

# FREE SIMON CHAPMAN

Anarchists carried out actions around Europe last week in solidarity with Simon Chapman, the London activist being held prisoner by the Greek state following anti-EU demonstrations in Thessaloniki. Simon was the victim of a fit-up by cops on 21st June as he peacefully protested against the EU summit. Police had been searching desperately for scapegoats to appease local bosses, who were incensed by their losses in a riotous bout of molotov cocktails, property destruction and street battles involving 5,000 demonstrators.

But unknown to cops, Simon's framing was clearly caught on camera by both the independent and the mainstream media. At one moment, video available on Indymedia and elsewhere shows him reeling over the curb, carrying a blue backpack and with the boot of a riot cop pressing down on his body. Blood is streaming from his head. The next moment, the camera catches police putting a hammer and axe into a black bag full of molotov cocktails before placing it next to Simon.

Simon, like seven other anti-capitalist activists arrested with him, faces between seven and 25 years imprisonment if he's convicted on charges of rioting, construction and possession of explosives, arson, serious damage to property, and resisting authority. Bail has been refused and, due to the summer recess, the Salonika Eight (as they've come to be known) will be held until September before they make their first court appearance.

Actions are still being taken to free the eight prisoners. A Thessaloniki Prisoner Support group has been established and there's an appeal for funds to cover legal expenses. The Greek tourist office in Amsterdam has been attacked twice with paint and hammers, while the Greek embassy in Berlin has been occupied. Up to a hundred people demonstrated outside the Greek embassy in London on 28th June. Solidarity demonstrations were staged in Denmark and Italy at the same time, as well as in Greece itself.

The 2004 summer Olympics will be held in Athens, and their international image is important to the Greek ruling class. So tourist boards, Greek airlines, travel companies and any other international Greek businesses and institutions look forward to telling you more about their beautiful country.

• Send letters and books (paperbacks only) to Simon: Kratoumeno SIMON CHAPMAN, Dikastikes Fylakes Diavton, T.K. 540 12, Thessaloniki, Greece

• The campaign is raising funds. They can be contacted at: BM Automatic, London WC1N 3XX (Cheques payable to 'ABC')

• To get the latest email updates, contact: ThessalonikiPrisoners@yahoo.co.uk

• For photos of Simon being set up see: [www.wombles.org.uk/actions/thesspris.php](http://www.wombles.org.uk/actions/thesspris.php)

• For video upload see: <http://italy.indymedia.org/uploads/simon.avi>

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



On 30th June British politicians voted to stop killing one of the above, just three months after they decided to start killing the other. And there's really not a lot we can say to that.

## IRAN: CAULDRON OF DISSENT

In the second week of June a cycle of nightly student demonstrations began on the Amir Abad campus in Tehran and spread to other towns and cities. The protests were marked by street violence. The students were attacked by thugs of the Basij, a subsection of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guards, who guard the legacy of the 1979 revolution.

The Basij are a plainclothes group, who can usually be identified only by the Kalashnikov rifles, knives and chains they wield, the teargas canisters they throw, the walkie-talkies they use and the motor-bikes they drive.

Often the students fought back, in some cases setting the Basij bikes on fire. One report concerning the first five nights of protest spoke of the destruction of 22 cars, 34 motorbikes and five banks, and the death of one student in Shiraz. Later in June a reporter estimated that there'd been five hundred arrests.

Was this the beginning of a new Iranian revolution? That renowned political commentator, G.W. Bush, certainly seemed to think so. He applauded the students' actions as "the beginning of people expressing themselves toward a free Iran", inspired by the "powerful incentive" of freedom.

The Iranian authorities' response was more measured and, in the absence of clear reports from Tehran, their reactions may well be the best guide to the real nature of these protests. The first point is that there's been no official attempt to impose a complete ban on the protests.

This wave can be seen as part of the wider evolution of Iranian political culture. There were massive student demonstrations in 1997, and again following the arrest of, and subsequent death sentence against, history lecturer Ashem Aghari in November 2002.

Now the students appear to have won a grudging recognition of their right to protest. Last month, the police authorities insisted that student protests should be limited to the university campuses, but they didn't ban them.

The over-enthusiasm of the Basij in their duties even proved embarrassing. They conducted at least one armed raid on a student dormitory, and the sight of thugs hitting, beating and knifing students certainly won the protesters public sympathy. Residents of the Tehran-Pars district of the city would leave their gates and doors open at night so that students could run to safety from the Basij.

In mid-June the Tehran city police were mobilised with the dual aim of preventing

the Basij from attacking students and also of stopping the students from taking their protests from the campus into the streets.

During the current cycle of protest, the reformist Prime Minister, Seyyed Mohammed Khatami, has remained strangely silent apart from one or two perfunctory calls for calm.

Given the real eloquence with which he's defended the principle of freedom of speech, his labours to develop a tolerant, modernistic reading of Islam, and his courageous criticisms of the entrenched, unelected power of clerics in the judiciary and other state institutions, it seems curious that he hasn't defended the students with greater vigour.

The truth is that these students are also causing Khatami some problems. The protest originated as a protest against the privatisation of the universities, which they fear will raise university fees.

This 'reform' is part of an economic liberalisation programme led by Khatami himself. In their nightly protests students shout insults against both Ayatollah Khamenei, the unelected supreme leader of Iran, and against Khatami, whose reformist government hasn't led to any real improvement in people's lives.

Both leaders are aware of the desperate  
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condition of Iranian society. Official unemployment figures record that 14% of the population is out of work. Unofficial estimates suggest that the real level may be double that. Poverty has driven many women into prostitution. Corruption and near-bankruptcy have left many workers in the nationalised industries unpaid.

Following the 'liberation' of Afghanistan, on Iran's eastern border, cheap heroin is flooding into the country. Between one and two million people of Iran's sixty-five million inhabitants are addicts, and HIV is spreading rapidly as a result. And, lastly, even the simplest person can work out the equation: after Afghanistan, Iraq; after Iraq then who?

The student protests are an unwelcome reminder of another problem too, the massive disaffection of young people with the regime.

The skilled and the educated are migrating, at the very moment when Iran needs all its engineers, doctors and civil servants.

This point may explain the state's grudging half-tolerance of the students' protests – it can't afford to drive them out. Young people's lives are shifting, whatever the religious leaders direct. A banned opinion poll in 2002 seemed to show that 76% of Iranians didn't follow the basic Koranic instruction to pray five times a day, a figure which rose to 86% among students.

In the bad old days of the 1980s, young people would risk severe beatings and prison sentences in order to buy a smuggled Kim Wilde poster or Michael Jackson cassette. More recently, the Internet has provided new possibilities.

There are about two million Iranians with access to the web, and young women in

particular use it as an alternative public sphere, discussing fashion, sexuality and – more seriously – voicing a deep and growing frustration with puritanical clerical restrictions.

The student protests may well be the most visible sign of this otherwise apolitical and silent youth revolution. On the other hand, the authorities' strategy of limited repression appears to have been relatively successful in isolating the revolt.

The majority of Iranian students are women. It takes incredible courage for young women from respectable, even conservative, backgrounds to stand up against the Basij. Only a militant minority of students participate in the protests, perhaps a few thousand.

When the campus protests were isolated from the city streets, non-students devised a form of proxy-protest. They'd drive through the back streets to roads close to the

campuses and circle round the universities, hooting their horns. If stopped by the police, and accused of participating in the protest, drivers would explain that they'd sounded their horn because they were caught in a traffic jam.

Cars still circle round the campuses every night but, significantly, they come from the rich quarters of north Tehran, not from the poor south. As yet, no solid link has been made between workers' demonstrations over delayed wages, and student protests concerning free speech.

Are conservative Bush and fundamentalist Khamenei both right to consider these protests as pro-American? Certainly the demonstrators come from a generation that's seized western objects as symbols and instruments of a cultural rebellion: jeans, trainers, rock music, satellite television, the internet. And many anti-fundamentalists will cheerfully call on American Cruise missiles to blow the cleric conservatives away.

But a culture of protest isn't so simply pigeon-holed. Remember that this cycle of protests began as a protest against privatisation, a protest against precisely the type of policy that the IMF is trying to impose on Iran. Would Bush be so keen to support a group of American students on a similar protest?

Secondly, while Kim Wilde and Michael Jackson don't sound like the appropriate icons for a libertarian revolt in western Europe, we should remember that their meanings may well change as they cross frontiers.

Lastly, some reports suggest that at least one student union has shifted from a pro-Khatami stance to organising these protests against him. This union has worked to spread the revolt from Tehran to other campuses. If such militants now turn to building links across Iranian society, then this movement may turn into something that Bush, Khamenei and Khatami have never imagined.

Sharif Gemie

**France** It's not often we hear of a strike in a chain of pubs, though comrades worried about the revolution starting a bit earlier than closing time can rest easy. The strike is in Paris, in a small chain of brew-pubs charmingly called Frog, owned by an Englishman and an Icelander.

The Sri Lankan cooks in the restaurants decided to join the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT, to get bosses to respect things like paid holidays, extra payments and their right to organise, and in support of claims for extra pay for night work.

The company responded by firing two. Workers have been on strike since 16th April as a result. They've regularly picketed in support of their demands, and they've faced management harassment and threats from the police.

The bosses have recognised that this is a landmark strike for the catering industry in Paris, with its reliance on casual and immigrant workers. Alongside the McDonalds strike in the city, a victory for

these workers could see big gains for workers in a notoriously difficult sector to organise.

Martin H.

Contact the strikers at [cntfrog@cnt-f.org](mailto:cntfrog@cnt-f.org)  
For more info visit [http://www.cnt-f.org/accueil/actu/restauration/2003-05\\_soutien-inter-ag.html](http://www.cnt-f.org/accueil/actu/restauration/2003-05_soutien-inter-ag.html)

**Spain** Anarchists in Cadiz are meeting with Moroccan anarchists and they've asked for help in providing books on anarchism in English. They're looking for any classic anarchist texts, as well as anarchist books on ecology and the environment, globalisation, feminism and so on.

Freedom readers can contact them at the following address: Ateneo Libertario 'Eliseo Reclus' de Jerez de la Fra., Plz. de El Arenal, Edif. Sindical, planta baja, puerta derecha, Apdo. Co. 586, 11480, Jerez (Cadiz) Spain

**American prisoners** Cassidy Wheeler has scored a legal victory against the Oregon Department of Corrections, following their

decision to classify anarchist papers as 'Security Threat Group' material ('News from Snake River', 2nd November 2002). Officials in the Oregon DOC are now busy rewriting the mail regulations, but the upshot is that Cassidy should get Freedom and other papers with much less hassle than he's used to.

Meanwhile Brian McCarvill, another anarchist who's recently pursued a lawsuit against the Oregon DOC for the same reason (Freedom, 31st May 2003), has been moved from the State Penitentiary. The case was settled by 'contractual compromise', but Brian's supporters said its terms were favourable to him.

After his move, on 15th May, he insisted it had been used to punish him for his stance. Most of his property was lost during the transfer, and his new jail, Two Rivers Correctional Institution, doesn't have the medical facilities he needs.

For more details of how to help, contact the Anarchist Prisoners' Legal Aid Network at [weneversleep@zipli.com](mailto:weneversleep@zipli.com)

## Forthcoming events

### BRIGHTON & HOVE

**Sunday 13th July** Brighton Peace Festival at Hove lawns. For more info tel 01273 241625 or email [peacemessage@harmonyculture.com](mailto:peacemessage@harmonyculture.com)

**Wednesday 23rd July** Comedy gig with Mark Thomas and Rob Newman plus launch of *Peace de Resistance: Schnevs Annual 2003*, 8.30pm at The Old Market, Upper Market Street, Hove (tickets £10 from box office 01273 736222)

### BRISTOL

**Saturday 19th July** Stop the War demo, meet at Fairford High Street (junction of Mill Lane and Park Street) at 12 noon

### COULPORT

**Saturday 2nd to Friday 15th August** Trident Ploughshares disarmament camp at Coulpport, Scotland. See [www.tridentploughshares.org](http://www.tridentploughshares.org) or call 0845 4588 366

### DERBYSHIRE

**Sunday 24th August** Red Rambles walk, meet 11am at Hurt Arms pub car park, Ambergate, for five mile walk and picnic through mixed deciduous woodland

### DOVER

**Saturday 19th July** Farmed Animal Action rally against live exports, meet 1pm at the roundabout leading to the Eastern Docks. Register your attendance on 0845 4560284, or for more details email [info@farmedanimalaction.co.uk](mailto:info@farmedanimalaction.co.uk)

### GUILDFORD

**Sunday 20th July** Ambient Green Picnic in

Shalford Park with four music stages powered by ecologically-sound energy, plus stalls, workshops, kids stuff, all for free. See [www.surreywap.co.uk/Ambientgreen/Ambienthome.htm](http://www.surreywap.co.uk/Ambientgreen/Ambienthome.htm)

### LEICESTER

**Tuesday 5th August** Leicester Anarchist Federation meeting upstairs at Ale Wagon pub, Charles Street. See [http://www.geocities.com/leicester\\_af/org.html](http://www.geocities.com/leicester_af/org.html)

### LONDON

**Sunday 13th July** The Zapatistas Today, with speakers just returned from working in the Zapatista communities in resistance, 3pm at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel

**Monday 14th July** Making Links: community food projects and networking, national conference of The Food Poverty Network at Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, NW1. Call 020 7837 1228 or see [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

**Thursday 17th July** Haringey Solidarity Group discussion evening from 7pm to 9.30pm at Phoenix Millennium Centre, corner of Vincent Road and West Green Road. Topic: Army and Police – defenders of the state or status quo

**Friday 25th to Sunday 27th July** Anarchist Youth Network Summer Gathering with social events, film showings, workshops, etc., at a venue near central London. See [www.anarchistyouth.net](http://www.anarchistyouth.net) or call 07814 629780

**Saturday 26th July** Disarm DSEi public meeting, 2pm at University of London, Malet Street, WC1. See [www.dsei.org](http://www.dsei.org) or contact Disarm DSEi, c/o 11 Goodwin Street, N4 3HQ, tel 07817 652029, email [disarm@dsei.org](mailto:disarm@dsei.org)

**Sunday 27th July** Disarm DSEi fund-raiser, film

night from 5pm at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel. See [www.dsei.org](http://www.dsei.org) or contact 07817 652029

**Monday 28th July** Free the Weed! meet 2pm outside St James Park tube for rally at the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, then chill in St James Park. Contact Tim Summers on 020 7737 6289

**Thursday 31st July** The Situationist International and After exhibition at The Aquarium Gallery, 10 Woburn Walk, WC1. See [www.vortexbooks.com](http://www.vortexbooks.com)  
**Every Wednesday** LARC Library open from 1pm onwards, 62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel

### MANCHESTER

**Tuesday 15th July** Manchester Discussion Group meet at the Hare and Hounds, Shude Hill, near the Arndale Centre at 8pm (also future meeting date on 19th August)

**Wednesday 6th August** Manchester SolFed meeting at the Hare & Hounds, Shude Hill, near the Arndale Centre, at 8.30pm. Topic will be Casualisation. See [www.manchestersf.org.uk](http://www.manchestersf.org.uk) or call 07984 675281

### NEWCASTLE

**Tuesday 15th July** Why Don't You is a new gathering of people who want to take direct action to stop injustice in creative, fun and effective ways. Each fortnight we will see video footage of recent direct action from around the world at the Side Cinema on Newcastle's Quayside at 7.30pm. For info see [www.sidecinema.com/whydonyou.htm](http://www.sidecinema.com/whydonyou.htm)  
**Saturday 3rd September** Roma and Asylum in Britain: Global Issues, Local Concerns, one-day conference at Newcastle University, The Fenwick Room, Castle Leazes Halls of Residence, Spital

Tongues. See [www.ncl.ac.uk/geps/](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/geps/) or contact 0191 222 8362/8368 or [Colin.Clark@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:Colin.Clark@ncl.ac.uk)

### OXFORD

**Saturday 26th July** Demonstration outside Campsfield Refugee Detention Centre, 12 noon at the main gates, Langford Lane, Kidlington, near Oxford (buses from Oxford city centre). This is a regular event on the last Saturday of every month. See [www.closecampsfield.org.uk](http://www.closecampsfield.org.uk)

### SOMERSET

**30th July to 3rd August** Big Green Gathering on a new site near Cheddar, Mendip Hills. For more info see [www.big-green-gathering.com](http://www.big-green-gathering.com) or call 01458 834629

### WORTHING

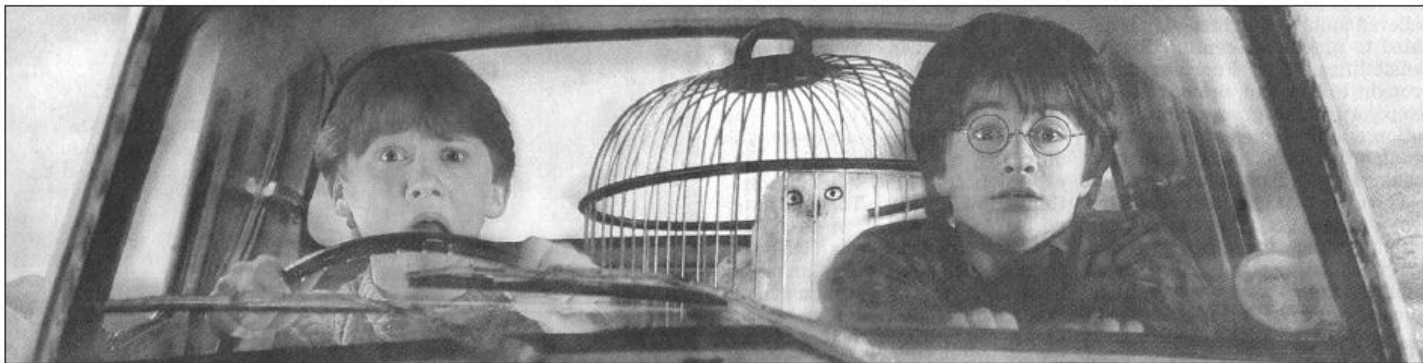
**Saturday 12th July** Worthing Against War, protest against the arms trade, meet Montague Place at 2pm  
**Monday 14th July** Worthing Green Social, upstairs at Barney's in Portland Road at 8pm (future dates 11th August and 8th September)

### YORKSHIRE

**Saturday 19th July** NAN Summer Conference from 10.30am to 5pm at Salem Centre, Salem Street, Hebden Bridge. Contact Harry on 01422 842558 for more details  
**Saturday 2nd August** Radical Bookfair and Film festival at 1 in 12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford. See [www.1in12.com](http://www.1in12.com)  
**13th to 17th August** Earth First! Summer Gathering in Yorkshire. See [www.earthfirstgathering.org.uk](http://www.earthfirstgathering.org.uk) or contact [summergathering@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:summergathering@yahoo.co.uk)



## Good fun, but promise of Potter is unfulfilled



The Harry Potter books, of which this is the fifth in a series of seven, follow a major convention of children's fiction by being largely set in a boarding school, where real parents are absent.

Potter is an orphan whose parents were murdered by the evil Lord Voldemort (who

is once again attempting world domination). He's badly treated by his foster family. From this promising anti-authoritarian beginning, J.K. Rowling takes sideswipes at politicians, Fleet Street, bullying teachers and more.

She champions the Weasley family, poor but goodies, against the Mal Boys, rich but

supporters of the evil Voldemort.

She's created an alternative world of magic (*sous le pavé la plage*, as the Situationists used to say), which has become darker and more threatening as the series has progressed and which has the addictive quality of a good soap opera.

Ultimately, though, Rowling's apparent anti-authoritarianism will disappear (look at the benevolent authority figure of Professor Dumbledore) as children become older and lose their rebelliousness. In the meantime the Potter books are a good fun read.

Mo Moseley

## The street beckons: the reality of asylum

They call anarchists extremist, but what's described in this article is happening under a democratically elected socialist government. It's about young men who have been unable to claim any financial support since mid-April 2003. Many of them are without permission to work and all have received notice to quit their accommodation. Only the social conscience of their landlords (a contradiction in terms?) stands between them and the street.

Until recently they were classed as Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers and received benefits on this basis. But such support as they had ended on their 18th birthdays. Welcome to the adult world, boys.

The law indicates that, as soon as they reach adulthood, refugees should be 'dispersed' through the offices of the

National Asylum Support Service (NASS). But this hasn't happened. Why not? The wrong forms were sent, apparently, and there aren't enough staff at NASS to process the workload. Could this be a deliberate ploy to send the message that the UK isn't a soft touch for asylum-seekers?

The list of those unable to help includes every organisation you might think of, apart from some NGO-run hostels. And as many of these are Christian-based, they're less well suited for Muslims.

Local MPs, social services departments and asylum teams all talk about using Section 20 of the Children Act to give support in these circumstances, but so far there's no sign of their talk turning into action. Budgetary wrangling, responsibility and allocation of resources have all been

mentioned. The machine takes time to grind through the gears, it seems.

Many of these young men won't speak up because they've settled in their localities and don't actually want to be 'dispersed'. They take the view that if they say nothing they'll be able to stay longer in the places they know and where they have support networks.

They may be working illegally or moving deeper into debt in order to eat. If they're working illegally, they're at the mercy of any cynical exploiter. Health and safety, reasonable wages, security of the law – all of these are beyond them. If they're accruing debt, who is it debt to? And how will the debts be called in, since the debtors have no cash? By accident or design, the system has created an invitation to disappear. How paranoid is

too paranoid in the murky world of asylum?

One young man I spoke to has recently been told he'll be removed to Austria under the third country ruling (Austria is the country he had first opportunity to claim asylum in). He says he'll go.

Since mid-April he's had no financial support and he lives in a house where his rent is no longer provided for. He's received no instructions, no date, nothing. NASS say they can't even support him as a 'hard case'.

No local organisation can support him either, if they're to stay within their remits. He's had one offer from his local council: if he goes to their office they may be able to pay for his travel to Austria. No support, no housing, no food, in other words – just a ticket to the unknown.

Stitch

## Suffering and resistance in Woodhill CSC

The Buckinghamshire prison has caught the attention of the corporate media lately because of Soham suspect Ian Huntley's being remanded there. But there are more important things going on deep behind the prison walls, inside 'the unit', or what is known (to the media only) as 'Britain's Alcatraz' – the Close Supervision Centre (CSC). This is the control unit for 'disruptive' prisoners. I'm one of the thirteen currently held in it.

To describe what goes on inside would require a book, but what needs to be known is the existence of the Marxist Prisoner Movement (MPM). This was founded earlier this year by myself and another comrade. After continuously expressing hatred towards society's and prison's evils, it was decided something had to be done.

Spending 23 hours a day in our cell for the foreseeable future, there's plenty of time to discuss and oppose the oppression, brutality, authoritarianism and totalitarianism of the Prison Service, the cover-ups surrounding deaths in custody, the privatisation of prisons and services such as canteens, giving corporate firms a monopoly on everything we eat and drink.

We're confronted daily with slavery in prison workshop, by corporations wringing out prisoners' pitiful wages for maximum profit. Prisoners' unions exist in Amerika

and Europe, we need them here too.

The MPM has no joining fee. We demand the right to vote in elections, the minimum wage, conjugal rights, the right to have property sent in (stopped after corporate firms running prison ships bribed governors to stop it). All of this can only be achieved through direct action, mass petitions and support from both sides of the fence.

Robbie Stewart

DH4408, HMP Woodhill,  
Milton Keynes, MK4 4DA

We publish this statement, not because we agree with Robbie's politics (we're anarchists, not Marxists) but because we support prisoner resistance.

If we're to understand the prevalence of self-harm and suicide in British prisons, we have to understand prison culture. Factors in the prison environment which might contribute include oppressive conditions, disruption of relationships, lack of support from outside, bullying, threats, fear and violence, uncertainty, isolation, boredom, enforced idleness, insomnia and the prospect of a long and meaningless sentence devoid of hopes and plans.

Prisoners who do nothing during the day or sleep through hours of daytime inactivity become restless and anxious at night. This isn't the sleeplessness of depression but the

restless preparations of despair. What I'm trying to say is that, after many months of isolation and oppressive conditions, lack of communication, support, uncertainty, I find it difficult to be quiet. Especially with the prospect of a long and uncertain period of incarceration still ahead of me. What does the Close Supervision Committee expect? Do they expect me to be a model prisoner after what I've been through and am still experiencing?

Sure enough, one day I'd like to be a 'model prisoner', but one day is a big hope and getting to it isn't helped by the psychological trauma I've experienced at Woodhill CSC. I'm going to need a lot of help, especially when prisons are 'going to hell in a handbasket' (four prisons condemned in as many weeks by the chief inspector recently) and prison staff continually abuse their positions of trust. I'm an inmate whose fears are picked up by recurring neglect in the prison system.

Suppose I'm a prisoner who's subjected to repeated physical or emotional abuse by CSC officers. After a number of painful experiences, the mere sound of intimidation in a prison officer's voice may elicit a reaction of fear in me. Once learned, such a fear is hard to unlearn. Another prison officer being nice doesn't undo the harm. It may be reduced by trust or therapy, but this

is just 'conditioning'. It's nice conditioning, but it was bad conditioning that got me here in the first place.

Whether it's good or bad, conditioning is about behaviour modification. Good and you react nicely, bad (which is what I've got throughout my time in the prison system) and you respond badly. So when a prison officer speaks to me and his tone is aggressive, it eventually triggers me off. I'm oppressed by the terror of the prison system, which treats those committed to its care as aliens. I'm damned to a half-life of terrorism, exploitation and relentless repression.

These conditions make you ill, both physically and mentally, so you require medical treatment. So off we go to the 'healthcare' centre, but in all the 138 prison healthcare centres throughout the country, not one can provide adequate care (reported in the House of Commons, 18th March this year).

So we're in a double bind. The prison system makes you sick and mental, and the only place you can go for help is the prison healthcare centre, where there's no healthcare. It just makes things worse and leaves no room for improvement.

Glenn P. Wright

RT 3785, HMP Woodhill,  
Milton Keynes, MK4 4DA



# Autonomista – Argentina's

**O**n 19th June we interviewed Neka, a representative of the Argentinian autonomous movement touring Europe. She's a member of the piqueteros, the movement of the unemployed, named after the Spanish word for blockade. Though best known for their direct action strategies, they promote a much wider political project, developing networks in their neighbourhoods and local areas, or barrios. Their projects range from education and health initiatives to microcompanies – self-organised workshops in which the unemployed make and sell primary products, thereby earning an income to supplement the meagre dole.

Self-organisation is a necessity for most Argentinians. The state is declining rapidly through a lack of legitimacy and basic resources, leaving whole areas of primary provision – such as health and social services – uncatered for. No foreseeable solution to the crisis seems forthcoming. The World Bank and the WTO are pressing ahead with the structural readjustment programmes that were responsible for the crash in the first place, and international banks are pressing for debts to be paid.

In the last few years, only the will of the people to resist and find new methods of social organisation has kept the country afloat. Throughout the crisis, it's been these working people that have improvised ways to keep the hospitals, schools and factories open. The state and its ruling elites, however, are looking to re-establish themselves. The struggle of the Argentinian people is far from over.

**Freedom:** *Could you explain who the piqueteros are, how they're organised and how they first appeared?*

**Neka:** First, let me introduce myself. I'm Neka and I'm a member of the MTD Solano, which is part of a wider network of movements called MTD Anibal Verón. We began to get organised at the end of 1997, when we were badly hit by the effects of unemployment. The starting point was holding meetings and assemblies in the neighbourhoods.

**Freedom:** *Did these assemblies and meetings begin spontaneously, or were they an initiative taken by previously organised political groups?*

**Neka:** No. Most of us were already engaged in different projects and knew each other through everyday life in the neighbourhood. For example, I was part of an interdisciplinary team working on health issues in our barrio. So we'd been in touch. There was a bond between the neighbours. And there were also some other compañeros who'd been involved in other projects in the area as well. When we first decided to get together and discuss the problems brought about by unemployment, most of us had a deep and sound knowledge of our barrio.

**Freedom:** *So there was previous experience of organising at an exclusively local level?*

**Neka:** Yes. The area I come from, San Francisco Solano, is a town of 80,000 people. All the barrios were products of the asentamientos, that is, the squatting of land to solve the housing problem. That started as early as the 1980s, so there's a long history of determined and hard-won struggle in this area. We'd already been involved in different actions together, trying out different ways of organising and of problem-solving.

**Freedom:** *Are the piqueteros represented all over Argentina?*

**Neka:** Yes. It's a very diverse movement. Although, at first, we didn't use the word piquetero to describe ourselves. Initially it was used pejoratively by the media, that is, the state, to imply that we were criminals or subversive elements.

When we began to get organised, it was at a difficult time. There was still a middle class then, which doesn't exist today. They were waiting to see what the new process of privatisation would bring and were optimistic about what capitalism and neoliberalism had to offer. So when we began to blockade roads and occupy public buildings, demanding the return of what had been stolen from us, it created a shock.

Since then the social and political situation in the country has affected wider sections of the population. They've felt the consequences of all this and they've woken from the dream that capitalism promised – the same dream that capitalism itself has robbed them of. What is this idea of progress through exploitation – waged labour as they call it, but exploitation for us? Through unemployment, capitalism not only steals your job, but your dreams as well, dreams of comfort, consumerism.

**Freedom:** *Was there a particular point at which you decided to initiate these actions, the road blockades? Was it planned from the start, or was there a process of radicalisation that you went through?*

**Neka:** There isn't a single unified movement in Argentina. There are lots of different ones, and each one has its own, often very different, way of organising. For some, the piquete, the road blockade, is the most important. They use the media to build up their movement or party. For us the main focus is what goes on behind the blockade.

At MTD Solano, we think blockading roads or squatting public buildings are only means to an end. The most important things are happening in the barrio, at the assemblies, in the collective decision-making. Before undertaking any action, we hold meetings to discuss why we're going to do it. What's the meaning, for example, of setting up a blockade in front of a factory or a mill, places where the raw materials that we need for basic production or to feed ourselves, are kept? Or before we squat an outlet of Carrefour, the multinational supermarket chain, we discuss the meaning of such capital concentrations, and why the food is concentrated there, not where it should be.

There's a broader political project. Direct action and project construction in our area, in our barrio, are combined. So every day we construct in our neighbourhood what we demand in the street.

**Freedom:** *What's the impact of all these projects on the lives of those taking part in them? Has it coincided with an evolution in the political ideas, in the nature of the demands you make?*

**Neka:** I think there's been an important breakthrough in the traditional way of thinking about politics and political issues. We've been through a lot of different organisational practices, lots of different experiences, and what we've finally learnt is that we can build better projects without leaders. We don't need anyone speaking on our behalf. We can all have a voice to express both our problems and their solutions.

Popular education is the backbone of our project. It's allowed us to open up space for discussion and thought. We've started to

build new social relations, based on a deeper knowledge of each other, so we can feel we're all part of everything we're building. There's no state or boss, no one who can dictate to us how we should live. Regaining our dignity depends only on ourselves.

**Freedom:** *Do you have a practical project for popular education or is it more like sharing the experience of social construction?*

**Neka:** No. As we understand society, it's based upon relationships of domination. Anything coming from its institutions will be based on these same principles of domination. So education is an education in domination, as is the family. When we propose a social change, this means we have to begin anew and devise new relationships. This is the challenge. For example, we decided that we had to produce our own foods to resist the monopoly of food production, like GM crops, and other impositions on how we eat that endanger both our health and the environment.

These new relationships are born of practice, through discussion of all these issues. Horizontality and autonomy, and all the things like that, aren't abstract ideas or theories, but practical processes. So popular education, these meetings and assemblies, are all part of the effort to change these relationships.

**Freedom:** *This form of organisation is very different from the traditional one based on parties and hierarchies. How does the movement relate to these more traditional forms of the left? Have they tried to use you to achieve their goals?*

**Neka:** It's a common occurrence in Argentina that when there's something interesting happening anywhere, the parties either criticise it or try to manipulate it. So we have to fight against both the right and against these attitudes on the left. There are areas where we can work together – against the debt, for example, or against repression – areas that affect us all. But ours is a very different logic and the new society we envisage is very different to theirs. I hope finally they'll learn, as they find themselves becoming as authoritarian as those they criticise, that their ways don't work.

**Freedom:** *Have you ever had any problems keeping the assemblies independent?*

**Neka:** A lot. We're always being criticised, and there's an ongoing attempt to manipulate and infiltrate us. Security in the movement is an area of work and debate as well. We're always discussing how to take care, not only of ourselves, but also of the construction of our projects.

**Freedom:** *How is all this practically implemented? How do the assemblies work and how are they coordinated?*

**Neka:** There are different levels of coordination. There are seven barrios in the MTD Solano and, in certain fields like health, education, productivity and economic projects, they all work together. These initiatives are coordinated through delegates, as are the wider plans for the struggle. Delegates from different areas meet once a week and they represent the decisions made in their assemblies.

As well as this, the MTD Solano has its own delegates who meet with others to coordinate our efforts and experiences as widely as possible. This is done through the MTD Anibal Verón, which also coordinates with different levels and organisations, some of which may have different ways of doing

things – they may be leaders or decision-makers, for example – but always through delegation. In our case delegation is taken in turns. If delegates don't voice the decision made by the assembly they can be recalled.

**Freedom:** *Has this co-ordination on a wider level always happened this way or has it evolved gradually? Was there a discussion on how to implement it?*

**Neka:** The needs of the movement have led us over time to focus more on our shared interests than on our political differences. Take repression, for example. In less than a year we've had three compañeros killed in the MTD Anibal Verón. A year ago there was the Avellaneda massacre, in which two of them were assassinated. This level of repression made us stop and think we should coordinate our struggle. Another example is the corralito, the state's expropriation of the people's savings. We saw that it wasn't only affecting those deprived of their savings, but also the everyday life of the whole country. Reality itself has imposed different levels of coordination on us.

**Freedom:** *Has there been an increase in repression? How has it affected your personal lives?*

**Neka:** I think the repression of the dictatorship in Argentina has never really ended. There's certainly been a change in the methods. They're now much more subtle, but, precisely because of that, much more dangerous. Take the different methods of social control, for example, and the means employed to control social movements. Essentially the state is a repressive force, and the system is criminal.

When a state leaves millions homeless, without any benefits or health and social services, that's repression. When there are large numbers of kids starving to death every day, dying of malnutrition or bad health, that's repression. These policies are repression. Economics is repression. But this is also combined with the batoning and shooting of those demanding an end to all this, of those asking for what they have a perfect right to.

Lately, another instance of repression has been the attempts to entice all the popular struggles into becoming part of the institutions, searching for every means to buy the leaders. That's why we don't have leaders, because in the end they always agree to something the people don't want, something the assemblies don't want.

The state has a deliberate policy of undermining such groups. The present methods of repression are more subtle: propaganda, criminalisation, and new laws. On top of this they're organising groups in the barrios. They employ youngsters from a given area to work with the police against their own neighbours, killing militants, chasing people down. There have been more than three hundred different cases of shootings, that is, faked robberies in which there's always some militant killed, and this is organised by the police themselves.

So for us it's all part of the same dictatorship, stretching back to the military junta of the 1970s, only now it wears a mask of democracy.

**Freedom:** *So we can say that every state, dictatorship or democracy, always follows the same pattern, that of repressing the social movements?*

**Neka:** There's a change in the form, in the shape, but the essence remains the same. It's a matter of detail.



# rebellion of the grassroots



**Freedom:** Basically, it seems to be a situation of class exploitation in both forms of government. And the role of the state is to ensure and protect the privileges of the rulers, the rich and powerful.

**Neka:** Of course. As I see it, true democracy is when we all have the possibility of saying what we want, of choosing how we want to live, without it being imposed on us. As long as these relationships of domination exist, as long as there's imposition from above, there can't be any democracy, no matter how popular a government is.

**Freedom:** Do you also keep in touch with other types of social movements, for example the workers running the factories?

**Neka:** Yeah. The network of squatted factories is very diverse as well. There are about two hundred of them, and a lot of different proposals on how to run and defend them. But there's also a network for coordination between them and other social movements, such as the assemblies and the piqueteros. As of a few months ago, there's a strong coordination with other squatting groups as well, such as teachers and doctors. It's a very interesting process. Even if the political line is usually different, the lines for coordination are very interesting.

**Freedom:** Do you think your movement served as a point of reference for other groups that began to get organised after the December 2001 crisis?

**Neka:** I think so, I think it's been useful. Even though we believe it can't be right to become a model or create a dogma. But I think there are experiences that multiply themselves and then get diversified, which is very interesting. We're always having comrades from other places coming along to visit, to stay with us for a while, work and have a look, and they're very happy with it.

**Freedom:** Do you coordinate with anarchist groups? Are they simply organised as members of the assemblies?

**Neka:** No, there have been periods of powerful anarchist struggle in Argentina, such as those of the so-called 'tragic week' or the Patagonian Rebelde. And the anarchist influence is very strong in aspects of the present movement such as education and organisation. We're also interested in the Spanish Civil War. There are some compañeros from the MTD Solano who come

from the anarchist struggle. We have some similarities with the historical way of building organisations, but nowadays we don't maintain any substantial relationship. We do with individuals, but not with any anarchist organisation.

**Freedom:** What do you think the role of globalisation, and international capitalism, has been in the crisis that Argentina is facing?

**Neka:** Even if it's true that national economic groups and the state are partly responsible, ultimately the root of the problem has been global – the interests of big capital. It affects countries like Argentina but also everything happening in Africa, in Asia, and some of what's happening in some European countries too. Policy is planned and executed by the likes of the IMF, in the interests of big corporations, the USA and the European Union – in short, those with economic power.

**Freedom:** Attempts are being made to create an opposition to this neoliberal project by building an international anti-globalisation movement. How do you see these attempts?

**Neka:** We take part ourselves in a lot of forums, meeting people from all over the world. The Porto Alegre forum, for example, but also many others at a regional or continental level. They're interesting, but it should be stressed that it's best to concentrate on coordinating practically. There's a risk of empty speeches, agreements and theories that lead to no substantive action.

The system preys on our everyday life. We're educated to obey, the clothes we wear are imposed on us, even where we can live. You and I can't choose the place, the house or the barrio where we want to live. The struggle against this domestication or disciplining is what we have to co-ordinate afterwards.

**Freedom:** Practically speaking, what do you think we can do here in Europe and the UK to support the struggling people of Argentina?

**Neka:** We draw strength and hope from meeting other struggling people or those who are doing things in their areas, promoting a new way of life. We also share resources. Usually in Britain, as in Spain and Italy, resources are more readily available, things we lack in Argentina. Support, and

sharing these things as much as we can, I think that's a very important issue.

And there's also the repression. I think it's been restrained in Argentina thanks to worldwide demonstrations – in front of the embassies, the international organisations. Such institutions won't do much on our behalf, of course, but such demonstrations draw attention to our struggle.

**Freedom:** Looking to the future, do you think there's any possibility of a solution to the crisis in Argentina under capitalism, or do things require a radical redefinition?

**Neka:** At the moment in Argentina there's a large void left by the collapse of the state. But the system is very durable and continually creates conditions under which it can support itself and thrive. That's happening with the new government, but it doesn't mean that the right solution is being applied – for us. No solution will come from any reform or the reproduction of what we had before.

**Freedom:** Can this power void be filled by a network of the struggling groups? Do you think such a coordination could be the embryo of a new society, organised in a different way? Could it take over areas from the state?

**Neka:** We, at least, aren't thinking according to the same logic we used to. I believe we can develop a different logic, that it's possible to imagine a different kind of society, a different kind of country. Well, not even a country, since the borders are artificial, but the starting point would be to discuss and work out new ways of organising. We at MTD Solano don't have any faith in a revolution employing the same means and ways of the bourgeoisie to govern. There must be a different logic.

**Freedom:** Could this way of organising, according to these different logics, take over from the state, so that at the end you get a network of assemblies managing the everyday life of the workers?

**Neka:** Yeah, I think that would be the logical way, wouldn't it? Because that's the only way everyone can have a say in what affects them.

**Freedom:** Finally, how do you think this is going to evolve – the movement itself and the social and economic situation in Argentina?

What do you think is going to happen and what would you like to happen?

**Neka:** I don't think the conditions have been met to put in place a popular government, no matter how much the bourgeoisie want it. I think that, for a while, they'll use mechanisms to create some social consensus, to gain the support they need to stay in power. But at some point it's going to kick off again. The conditions are primed for it. They're using a lot of tools to foster hope amongst the people, as they did when they brought in Lula, Chavez, and Castro. But all this is simply a mask to fool us. In fact, I think this government is already having a lot of problems. We don't expect any important or radical changes. On the contrary, they're going to employ ever strengthening repression.

The challenges, at least for us, are to continue strengthening ourselves in the barrios, creating sound organisations, analysing new situations in depth as they arise and fighting struggles as creatively as we can. And we mustn't let ourselves become dogmatists, either.

**Freedom:** So a future of struggle?

**Neka:** Yeah, the struggle goes on.

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## Is it a useful analytical tool or just stale leftovers from Lenin?

# Anarchist views on imperialism

A few years ago we heard a lot about globalisation. We were told that capitalism had triumphed following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Fuelled by factors as diverse as the internet, international institutions like the World Bank, global financial markets and an increasingly heterogeneous world culture (exemplified by brands such as Nike, Coca Cola and McDonalds), it was spreading unabated throughout the world. Wherever you were you could still watch CNN, drink coke and eat your Big Mac. Even if you couldn't afford to, you still wanted to. History was over and capitalism had won.

Old-fashioned imperialism, it seemed, where capitalists divided the world between themselves, often by means of war, was no longer needed. Indeed, globalisation was held to be an improvement because it went deeper. When Britain conquered India, little attempt was made to turn its people into westerners. Globalisation, on the other hand, tried to turn everybody into a consumer, to bring everyone into the capitalist market place.

You don't hear so much about globalisation now, and the invasion of Iraq shows why.

Old-fashioned imperialism, unlike its victims, is alive and well, and this was the reason Bush and Blair invaded. The operation's code name, Iraqi Freedom, was a sick joke.

Imperialism as a concept is frequently attributed to Lenin, but the word was in currency before he wrote his pamphlet of the same name. By the start of the twentieth century, capitalist companies and states had outgrown their national economies and begun to share the world between themselves. The aim was to increase the size of their markets and to exploit other countries' natural resources.

The strength of states such as Britain, Germany and America, as well as of the large monopoly companies within them, meant they were able to extend capitalist relationships well beyond Europe and the United States. The greatest period of globalisation came, not in the 1990s, but in the three decades before 1914.

The latest invasion of Iraq wasn't Britain's first. It had happened before, towards the end of the First World War when the area was part of the Ottoman Empire. British oppression of the local population at that

time was brutal. One senior officer, Colonel Gerald Leachman, said "the only way to deal with [Iraqis] is wholesale slaughter". T.E. Lawrence, 'Lawrence of Arabia', duly obliged, boasting of the killing of "ten thousand Arabs".

On both occasions the British state invaded and occupied the country before setting up a client government. The only difference was that this time they had a little help. Both invasions were launched to secure oil reserves, currently valued at \$4,000 billion dollars, and because the region was strategically important. The British state is no longer the power it was, of course, but the imperialist motives remain the same.

Capitalist states make crude calculations. How much will this cost? How much will we gain? Do the gains outweigh the costs? From the White House and the Pentagon, the gains for the American state machine must have seemed substantial before the war began (though they may be looking a little shakier now).

Before 1989, east and west fought for control of contested areas by means of client regimes. They rarely intervened directly

themselves. When they did, as in Vietnam and Afghanistan, it was only because their client governments had failed to secure what was demanded of them. Like the attack on Afghanistan before it, the invasion of Iraq represented a return to traditional imperialism, but with a difference. It signalled New Imperialism, if you like.

At no time in history has one state had the economic, technological and military power that the United States currently possesses. Lenin wrote of capitalist nations dividing the world up amongst themselves, but America and the transnational corporations aren't interested in that. They want global hegemony. If they can't get this by peaceful means they're willing to resort to armed conflict.

Yet America's size is also its weakness. It's a clumsy giant, trying to stamp its authority on the world. As we found out on September 11th, this makes it vulnerable to those who seem weak. As anarchists, we oppose capitalism and the state, any type of state. Our task remains the same: to argue for a better, fairer system that gets rid of both.

**Richard Griffin**

It seems that the ideological construct known as imperialism hasn't yet been adequately dismantled. It continues its detrimental effect on anarchist consciousness. The construct of imperialism as understood by the left didn't fall out of the sky. Equally its existence as an actual economic, political and military force isn't undisputed fact.

The leftwing explanation of imperialism was devised after the Russian Revolution to underpin the Bolsheviks' dubious claim to be operating within the proposed developmental framework set out by Marx. The problem addressed was simple and twofold. Russia wasn't an industrial nation and the Bolsheviks weren't an economic class but a political faction.

The Leninists explained their apparent deviation from the tenets of Dialectical Materialism through an analysis of what they called Western Imperialism but which anarchists now know to be geographical dispersal of capital's general conditions (or globalisation).

The Bolsheviks argued that Russia and other feudal countries were, when considered in relation to 'Western Imperialism', the national equivalent of the proletariat. This spurious analysis over the last eighty years has become the legitimisation myth of many subsequent 'national liberation struggles'. It's particularly useful because it provides an easy 'us and them' scenario whilst at the same time mystifying the class aspect of such struggles.

Terms such as 'the people' are deployed by the leaders of national liberation to obscure their own class position (which is always bourgeois), and their domination over the

local peasants and workers they claim to represent. So the struggle against the 'alien oppressor' is characterised in terms of cross-class solidarity.

One can easily see the appeal of such strategies – they shut critics up by asking, "if you were menaced by the real threat of a foreign jackboot, would it be appropriate to dispute the right of your leaders to lead?" The now familiar disguise of a sectional push for power runs, "first we must win the war, then it will be time for the revolution", or sometime never and over your dead body comrade.

It's as if they'd have us believe that 'foreign' capitalists are somehow more offensive than indigenous ones, or that local/native exploiters and tyrants are less exploitative and tyrannical. With these arguments, 'no war but the class war' doesn't even get close to a class analysis of war, culture and power. The exigency of *realpolitik* has always been used to justify, not just the emergency measures taken by the 'struggle's' leadership but the position of the leadership itself.

So, to the question "is now the right time to be criticising the Palestinian bourgeoisie?" (posed, for example, by José Martí in this newspaper earlier this year), the answer must be, if the answerer is an anarchist, YES. The moment of political crisis is precisely the moment to question all authority because it's in crisis that tyranny establishes itself.

Anarchists explicitly reject bourgeois terror (or nationalist armed struggle if you like), whether it's embarked on by the leadership of some romanticised representation of a people – so noble, so hospitable, so horribly oppressed – or whether it's officially state-sanctioned. This is because all such struggles have a hidden agenda which operates against the working class. There's no such thing as a shared interest when one owns and the other labours.

Anarchist consciousness says that we live in a period of history which it describes as capitalism (a generalised social relation and source of political power based on economic force) and that capitalism is inherently hostile to human beings because it revalues everything, including people, into monetary value.

It therefore follows that all macro social, political and cultural phenomena, including

nations, tribes, cultures and peoples are both structural expressions of capitalist domination and a phenomenal mystification of it.

Anarchists therefore consider that all struggles between nations are really struggles between capitalist factions competing for the right to own the means of production, including the right to own the labour power of 'the people'. Israel wants a cheap labour force, Arafat too.

Under capitalist domination there's no such thing as a self-determining nation. Neither imperialist states nor 'liberated' states are free of the capitalist order which exists above and within and independently of all established political forms. All capitalist states from America to Palestine are driven by economic imperatives they can't control.

Anarchists consider it impossible for a nation to act autonomously of economic stimulus, in contradistinction to the way that, at a micro level, all of us as individuals retain some part of our lives that isn't wholly commodified. It's from this experience of small freedoms that anarchists infer the fundamental struggle of present existence to be between the interests of capital and the interests of humanity as so many billion individuals. Every other issue, language, nation, religion is secondary.

When someone talks of the struggle of a 'people' against 'imperialist aggression', anarchists ought to ask themselves a set of simple questions. Does the term 'the people' include a set of instituted political and religious conventions? That's not people as anarchists understand the word.

Does the term 'the people' include all minorities and sections of the local populace, or are these being subdued and exterminated? What's the role, background and business interest of the representatives of 'the people'? In what context is this tragic and moving account of 'the people' in struggle made to appear? Who's telling the story and what's their motive?

Anarchists must always question and resist all forms of authority and always avoid getting involved in simplified 'good versus evil' arguments. For us there's nothing to choose between the homeland of 'Palestinians' and the homeland of 'Israelis' as both are dominated by capitalist production methods

and both are promoted by competing economic interests in the mutual struggle for energy security (as if capitalism has ever allowed anybody anywhere in the world the luxury of a 'homeland' free of exploitation).

It's appropriate to examine the appearance, promotion and political function of 'national liberation struggles' within the British left. There's little space here, but it seems to us that making the leftist call of 'freedom for Palestine' in place of demanding "freedom from capitalism for everyone" is down firstly to the left's complete exhaustion of ideas, their inherent control freakery and conservatism; and secondly because they've inextricably placed their ambitions and activities within existing domestic political institutions.

In other words, "if we can convince you that we all vaguely agree that Palestine must be free (and none of us is responsible for the actual details of such a freedom) then there's a chance that you'll be so kind as to cast your vote for us".

**Monsieur Dupont**

### Next issue

The next issue will be dated 26th July, and the deadline for copy will be 17th July. Contributions can be sent to [FreedomCopy@aol.com](mailto:FreedomCopy@aol.com)

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### Answers to Anarcho-quiz (back page)

1. It was originally established to house animals confiscated from the private collections of the aristocracy.
2. Hardie, no friend of anarchism, called it Bismarckian because it was stitched up by authoritarian Marxists to exclude any group which didn't automatically agree with electoralism. Many anarchists were there to represent trades councils and unions, but they were expelled.
3. He was acquitted of the killing but fined \$1 for unauthorised use of government property – a bullet.
4. Charles sent her to Belgium but didn't pay her. She had to borrow money to return to England and ended up in a debtors' prison.

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# A study in S&M reveals tenderness beneath

by Hilary Spurling

The sado-masochistic relationship at the core of *Secretary* may initially seem weird but all is explained in this well-crafted, entertaining and thought-provoking film. The complexities of the sexual relationship are so well acted and so beautifully filmed that everything makes sense.

At one level it's an office romance in which the office is the place for the serious business of erotic game-playing. At another level it's an extraordinary sexual encounter between two shy people that develops into a love affair. It's also a satire on political correctness and the power relations between men and women.

The film explores the darker and dirtier aspects of sex. In the strange world that we're drawn into, feminism is irrelevant. As the relationship between the two central characters develops we realise their behaviour can't be judged by any notions of normality. All that matters is that they enjoy their game and their needs are complementary.

At the beginning of the story Lee Holloway, a drab, sloppily-dressed, psychiatric patient leaving hospital is delighted when she gets the job of secretary to the attractive Mr Grey. In her new role as Miss Holloway she accepts the humiliation and disregard that her boss coldly conveys to her. She deliberately makes typing errors so that he can bend her over his desk and give her a good spanking.

This treatment is erotically satisfying to her and gradually she's transformed into a confident, sexy young woman. In the background is a gentle, caring boyfriend, under pressure from his parents to marry Lee, who doesn't arouse her sexually.

She is from a dysfunctional family with an over-protective mother who doesn't allow her to grow up. The obsessively controlling Mr Grey is not really explained, apart from



Slave to love – Lee Holloway (Maggie Gyllenhaal) in *Secretary*

the fact that he had a controlling ex-wife. However, we understand why they're so well matched.

The sado-masochism is presented as a game in which intense emotions are being played out. While many of us may find the game bizarre, and possibly laughable, it is in fact a very serious game which has a compulsive, obsessive quality. The

underlying message seems to be that it's the strong sexual attraction that drives these two people into their weird game and which gives them a sense of liberation and the possibility of change. Unsurprisingly, when Lee briefly ventures into the 'conventional' world of S&M she realises that off-the-shelf sadists simply don't turn her on as Mr Grey does.

This film certainly supports the conventional view that the function of sex is the giving and receiving of pleasure but it challenges assumptions about the nature of pleasure. In any satisfying sexual relationship there are inevitably moments when the other person is treated in a depersonalised way and their feelings disregarded. People use each for their sexual pleasure, however much they may wrap this up in the language and behaviour of seduction. Unfortunately, the feminist preoccupation with abuse has made men defensive, women confused, and it's difficult to discuss the ambiguities around sexual pleasure.

Anarchists argue that we can only be free when we find our own unique way of expressing our sexuality without unreasonable constraints. A mature sexual person recognises the place of fantasy in their sexual lives. Essentially, sex is a form of play where adults can pretend to be dominant or submissive, controlling or accommodating, or whatever, and it's through being playful that they're most likely to discover and express their real selves.

Feminist rejection of traditional gender roles may have been absorbed into mainstream culture but much of the sexual imagery of the dominant male and submissive female remains in our psyches. In the film traditional roles get played out in a sexual way and the outcome is liberating for both individuals. The sexual encounter creates the intimacy in which the couple can open up with each other and eventually show their needs for tenderness and understanding.

This is a very entertaining and optimistic film which shows the centrality of sex in unlocking repression and promoting self-esteem and tenderness. In a society where individualism and self-reliance are valued so highly it's important that our basic human needs for sexual gratification and a loving relationship are re-asserted.

## Readers' views

### Anarchists come lately

I want to take issue with some views expressed by the (anonymous) writers of 'Mayday reclaimed?' (14th June).

They claim that the trade union march, held in London on 1st May, is "as irrelevant as it was five years ago and – alongside the Countryside Alliance march – it remains the only demonstration promoted by the state."

While it's true that the organisers, the Mayday Committee, do meet with the police, that's hardly being "promoted by the state". To add the Countryside Alliance is a smear unworthy of an anarchist contributor.

For readers' information, the Mayday Committee, made up for the most part of rank-and-file trade unionists, has organised a rally and march for around twenty years now. It's always been held on 1st May and it's always been supported by trade unionists and their families who have been forced into exile from their own lands.

These have included comrades who suffered torture, for example in Chile.

In recent years the Mayday Committee has attracted growing numbers of indigenous trade unionists too.

At the same time, we've also seen the rise of an alternative Mayday event in the capital.

As we know, various happenings have been organised, some successful, some not. But what the unnamed writers of your piece don't know is that over this time there's been

co-operation between the two groupings.

Mayday 2000 saw demonstrators attack a branch of McDonalds in Whitehall and provide lovely gardens in Parliament Square.

The police also used this as an excuse to stop our march from using Trafalgar Square.

But they lied when they told us that demonstrators from Whitehall had entered the Square.

We objected to this because at that time the Square was empty. The march sat down in the Strand to protest.

The police threatened arrests. Word was passed up and down the march and a decision was agreed that we'd use an alternative venue for the rally.

Afterwards, some full-time union officials said McDonalds was the work of agent provocateurs and the police were right to stop the march.

Let me make it clear that the Mayday Committee rejected this and blamed the police.

The Mayday Committee, through the trades' councils, made this position clear by delegates speaking at conferences and meetings, thereby getting their support.

This year saw the TUC give its official support to the Mayday rally for the first time. I understand that this 'blessing' brought its own problems and caused printing delays.

The attendance was also down on the last few years, something both Maydays had in common.

Continuing TUC support could, in my view, mean the kiss of death and would

certainly mean far less concentration on the anti-capitalist approach of recent rallies.

Certainly there's a need for much greater co-operation between the two groupings. The last thing that's needed are the views expressed in 'Mayday reclaimed?'

The work of the Mayday Committee in keeping 1st May alive as day of celebration and protest should be recognised.

If any grouping has kept Mayday alive and 'reclaimed' it, the anarchists are very much the latecomers.

P.T.

John Doheny

### History lesson

For the interest of Iain McKay and others searching for organisational means and activities, I'd offer the history of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), which operated in the 1790s in the capital.

Wishing to keep its groups small and independent, when one grew larger than thirty members it divided and, after the next thirty, divided again.

This accomplished two things. It lessened the possibility of government spies and it made it possible for everyone to contribute to discussions and decision-making within the group.

Another (unplanned) effect was that the government's emphasis on arresting leaders only made the groups multiply and spread

out over large areas, which made leadership almost irrelevant.

Of course, unlike the present the working class then lived near each other – in the same street or adjoining streets – which made the dividing and spreading much easier.

Still, the LCS plan seems better than trying to organise the whole of the working class through the pages of *Freedom* and in trade unions, especially when so many of them focus only on higher pay and a comfortable middle class life.

### What orthodoxy?

In her remarks about Herbert Read, A.K. writes that Read "cut himself off from the anarchist movement for good in 1953 when he accepted a knighthood" ('Nice theories, Sir Herbert, shame about the knighthood', 31st May).

I wonder what this recently adopted term, 'the movement', means.

How can the sneering, quarrelling invective and general abuse of each other (for example, the attacks on Murray Bookchin in recent years) characterise a movement?

Perhaps A.K. and others have answers to this question.

A.K. also remarks that Read "never abided by anarchist orthodoxy". The refusal to  
(continued on page 8)



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abide by orthodoxy is pretty much an anarchist characteristic.

Beyond the fundamental refusal of the authority of the state, individual anarchists seem to think and write (and sometimes act) in different ways all over the place. I'd like to have a list of orthodox anarchists.

I agree it was a mistake for Read to accept the knighthood, and he didn't fare very well in his written efforts to defend himself and to diminish the importance of it.

Many people (including his strongest critic, Vernon Richards) later believed that he'd accepted it because his wife, Ludo, wanted to be Lady Read.

She did have leverage and this sounds reasonable since Read also acquiesced in other mistaken decisions which were hers. The education of their children was an example.

But Read didn't cut himself from anarchism for good in 1953. Many anarchists were embarrassed by Read's act, even more were angry at what they saw as betrayal, and according to David Goodway "Read was ostracised by Freedom".

Yet, Goodway continues (in his introduction to *A One-Man Manifesto*, the collection of Read's anarchist writings published by Freedom Press), "as far as Read himself was concerned he remained an anarchist ... his gravestone at St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, bears the inscription: 'KNIGHT, POET, ANARCHIST'."

In fact, Goodway provides a much better description of the development of Read's thought, and his anarchism, than A.K.

J.D.

## New reality show

According to reliable sources at the BBC, the people behind the original *Big Brother* are planning to launch a brand new Reality TV extravaganza. Titled *I'll Sell Liberty, Get Me Into There!*, the show will feature a melange of current and aspiring politicians. Each week the contestants will attempt to outperform each other as they engage in a series of meaningless debates and rituals. Although the result of these will be planned in advance, television executives are hoping that the supposed friction between contestants will keep viewers glued firmly to their seats.

In order to ensure that this is the case, there are also plans afoot for the public to have a small role in proceedings. Gingerbread Lucas, acting Head of the BBC, told *Freedom* that viewers will be given the opportunity to evict contestants from the House. When asked if this would be a weekly feature of the show, he shook his head. "In the interests of stability, this will only happen once every four or five years," he explained. "Moreover, the ejected contestant will then have to be replaced by a similarly inclined colleague."

When pushed on this issue, Mr Lucas revealed that the role of the voter will not be



a particularly important one. In fact, the rules have been fixed to ensure that certain contestants will enjoy a privileged status which ensures their stay in the House will be both long and prosperous. What's more, these contestants will be given carte blanche to make decisions that impinge upon the lives of those outside the House.

However, not everybody is convinced about the ethics of the proposed game show. Former *Radio Times* columnist Ambrose Bierce recently contended that it will turn out to be nothing more than a "means of livelihood affected by the more degraded portion of our criminal classes." It remains to be seen if he will be proven correct.

Dean

## In Laurens's crystal ball

Why did the government allow Tony Banks's ban on hunting to go through? Was it so the House of Lords could overturn it, allowing ministers to call an election on whether the Lords should be allowed to do so? Many people who now intend to abstain in a general election would then be faced with a challenge - "if you abstain now, the Lords will prevail and hunting will remain".

In every election for the last 53 years, when I've talked of Labour's betrayals and given the case for abstention at least one Labour supporter has said, "that may be true, but if Labour is elected they'll abolish hunting". Now it might actually be true. But my bet is that Blair would still find some way of ratting.

Laurens Otter

## A sideways look

It may come as a surprise to learn that there's such a thing as international law covering warfare. For the most part, it covers things like not killing prisoners and which arms are acceptable for use between civilised nations. Of course, many things prohibited by the Hague or Geneva Conventions have been used against people deemed 'uncivilised'.

These laws derive from a recognition in the late middle ages that certain rules were needed to give combatants some protection. At the time armies were composed almost entirely of mercenaries and the modern concept of the 'citizen army' hadn't yet been invented. This came with the French Revolution, and it was ruthlessly exploited by Napoleon. It forced his opponents to adopt similar tactics, such as the appeal to nationalism.

The 'law of war' has struggled to keep up with changes in technology ever since. The chief question has usually been on the definition of combatants - because if you're not a combatant, you shouldn't be attacked. The second world war muddied the waters, after the blitz and the Allied response of mass bombing of civilians.

The victors decide who's broken the law. So the US never breaks it, because it always wins and opts out of any multilateral body which might adjudicate. In order to be a combatant, and therefore covered by the rules, you have to be in uniform, openly carrying arms and in the frontline.

There's a bit of ebb and flow with frontlines, but you'd likely know when you were in one. If you're not in the frontline,

you can't be a 'combatant'. What you're not allowed to do is dress up your troops as peasants and then shoot unsuspecting occupying soldiers, like happens in films.

By doing so, you'd give up your supposedly privileged status as a non-combatant (whereby it's wrong to kill you, for example, by dropping a daisy-cutter into your village from 30,000 feet) and, if they catch you, occupying forces are allowed to do horrible things to you. Perhaps dropping all those bombs on Iraq was 'pre-emptive' against elite Republican guards who'd disguised themselves as peasant women with babies.

A recent trawl of the web found a human rights site saying that "with the dissolution of the Iraqi regular army and the occupation of the whole territory by the Coalition Forces, there are no possibilities for Iraqi civilians to acquire the status of combatant and use force in a legal manner."

Countless American soldiers and six British military police have been, in the words of the balanced and neutral British press, murdered. Legally this was true, because the killers were non-combatants. But the same also applies to the tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians killed during the bombing or shot while protesting.

In other words, this is like many other laws. It ignores reality. If some bullying foreign power occupied your neighbourhood, talked of democracy then cancelled elections and shot at anyone who protested, even the slowest on the uptake would understand that something more than letter-writing was needed.

The press bleats about the murdered Britons. But if they really gave a toss they'd be campaigning to get them out of Iraq. One thing's for sure. This situation is going to get a lot worse, regardless of what international laws may say.

Svartfrosk

## Anarcho-quiz

1. What are the revolutionary origins of the Parisian miniature zoo, the Ménagerie?
2. How did Labour Party founder Keir Hardie describe the international socialist congress held in London in 1896?
3. In 1944 a guard shot dead a Japanese-American inmate at the Tule Lake concentration camp, California. What happened to the guard?
4. Aphra Behn, the first English female novelist, became a spy for King Charles II. What was the result of her espionage?

for answers see page 6

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