark its 100th birthday as well as an analysis of the British anti-war movement. So if you want to tell others about a good book or website you've read or just want to share some of your thoughts on subjects like ecology, anarchist history or social struggles in Brazil then we want to hear from you.

If writing is not your thing, then we need people to help out with other important tasks. Distribution, layout and editing all need to be done, as goes getting the Black Flag website sorted out. Even if it is just informing us of an interesting article on the internet, please do it as we may want to reprint it.

If you think you can help us out on any of these issues, please contact us. Either email your articles/reviews to (preferably in rich text format) or post them to Black Flag, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX. Needless to say, we welcome contributions from comrades across the globe.

Finally, if you want to get involved in the editorial collective then please contact us. While we are bigger, we could also do with more help.

SCRAP THE BID

We'll all end up paying for London's billion-pound Olympic bid



Protest on 19th February 2005
Meet at 1pm outside Statford Station, Meridian Square, London E15
www.NoLondon2012.org

2

The number of weeks before the first hearings were held on Janet Jackson's boob at the Superbowl.

56

The number of weeks before the Bush Administration allowed he 9/11 Commission to be set up – and then only after public protests from the victims' families.

WUJGCAI

If you're in favour of (tick all that apply)

- meat-eating
- veganism
- technology
- biotechnology
- allopathy
- quackery
- violence
- pacifism
- religion
- selfishness
- Stirnerism
- Marxism
- individualism
- workerism
- other (write in)

you're WRONG !!

What makes you think I'm wrong?

It's a gut feeling

Please don't think with your gut.

Diverting your gut from its proper function might be a cause of indigestion.

Your basic mindset is morally wrong.

I won't demean myself by talking to you !!

A demonstration of Argument by Intimidation

A sideways look

There's a long tradition of songs about the revolutionary potential of pub closing time, from Alex Glasgow's 'As Soon as this Pub Closes...' to Serious Drinking's 'The Revolution Starts at Closing Time'. Along with many of my comrades, I have long held that I should have the right to drink when and where I choose, uninhibited by temporary measures left over from the last Liberal government. And for once, I thought New Labour were in step with me (or perhaps just in hock to big businesses who wanted to sell me drink whenever or wherever they could).

Alas, I find myself surrounded by moral panic about the dangers of binge drinking. The police, the tabloids and Middle England have woken up to what happens when lots of mainly young people go out and get drunk. Some fight. Some fall over. Some vomit. Of course, none of this happened when they were younger – am I alone in finding it particularly rich for journalists to go off on one about alcohol?

Hiding behind all this are some contradictions. Firstly, the people in a panic about binge drinking often say things like "why can't we have the sort of relation to alcohol as they do in the Mediterranean countries?" To which the simple response is that they have a different culture, based around regional cuisine and family life, often in the outdoors. Here, we don't – it's too cold and we are so alienated from our cuisine most of us don't even know what's in season. And until recently pubs were largely the preserve of men. And men usually behave differently in front of families than they do when on their own.

Of course, the other big unstated difference between the culture of the Mediterranean and that of Britain is that there all classes of people eat the same things. The rich might buy more

expensive versions – but the food is basically the same. It's a generalisation, but in Britain, what you eat will define your social class. The well off are as likely to be found in the Co-op or Aldi as the poor in Waitrose. And it is also true that poorer people will be found in Wetherspoons and the richer in wine bars or gastropubs. Add in the cavernous pubs that cater almost entirely to young people and you see the traditional fear of the 'mob' manifest itself in this. And as if to prove it, they employ bouncers.

And suddenly the press, who are to the right of everybody, start on another rant. It strikes me as class hatred pure and simple. Public schoolboys mooning at a game of rugby are just indulging in innocent high jinks, the same behaviour in a town centre on a Saturday night is 'hooligan Britain gone mad'.

Don't get me wrong, I don't particularly approve of the behaviour indulged in by the likes of Prince Harry or Euan Blair. But the answer is not to say that only places serving well-behaved middle class people can stay open late. We all know the reality of local pubs where the police turn a blind eye to late sessions so long as there's no trouble. Perhaps allowing more places to open and serve drinks, possibly some not owned by big business, might calm town centres down.

Labour look like they are weakening, but I do hope to be able to drink what I like, where and when I like, sometime in the near future. Though there is an additional worry – with 24 hour opening, when will the revolution start?

Svartfrosk



Blast from the Past

From Freedom of 10th February 1968: "Of all laws, obstruction is the easiest to get nailed for! And of all the places, the Roberts-Arundel picket line is the easiest to get nicked for it!

This week, two more Arundel pickets were pounced on by the Stockport police for doing next to nothing. One, a young worker from Avro's, was said to have stopped a scab to try to talk to him. That was all the police wanted, he was arrested and taken to a waiting police van.

Some pickets then went over to the van, with them a local anarchist selling Freedom. Next news he was arrested for obstruction and put in the van. Both arrests brought loud protests from other pickets and police re-inforcements moved in.

Both lads were then taken to the local police cells, where one was said to have tried to get away. Later each were charged with obstruction and put on £10 bail (paid by the union) while the case was held up until 27th February."

The quiz

- Who founded the Committee for the Defence of Indigenous Algerians in 1923?
 - When Angola banned genetically modified food imports unless it was food aid, and milled, what was the response?
 - Why was Mexican scientist Ignacio Chapela denied a job at the University of California Berkeley?
 - In 1998, Murdoch-owned TV station Fox was ordered to pay compensation to journalists it had fired for refusing to distort their report about biotech giant Monsanto. On what technicality did Fox win their appeal against this?
- Answers on page 6

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