

INSIDE ►►

Connexions
page 3

Voting special
page 4

Libertarian parenting
page 5

Reviews
page 7

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

The Shia revolt promised before the war by those in favour of the American invasion has started, but with a twist: it is against American rule. It is just over a year since the US-led invasion of Iraq began. In that year we have seen the lies used to justify the war exposed. We have also seen that the 'liberation' of Iraq only involved liberating its resources for transnational corporations. Its people are under occupation by US imperialism and within this same year we have seen an insurgency against the occupation start and intensify.

The current revolt in Iraq is to be expected. It is the latest in a long series of protests which have resulted in Iraqis being shot at by their 'liberators'. This time they are fighting back and on a large scale. Fighting has broken out in towns and cities which contain over 70% of Iraq's population. This must have put a damper on any plans the US may have had to mark the fall of Baghdad.

But credit where credit is due. The US has managed the near impossible. It has turned a population who used to be subject to a vicious dictator against them. Saying that, backing that dictator at the height of his tyranny obviously would not have helped nor would invading the country and killing over 10,000 civilians in the process. While it was predictable that the Sunni population would oppose the Americans (at least to any bar the US state), the fact that the US has added the Shia to their enemies is quite impressive. This group, which makes up the majority of Iraqis, suffered immensely under Saddam. That the Americans have turned their neutrality into a mass uprising says a lot about the regime they have imposed.

The occupying power has vowed to defeat the revolt. Helicopter gunships and tanks have been used against it, echoing Saddam's crushing of the Shia revolt back in 1991. Then they allowed Saddam to do it, this time they are doing it themselves. And while Saddam's act was portrayed as an evil act and (hypocritically) used to justify the war, the US repression is being presented in the best possible light. Yet again, the imperialists prove that dead Iraqis only count when it's not the US who killed them. Both literally and figuratively, of course, as the occupying power does not bother to keep track how many civilians they kill in Iraq.

Why have parts of the Shia population joined with the Sunni insurgency? While this revolt is a product of general hatred of the occupation and US rule, the gun battles which have erupted all across Iraq came specifically as a result of protests by

supporters of radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr. Somewhat ironically, this violent revolt was triggered by the closure of Sadr's al-Hawza newspaper a week ago on the grounds that it was inciting anti-US violence. Then US troops arrested one of his top deputies in Najaf.

Rather than stifling the movement, the two acts of state repression inflamed the problem. Initially, there was a wave of peaceful demonstrations, including the occupying of police stations and government buildings across Iraq including UK occupied Basra. In Baghdad, the Iraqi army responded to the protests by opening fire and allegedly killing three people. Since then the revolt has spread, with rebels taking at least two towns by Thursday (Najaf and Kut). While occupying troops are suffering losses, it is Iraqis who, as usual, are making up the bulk of the dead and wounded.

As well as the Shia revolt, 1,200 US troops as well as Iraqi security forces were sent to 'pacify' Falluja, a Sunni town of 200,000 people. This is where four US citizens were killed a few weeks ago (the US is less vocal that this was in response to deaths of Iraqi civilians in their raids). By the 8th of April, the US had killed over 300 Iraqis as a result of waging heavy street battles, using war-planes and tanks. This included around forty worshippers killed when the US blew up part of a Mosque. Not the best way to win hearts and minds.

Faced with the insurrection, the various politicians got into the act. The current president of the American puppet Governing Council, said that "any act that leads to violence and losses among civilians and coalition (personnel) is an act that we sternly condemn." We wonder if he includes the invasion that brought his new masters into power?

Not to be outdone, America's dictator in Iraq, Bremer, stated he had "a difficult security situation. We have a group under Moqtada al-Sadr that has basically placed itself outside the legal authorities, the coalition and Iraqi officials." How legal are authorities imposed by violence? Without irony, he said that al-Sadr was "attempting to establish his authority in the place of the legitimate authority. We will not tolerate this." He did not explain how an illegal occupation following an illegal invasion can create 'legitimate authority'. So Bremer's 'legitimate authority' only exists, like Saddam's, by means of state violence. But we can understand why he attacks Sadr for wanting to run the country: that is America's job. And his comment against groups who "think power in Iraq should come out of the barrel of a gun" was



truly priceless.

Bush joined in with the political mumbo-jumbo and was his usual delusional self, insisting that "the message to the Iraqi citizens is they don't have to fear that America will turn and run, and that's an important message for them to hear." Obviously he fails to see that so many people are rebelling because they fear America will

stay in Iraq and turn it into a de facto colony. If the US announced it was withdrawing then the levels of violence may decrease.

As it is, the number of American soldiers killed since the start of the war is now over 600. But rest assured, as in Vietnam the children of the rich, like Bush, are safe at home while their parents make money off the war. Rest assured, though.

From the safety of Whitehall and Capitol Hill Blair and Bush are bravely agreeing to fight to the last man. As long, of course, it is not them.

And while the politicians and bureaucrats talk bollocks, the people of Iraq are being subject to the levels of repression last seen under Saddam. It is funny how quickly the Bush Junta,

► page 3

SAY NO TO ID CARDS

In a case of the blind leading the deaf, a fast-track plan by David Blunkett is being backed by Blair to introduce ID cards. If Blair's government get their way, everyone in Britain will be forced to carry them within five years.

Blunkett was forced to water down his proposals for ID cards last November after objections from other cabinet members. So why the rush now? Apparently the bombings in Madrid and the arrest of suspected Islamic terrorists in Britain are the reasons for the accelerated introduction of compulsory ID cards. Yet these are obviously phoney

rationales. ID cards are compulsory in Spain and the suspected terrorists were apprehended without them. Obviously, like Aznar, Blunkett and Blair are using the atrocity in Madrid to further their political agendas.

And talking of dubious logic, ministers are insisting that Britain was better prepared to meet the threat of Islamic terrorists than many of its European counterparts because of its experience in fighting the IRA. Unlike the Spanish state's experience in fighting ETA?

Getting their priorities right, one minister said "the argument has moved

on from concern about civil liberties to making sure we get the logistics right." Yet civil liberties are the concern. When the Madrid bombings happened, the likes of Blair proclaimed it an attack on our way of life and democracy. And yet here the politicians are, eroding a key aspect of both by means of ID cards.

As libertarians, we should be at the forefront of resisting ID cards. Even if the excuses for introducing them were not flawed, we should not be giving the state more means of tracking us. Giving the state new powers is always a mistake.

FREEDOM

Volume 65 Number 08

Anarchism

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

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

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

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

Anti-fascism

Anarchists from the three national federations and No Platform are creating a new militant anti-fascist network to combat the rise of the far right. If you'd like more information or to get involved see www.antifa.org.uk

East Midlands

For all of you in the East Midlands, there's a new egroup called (originally enough) East Midlands Anarchists. It's aimed as a point of contact for anarchists in the region, a place for discussion and hopefully as a springboard for better organisation and activity in the area.

To join, email east-midlands-anarchists-subscribe@yahoo.com

Thank you Toby

This is Toby's last issue of the paper as a member of the editorial group. Over the last six months he has handed over the first five pages to new editors, and is now passing the whole paper over. We would like to thank him for everything he's done for the paper over the last three to four years, and look forward to carrying on his good work in the future. He'll now be pursuing other activities within Freedom Press group.

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Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 1st May 2004 and the last day for getting copy to us will be Thursday 22nd April. 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!

Remembering Tony Smythe

born 2nd August 1938
died 27th March 2004

Tony was educated at University College School and conscription was the catalyst for his radical activism. In 1958, he was imprisoned for three months as a conscientious objector, refusing not only military service, but also alternative civilian service. He became, and remained until his death, a radical anarcho-pacifist.

Shortly after his spell in prison, he joined the staff of the London-based War Resisters International as its assistant secretary and, in December 1960, played a major role in organising its triennial conference in India.

Tony was also a key organiser of the conference in Beirut in January 1962 to establish a world peace brigade, whose aim was to engage in non-violent intervention in areas of crisis and conflict. He was also active in anti-war campaigning in Britain and was one of the founder members of the Committee of 100 launched in 1960.

Tony's elevation into a public figure came in 1966 when he took over at the NCCL - now Liberty. By encouraging it to broaden the scope of its activities,

including monitoring the conduct of police and participants at major demonstrations, he raised the profile of the organisation and helped expand its membership from 1,800 to 5,400.

In 1971, he left NCCL to join MIND, the campaign to advance the views, needs and ambitions of people with mental health problems. Again he succeeded in catapulting what had been a little-known and relatively low-key campaign into public prominence. He established an executive committee that started the process which led to users of the service becoming involved in management and policy decisions.

In the last few years of his life he became active in Haringey Solidarity Group (HSG). When we were campaigning against changes that affected claimants like the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and the New Deal, Tony was always there: from discussing tactics, to helping to write leaflets, to standing outside job centres trying to inform both claimants and staff.

Whenever we needed transport for evening activities Tony was always there with his camper van. A number of us will always remember the evening Tony, Phil (sadly now no longer with us

either) and Donald from HSG were stopped by two young police officers for fly posting against the JSA. The cops couldn't believe they were still doing this at a collective age of around 170. One of them said, "You're old enough to know better." And in fact he was, in a sense, right. Tony was old enough to have seen it all and to know very well why he was doing this - a lot better than some plod in a tin can!

When Lorenzo Komboa Ervin and JoNina Abron, two ex black panthers from America, came to stay with us in Haringey, Tony was one of the first to show them around and discuss politics, even though his views on "self defence" differed greatly from theirs. He was also very supportive of Delroy & Sonia Lindo, a Haringey couple harassed by the local police for their friendship with Winston Silcott.

Tony was instrumental in helping set up the Markfield Project in Haringey in 1979. The Markfield Project is an independent Family Resource Centre for all ages of people with mental health problems and learning difficulties. It promotes empowerment and inclusion by challenging all forms

of. In fact the Markfield and HSG organized an event to celebrate Mayday in 2000. Even though ill at the time, Tony turned up to support the event and spoke fondly of his past involvement with the Markfield - something a lot of us didn't know about until that day.

On a personal level I will always remember the heated discussions Tony and myself had over tactics within the anarchist movement and for the anarchist revolution we both always wanted. Tony a life long committed anarchist always argued the pacifist line. I must say I disagreed with him. But we discussed the issues over a cup of tea or a beer and always ended the debate as good friends as when we started.

His lifelong partner, and fellow-anarchist campaigner and organiser, Jeanne, died in 2001, a shattering blow from which he never really recovered. Tony will be sadly missed by all those who knew him. It was a privilege to have known him.

This Obituary was written by members of Haringey Solidarity Group and pinched bits from Michael Randle piece in The Guardian on Monday 29th March 2004

LISTINGS

Brighton

18th May Public meeting against water fluoridation, with invited medical and Human Rights speakers, at Hanover Centre, Southover Street, from 1.30pm to 4.30pm.

Dublin

1st May Join the anti-EU festivities on the streets with RTS parties, street blockades and forging links with Ireland-based activists. For more info, see www.dublinmayday.org

Glasgow

24th April End the council tax! national demonstration, called by the SSP.

Lancashire

Friday 30th April upstairs @ 12 Bar, Church Street, Preston, 7pm, £2 on the door The Sanity Clause, Eastfield (solo set), One Man Stand, plus special guests

Saturday 1st May Laying wreath at Memorial outside the Corn Exchange, Preston, at 12noon.

Saturday 1st May Mayday March, meet Thurman Street car park, Lancaster at 11am, then five hours of boring-as-shit speeches or ... huge picnic in the fields behind George & Dragon, St. George's Quay, Lancaster, from 12noon. Bring food, drink, games, positive attitude, furry creatures, large and small people. Jugglers and drummers will have the piss taken mercilessly.

Saturday 1st May Spontaneous Combustion: bands and more at Gregson Centre, Moor Lane, Lancaster, from 7pm, £2 on the door. The Sanity Clause, Eastfield, Confrontation, bellydancing, soapbox provided For spontaneous rants, bring cds - the theme is protest.

Saturday 1st May Underground Sound Mayday party at the Crypt, Meeting

House Lane, Lancaster, from 9pm to 1am, £3 (£2 b4 10pm) with brains, the whip and gez.

Sunday 2nd May May Hungover Sunday Gathering, Gregson Centre, Moor Lane, Lancaster, 1pm to 5pm Children's films, political films, displays, discussion and other stuff. Parent-managed kid's space. Grub.
Sunday 2nd May Thorpey's Red Rose Club, Yorkshire Street, nr. Turf Moor, Burnley, 7pm, £2 on the door The Sanity Clause, Eastfield), Burn All Flags, One Man Stand

London

23rd April Seaside Tribe and Campaign Against Arms Trade present Peace and Revolution at The Brixton Telegraph, 228 Brixton Hill, Brixton, £5 before 11pm, £8 door after, call 07811 260359 or see www.seasidetribe.org
24th April CAPS demo outside Wilkinsons, Stratford, from 12.30 to 2pm. For more details contact classwaruk@hotmail.com

30th April Critical Mass bike ride: ten year birthday party. Starts 6pm at Southbank, Waterloo, in front of the National Film Theatre under Waterloo Bridge. See <http://cmlondon.enrager.net>
1st May Mayday Picnic from 3pm in St James Park. We should stress that this is genuinely a picnic and nothing else, so please bring what you would expect to find.

1st May Join the Libertarian bloc for the TUC march on International Workers Day. Provisional meet up 12noon, Clerkenwell Green
8th May Annual Cannabis March and Festival, carnival-style march from Kennington Park (assemble 12noon) with floats, banners, costumes and samba beats leading to an all day free festival in Brockwell Park, Brixton - licence permitting.

info@thecannabisfestival.co.uk

<http://www.thecannabisfestival.co.uk/>
8th May Annual James Connolly/Bobby Sands march through Central London. 020-8442 8778 <http://wolfetone.org.uk/>
15th May Memorial/benefit gig for Chris Groner - who sadly passed away in March. With PAIN and other 'ChrisG' bands @ Chats Palace, 42-44 Brooksby's Walk, London E9. For info <http://www.chris-groner.com/>
Every Wednesday the LARC Library from 1pm at 62 Fieldgate Street, E1.
Every Saturday Vigil for the release of Mordechai Vanunu from 12 noon to 2pm at Kensington High Street near the Israeli Embassy. For more info see www.vanunu.freereserve.co.uk or call 020 7378 9324

Yorkshire

1st May Banner Theatre present Burning Issues: The Miners 1984-2004, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the 1984/5 Miners Strike, at Yorkshire Miners Gala, Locke Park, Barnsley at 2pm. See www.bannertheatre.co.uk/

National events

24th April The Campaign Against Prison Slavery is calling for a National Day of Action against Wilkinson's use the forced labour of prisoners. See <http://www.againstprisonslavery.org/>

Nationwide groups

Anarchist Federation
c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.afed.org.uk
Class War Federation
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX
www.classwaruk.org
Earth First!
www.earthfirst.org.uk
Industrial Workers of the World
PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ

www.iww.org.uk

Solidarity Federation
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
www.solfed.org.uk
For details of smaller and local groups see www.enrager.net/britain

Social Centres

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

Freedom
84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1
Kebele
14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY
www.kebele.org

Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)
The Basement, 78a Penny Street, Lancaster
www.eco-action.org/lancaster

London Action Resource Centre (LARC)
62 Fieldgate Street, London E1
www.londonlarc.org

Occupied Social Centre
159 Fortress Road, London NW5
www.wombles.org.uk

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

Use Your Loaf
227 Deptford High Street, London SE8
www.squat.freereserve.co.uk/useyourloaf.html

1in12 Club
21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 2LY
www.1in12.com

56a Infoshop
56 Crampton Street, London SE17
www.safetycat.org/56a

Britain

The liberty trade off

Connexions claim to help Britain's youth, but they do far more than that, says Angela Paine

The government's Connexions service has now been up and running for some time. Connexions is the 'joined up' multi-agency approach to support youth. The Connexions service is driven by a central database, common referral documentation, and information sharing. This database is available to a range of partner agencies. All the agencies employ Personal Advisers who can input information onto the system. This database is accessible by authorised personnel in defined geographical areas. Schools automatically give information to be uploaded onto the database each year for their leavers. Under the Data Protection Act all children should be given the opportunity to accept or decline certain aspects of this information sharing, 'informed consent'.

The government is also promoting a Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

The feasibility of CAF may be being examined in your area, ask about it. CAF runs way beyond the Connexions database. It will be a local government run database, and will involve agencies such as Connexions, LEAs, the police, health organisations, the NHS, and Youth Offending Teams, all feeding into the CAF database. The client age range? Zero to nineteen, and beyond in certain cases (informed consent at 10?). If it 'works' CAF may become a nationwide database not restricted to any geographical area CAF will operate on a tiered system of need indicators. All children on at risk registers, 'vulnerable' children, and those not in immediate need. The definition of 'vulnerable' is not clear. Alarming this 'vulnerable' group has been estimated to be around 36% of children in at least one local government area.

Now it may be said that if one desperate child is saved from abuse then this system is worthwhile. I cannot disregard the depths of pain, and anguish some children go through that lead them to live desperate lives in prostitution, addiction, and criminality, or to have their lives ended by horrendous cruelty and violence.

If these databases were tools that stood alone in support of the wretched, if these databases could be protected from changes in terms of use, if these databases were not sometimes run by subsidiary companies of corporations like Vesper Thornycroft if, if ...

Just after the festive season this year I caught a glimpse of a Connexions television advert: "No one to talk to? Talk to Connexions." I had this immediate thought. The government has given up on the notion of community.

This was then followed by the thought that the Soviets encouraged, through informing on parents, children to rely on the state first. Tenuous links maybe. Then I heard about CAF.

I concluded the following. The support for parents to be at home, to be parents, is minimal. Support is there for parents to go to work and leave their children with 'carers'. The support for struggling children to engage with their struggling parents is minimal. The support for children to seek help from Personal Advisers is there in buckets.

The dangers for children in abusive families or from families with few parenting skills is undeniable. Anarchists would argue that healthy communities/extended families are self-policing. Anarchists would argue that communities/extended families that are not distorted by extreme philosophies, such

as capitalism, would offer good support for at risk children, at risk families, and for those with poor parenting skills.

I would suggest that the governments view is that communities are dead, and are not revivable. Therefore the state has to provide. Therefore Connexions, and the CAF. The state will nurture and succour our children. The state will decide what is acceptable and what isn't. CAF will become governments tool for social engineering. (Since writing the above Connexions has adopted a new database system, which is compatible with CAF.)

The challenge to anarchists is this. How do you redefine community and liberty in an age where state intervention in more and more aspects of our lives? As we have lost the means for maintaining community are we to lost the means of raising our own families?



The moment the Great Revolution broke out in Yorkshire! A very wet and windy day at Menwith Hill, and a heavy police presence. There were 22 arrests – all released without charge. Gate No 3 remained blocked from 4am to 10.30am. The Main Gate was cleared after many arrests and heavy-handed treatment by police.

In brief

Post Office closures

About 3,000 post offices are being closed around the country by the new privatised company that manages them. In Nottingham activists associated with the Sumac Centre started up a campaign to save our three most local ones. About fifty people – pensioners, small business owners, unemployed and others – attended our first meeting; a good start, but one that we didn't manage to keep up.

Although the next few days saw over 6,000 leaflets delivered to the houses in our neighbourhood people stopped coming to meetings and our final demo was only made up of a dozen or so people. We were helped a lot by Haringey Solidarity Group sending us a pack with all the facts about post office closures – we'd hoped to emulate their successful campaigning – but we can't pretend to have the same support from residents' associations as they do; our local groups are mostly defunct.

Community campaigning is hard work. Much as we all talk about how struggle really goes on at the grassroots and has to be carried out by ordinary people, too often it turns out to be the same uber-committed activists who push on with it. It's possible that, after they'd vented their concerns at the first public meeting, people thought 'the campaign' would sort things out for them ... We avoided setting up any kind of campaign committee, against the wishes of the councillor who turned up, but clearly there were still barriers to getting involved.

If we want community involvement in campaigns we have to show we can win. We also need to put down roots, so that people know and trust each other and accept direct action as an everyday event. Hopefully, if it did nothing else, this short post office campaign has helped the new Sumac Centre to put down some of these roots.

Alfred V.

GM refused?

Bad news for the government. After deciding, in the face of overwhelming public opposition, to allow a strain of GM maize to be grown in the UK the company that developed the GMO will abandon the technology in Britain. The biotech company who produced the crop, Bayer CropScience, made it clear that unless the strict controls for growing the crops are relaxed, it will abandon the technology in Britain.

Two things should be noted. Firstly, the initial tests which the government said proved that the GM maize was safe were flawed. They used a pesticide so toxic it is now banned by the EU. Secondly, the biotech government wants the rigorous testing conditions which produced the (flawed) result in favour of the maize to be relaxed. So what does even this flawed testing prove if the 'listening' government capitulates and allows the crops be grown in another way?

page 1

Blair and the pro-war crowd has went from being so concerned about Iraqi human rights and freedom to baying for Iraqi blood and urging the crushing of the same kind of popular revolt they wanted against Saddam.

These developments do make it hard for the US to portray themselves as the liberators rather than the occupiers of Iraq, although the right-wing media is trying its best. It also makes life hard for the Bush Junta, which wanted to appear to be making some progress in extracting itself from the Iraqi quagmire before the elections in November. Now senior US congressmen have warned President George W. Bush's administration that Iraq faces civil war. Or, more

correctly, a war against US occupation.

More and more US politicians wonder if US should consider postponing the handing over of 'sovereignty' to the Iraqis on 30th June. The fact the media takes this nonsense seriously and reports it with a straight face shows how subservient to power it is. What the Bush Junta calls returning sovereignty to the Iraqis is, in reality, simply the US occupying forces taking power from one set of US appointed Iraqi politicians and giving it to another set. The interim government appointed by the US will be prohibited from reversing any of the laws passed by the US. The US-UK military occupation will go on, with the US maintaining full effective control, particularly of security, oil, economic

policy, major contracts.

Which, perhaps, explains why Bush does not appear to have the 'exit strategy' the media is so concerned about: the US is not planning to leave. Why invest so much money to further imperialist adventures and then give the country to its people? Why else is the US so against genuinely free elections in Iraq? Why else is it ensuring that its forces will be 'invited' to have military bases there? Why else is it talking about a Iraqi 'civil war' in the light of such obvious and generalised opposition to its rule? Simply to justify its continuation.

Little wonder the Iraqis are rebelling. Anyone with any dignity would. This mass insurgency exposes the lie that the US are liberators. Which explains why

the media has repeated the Bush Junta line that this is the start of a civil war rather than what it obviously is: a national liberation struggle. But on the positive side, at least Bush, as promised, has proven himself a uniter rather than a divider: the Iraqis are uniting against him and his imperialist plans.

Which exposes that other great myth of the US, funnelled faithfully by the media, namely that Iraq is on the brink of civil war. This revolt has seen Sunni and Shia unite in fighting the occupying forces. Thousands of Iraqis – from both the Sunni and Shia communities – marched 60 km from Baghdad to Falluja to bring food and medical supplies to the besieged citizens there. The repression by the US can only unite the populations

and their resistance even more.

With the uprising, the media is flogging that old chestnut of Iraq being on the edge of anarchy. As if. What we have is a series of competing governments and states, not their absence. The scale of current uprising suggests opposition to the occupation is popular. One thing is sure, this revolt shows that the Americans will have a major problem on their hands.

In these circumstances, anarchists can only redouble our call for the occupying powers to withdraw. It is up to the Iraqis to determine how they want to live, not an imperialist power which is shaping the country to further its interests.

Jain McKay

Voting discussion

Anarchists and elections

With the local and European elections coming up, should we be encouraging people to vote ... or not?

The vexed question of anarchists and voting surfaces regularly. Every election it's dredged up, and the traditional arguments against voting receive another assault. Does it change anything? Are politicians all in it for themselves? All the old arguments are seemingly refuted, and anarchists are left to square their (non-) participation with their consciences.

Political parties and their lackeys spend vast amounts of time, effort and money trying to persuade people to vote. Operation Black Vote, for example, seems hellbent on getting young black people to X their papers. At a time of falling voting turnouts, when increasing numbers of people fail to see the benefits voting allegedly brings, should anarchists be involved in diminishing the non-voting proportion of the population?

One story receiving little attention is the government's proposal to give the vote to sixteen year-olds. At a time when electoral politics are losing ground to real, practical politics based around people's everyday lives, this smacks of defeatism by the Labour Party and their foul Tory counterparts. Sixteen year-olds will likely vote once, see the tomfoolery of such a course, and join the sizeable minority who recognise the stupidity of hoping for improvement to their lives through the ballot box. Is it any

coincidence that the lowest voting turnouts in the UK are in the most alienated areas of the country?

It's also hard to see how giving some middle class tosser a cushy job for four or five years can conceivably make things better for working class voters. Take Diane Abbott. Please! Seriously though, her views on education show how little her interests coincide with those of the largely working class constituency she represents. If the schools in Hackney aren't good enough for her offspring, despite her lengthy tenure as MP for the area, what concrete improvements has she brought to those who provide her with her job? Like almost every other MP she is happy to make sensible noises to ensure her re-election, but her words are just wind, worth less than the effort it takes to read them. And she is just one among 650.

Voters only get one proper chance to influence politicians – at elections. The rest of the time politicians are open to influence from other sources, like big business. Look at Jonathan Aitken, former MP for Thanet. Mohammed Al-Fayed, owner of Harrods, paid him to ask questions in the Commons. Thanet and Knightsbridge are not commonly associated. Many other MPs represent business interests at odds with, and sometimes diametrically opposed to, those of their constituents. Councillors frequently behave in a similar manner. Conversely,

those MPs supposed to represent unions often fail to provide the representation those unions pay so heavily for. Think of Two Jags Prescott and the union flat he occupied for so long ...

Perhaps there would be something to be said for voting were the pernicious influence of political party abolished. If each MP really listened to their constituents on a regular basis rather than being more closely advised where their interests lay by party whips then some anarchist reservations about voting might need to be re-examined. Until that day, though, we will continue to be wary of those who seek power over the people they claim to be serving.

Some so-called revolutionaries claim there's a parliamentary road to socialism. Even if such a creature existed, it would not meet even the most moderate revolutionary demand. By entering parliament, politicians of even the most radical hue begin to see their interests as best served through the parliamentary mechanisms. Labour during the poll tax opposed people taking action themselves, asserting that the best thing people could do was nothing – until the next general election when Labour would win and abolish the hated tax. Did it happen? Entering parliament means leaving any radical ideas and beliefs outside.

Social change cannot be legislated. It must come from the bottom up, not the top down. Meaningful change has always



come from people's demands outside parliament, not as the result of initiatives within it. Anarchists' demands cannot possibly be met by parliament as they

entail people taking charge of their own lives: and no group of politicians in a talking shop will ever legislate that.

Edward McKenna

Chomsky "has recently given a reluctant endorsement" to John Kerry. He called him 'Bush-lite' but said small differences between him and George Bush "can translate into large outcomes". Fortified by Chomsky's implicit endorsement of voting, I want to make the case for a limited and tactical anarchist electoralism. Let's look at some of the usual arguments and slogans.

1) 'Don't pin your faith on one day in five years, it what we do the rest of the time that matters most.'

Of course our main concern should be organising for resistance and alternatives from the bottom up. But depending on how elections go this everyday organising can be made harder or less hard, so it's worth wielding tactically and without illusions, our tuppenceworth of this occasional kind of power, which for one day is more or less equal.

2) 'Voting implies that you accept the system.'

If you sign on or take jobs or accept lifts in motor cars, does that mean you accept the legitimacy of the Enclosure

Movement and the Debt-driven Capitalist Warfare State, immigration controls, etc?

3) 'Don't vote, it only encourages them.' Those in real power (not just in office) love low turn-outs, which mean weaker restraints on their powers and privileges. Most people who don't vote are manifesting demoralised 'apathy' (felt powerlessness), which press barons are happy to curdle into proto-fascist cynicism and diffuse anger.

4) 'If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal.'

So why did the Bush gang cheat lots of black and poor folk of their right to vote, and send thugs and lawyers to stop the real votes from being counted? Why are they installing riggable computers nation-wide, which state officials are forbidden to check?! (See the Independent of 14th October 2003 or www.blackboxvoting.org.) Of course if Bush succeeds, voting really will be pointless – but meanwhile there is a titanic popular struggle emerging precisely to defend the secret ballot.

5) 'People have been voting for a century and where has it got us?'

Doesn't follow. It would be as (il)logical to blame a century of wars, eco-cide,

engineered scarcity, etc on those who didn't vote at each election! The truth is that none of us have the right answers until we all do (together), or else all our necks would not be in the tightening noose of global totalitarianism we now experience.

6) 'All politicians are out for themselves.' I've known several political representatives I really respect.

Gwynfor Evans for one, who in 1980 vowed to fast to the death when Thatcher reneged on her promise of a Welsh-language television station. He may have had to make compromises at times (don't we all?) but I simply don't believe Gwynfor's ever accepted a bribe in his life.

I don't always agree with Green MEP Caroline Lucas or Campaign Group Labour MP Alan Simpson or LibDem Mayoral contender Simon Hughes, but, without having met them, I respect their sincerity and commitment.

6b) 'They are all in hock to the big corporations.'

This variant was pushed by Nader, who even tilted against Gore on the 'worse the better' grounds which German revolutionaries pioneered with such success in the thirties (Not). I've yet to

hear the US Greens publicly apologise to e.g. black women voters who split 96% against Bush because they foresaw the 'large outcomes' Chomsky now warns of.

7) 'Political parties and elections divide people.'

The main divisions come from classism, racism, sexism, etc but libertarian sociologists have long observed how parties tend to develop identities and interests of their own. But so do most groups, our own included.

The worst party-chauvinism occurs in the most fraternal political parties in hyper-competitive economies under the Divide and Rule conditions of First Past the Post (FPTP) where Winner Takes All.

In less macho and competitive political cultures with a proportional voting system, the 'sphere of separate power' tends to be less toxic and less separate: compare the US with Sweden. Under constructive pressure from the grassroots it becomes possible for coalitions to form promoting a complex consultative system of popular self-governance ... (Anarchy/governance as wave/particle?)

In Scotland we've seen the surprise emergence of thirty non-partisan cross-party groups of MSPs and activists from civil society groups, working to

develop specialist agendas for change on concrete issues from hate-crime and land reform to railways and renewable energy. (Of course there will be constraints coming from Westminster, Washington and global capitalism, but the same applies to more oppositional ways of organising – arguably more so.)

At all events none of this would have been possible under FPTP which creates a perfect context and pretext for Blair/Brown to drag Labour ever further to the right and then to exercise the right-wing 'elective dictatorship' they previously denounced.

In conclusion I suggest anarchists should rethink our usual line on elections and consider voting according to the following logic:

a) in PR elections: for the party/candidate we feel closest to;
b) in FPTP elections (or with our second London Mayoral preference): tactical voting to support whichever candidate (other than New Labour loyalist/Tory) has the best chance of being elected on a firm promise to deliver the kind of voting system (PR, preferably STV) which can enable a more pluralistic and grassroots-responsive political culture to emerge. (See forthcoming listings on www.dumpblair.co.uk)

Les Ismore

Feature

Libertarian parenthood

Even with the pressures of having children, there is a better way of bringing them up, says Steve McKee

Are children a burden or a blessing? Contemporary society struggles with its views on children and childhood. Youth is simultaneously seen as an ideal and as a threat. Children are portrayed both as little angels and little monsters. Young people are said to need to be allowed to have a childhood in these days of childhood ending all too soon. But at the same time young people hanging round public spaces, engaged in youthful activities, are seen as both a cause and symptom of society's ills.

Such conflicting views tell us more about the society that holds them than they do about children. This bears similarities to the conflicting views a sexist society holds about women. Women are held as a pure and chaste ideal at the same time as being temptresses who can lure men into carnal sin; seen as innocent creatures or a monstrous regiment; whore or mother.

Childhood, like womanhood, is a battleground for politics. Conservative politicians and liberal commentators, governments and professionals, teachers and social workers all have views on childhood, the family, and parenthood. The New Labour government has views on parenting, and might introduce parenting classes. Curfews have been piloted in some areas. The Christian Fellowship School in Liverpool wants the right to use the rod to 'save' the child. Single parents have long been pilloried and disadvantaged. The right to smack is debated in the Daily Mail. There is scarcely an area of childhood or parenthood upon which it is not possible to hold a political view.

Education has long been seen as political. Colin Ward wrote "Ultimately the social function of education is to perpetuate society: it is the socialising function. Society guarantees its future by rearing its children in its own image." Look at how education perpetuates class differences. Look at the language used by Callaghan in his Ruskin College speech. At the ideological tinkering with education during the Thatcher era. At the way education is seen as being mainly vocational; it turns out those who are intended to manage, those intended for professions, those intended to be factory fodder, and those who are not expected to amount to much. Get good grades and get a good job. That simple statement hides an ideological labyrinth.

We can't escape it; childhood is a battleground for hearts and minds. "Give me the boy at 7, and I'll give you the man" said the Jesuits. But how many anarchists – when asked how we will encourage individual autonomy, how we will loosen the 'instinctual' bonds of hierarchy and authority, how

we will encourage solidarity amongst 'naturally' selfish human beings – think of their own actions as a parent? If you are a libertarian and a parent, then you must be a libertarian parent, or what does it mean to say you are an anarchist?

But this isn't about indoctrinating the next generation of anarchists; it is about living by your principles. If you reject authority, do you impose it at home? If you value shared solutions to problems, do you seek them at home? If you reject coercion, do you impose your will at home?

Children are not taken seriously in our society. Their views are not generally sought, or if they are, then little weight is given to them. A child is a person whose wishes may be ignored. An adult – any adult – can override a child's request. Children are not competent; even to tell us what is in their interests. Children are an oppressed group.

You don't believe me? Then think of this often-used example. There is currently a debate in the UK about the level of force a parent can use in chastising their child. At what age can one smack? Should smacking be allowed at all? Does smacking – not beating, just a flat hand across the backside – cause any lasting harm?

Now try that with women. What level of force is it acceptable for a husband to use in chastising his wife? Does smacking women – not beating, just a flat hand across the backside – cause any lasting harm?

You see? The debate isn't even on the agenda. Anyone even raising the issue would rightly be labeled misogynist. So why is it okay to have that debate about children? What gives children this lowly status?

One answer we hear is children's lack of experience. Well, that may be so, but if I lack experience, I don't expect physical or some other form of punishment. I expect advice. And if I believe it to be good advice, I will accept it. If not, I will reject it. And that must surely be the libertarian parent's role: a source of good, reliable advice.

Of course, not all advice is accepted. My brother may have views about how I should put up my shelves. But he has no right to expect his will to be carried out. He doesn't say: "I'm your brother and you'll do as I say!" Or if he did, he wouldn't be surprised if my response contained swearing.

So what is the logic behind a parent saying the same? "I'm your father and you'll do as I say!" It doesn't sound like the argument put forward was very convincing, does it? Nor does it sound like that parent is likely to be a reliable source of reasoned advice in future. But even if we don't resort to that phrase, parents often assume their will must be given precedence over the child's. A 'liberal' parent may begin with the



illusion of trying to reach a consensual solution, but if the solution does not suit the parent then it can be rejected as 'unreasonable' and the parent's solution will be imposed. This is no basis for reaching agreement. Why should the child enter into it in a spirit of trust and genuine common endeavour? None exists on the parent's part. And the child, through experience, will have learned that. Perhaps the child's favoured strategy in those circumstances will be sabotage and rebellion. That would certainly be one reaction.

Any child expected to enter into a reasonable discussion must believe their views, their desires, their arguments have equal weight. Parents must have no expectation that their own argument – no matter how poor – be given more weight. But, people might say, a parent has a duty to keep their children safe. OK, but how does that preclude putting forward convincing arguments? If the issue really is a matter of safety, surely a convincing argument can easily be found? Yes, but you can't stand trying to reason with a child determined to climb an electric fence, goes one line of argument. Okay, but where are these children determined to commit suicide? Have you met any? Why would a child warned of severe danger ignore the warning? Well, they might, I suppose, ignore such a warning if they didn't know whether they could trust it. Maybe the parent hands out warnings of dire consequences the child knows from experience seldom if ever transpire. Maybe the parent habitually cries wolf. Certainly my children have never tried to thrust their hands into fires once

aware of the danger.

Which brings us back to reliable advice. If advice comes from a source we can trust we are more likely to accept it. If we have no idea whether it is good advice or not we are likely at best to be confused. Most likely we will just ignore it. Children are no different.

If this sounds like you have to be infallible, then don't worry. It is not reasonable to expect anyone to be infallible. And children with reasonable expectations will not expect that of their parents. But this is about ensuring that your children have reasonable expectations. And the realization that your own views may be mistaken must play its part in that. If the child has a better argument, surely that must be accepted? If it isn't, then all you are doing is enforcing your will for the sake of it; they'll know it, you'll know it, and if it happens often, the result will be a damaged relationship.

But what if you make a mistake? What if you overreact or shout? Then a sincere and prompt apology must be given. We aren't angels, neither child nor parent, and all good relationships will weather storms, but the injured party will want to know that the other is truly sorry and will try not to do it again. Remember, though, that the adult's position in society of assumed authority gives you the upper hand if you chose to take it. Your overreaction therefore has more significance here than the child's. Remember also that you decided to have children; at the very least your actions will have resulted in the child being born. The child had no such choice in the matter. "I didn't ask

to be born" is a factual statement, and cannot be gainsaid. Don't put your child in the position of wanting to utter it.

Of course no situation is perfect, but what matters is the honest attempt. If all involved trust each other's intentions, then that is the best that can be asked for.

People will sometimes say all this is well and good for children of a certain age, but you can't expect children of (whatever) age to contribute to a family solution. The age at which the doubter thinks libertarian parenting can 'reasonably' begin will vary. Some think it is only for teenagers.

Some think that toddlers cannot be expected to take part. Others think language is a prerequisite.

They are all wrong: every human from infant onwards is able to make their wishes known. A newborn baby is well able to inform its parents of its likes and dislikes, as any parent will vouch. The point is involving the child in the decision-making process in a way that is meaningful to them. There is, of course, no point in asking a newborn baby things which are beyond its understanding. But if it wants to be fed, it should be, unless there is a very good reason for the feed being delayed.

Some objectors say this will lead to 'spoiled' children. Well that is only the case if you think children are spoiled by being encouraged to take part in reasoned debate, by expecting their views to be valued, by expecting their wishes to be taken seriously. What I think it leads to is autonomous individuals, with a sense of their own self-worth, able to engage with others on an equal footing.

Editorial

The decision to abandon Mayday in London this year may strike some as misguided and regrettable. The dwindling turnout, though, has shown that new thinking is required to recapture people's imagination. Some anarchists have pointed out that congregating in the West End and aiming at high-profile targets has led to the event becoming little more than a great training day for the Met: a complaint with more than a grain of truth in it. Frankly, disappointing though it may be, a break may be just the thing to allow next year's Mayday to be all that anarchists could desire.

The anarchists who are going to Dublin and other parts abroad this year are doing the right thing. The anarchist movement in this country must look to the bigger prize: in this case next year's G8. Bowling about the streets of London will not create and strengthen the links with foreign anarchists that are needed to ruin next year's capitalist jamboree. By forging links with like-minded people from the rest of Europe, and using these as a basis for a stronger response to the continent-wide crack-down on dissent and revolutionary politics, as well as for the G8, the British anarchist movement must take the struggle onto a new plane.

Those staying at home are also doing the right thing, as well as strengthening our international links, we need to find a base for our movement at home. An example of this is the Mayday events in Lancashire, attempting to reach out from the activist/DIY ghetto and be accessible to ordinary people. Events are still planned in London such as the picnic and a libertarian bloc on the TUC march, and other events are taking place across the country. One thing that is important is that whatever we're doing on Mayday we support each other, whilst handing out leaflets to unionised workers might not be as fun or as glamorous as going to Dublin it's all still part of the same struggle.

For too long British anarchists have been happy to do their own thing largely in isolation from our brethren on the continent. It is time to end this insular outlook. Trips to Dublin, Paris and Berlin are, on one level, mere revolutionary tourism. On another they lay the basis for an alternative Europe, one where we exploit the links between anarchists from London to Lodz, from Birmingham to Barcelona. Our aims may be limited thus far to making new contacts abroad for next year's meeting of leaders. But that is only the beginning.

It is also important that we remember our roots, and why we are celebrating Mayday, because of the murder of the Haymarket Martyrs who struggling for the eight hour working day. To quote them "the day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today."

Quiz answers

1. Father Hegarty was a Catholic priest involved in revolutionary labour struggles. He was a founding member of the IWW and designed the 'wheel' that assigned different trades into different industries within the union. The IWW are currently revising this division.
2. As an inducement to his cousin Franklin to authorise congressional funding for the project.
3. Julian Cope
4. He claimed that the authors of all eleven stories on the current shooting schedule were suspected communist sympathisers.

Commentary

Fire gone out

I wasn't heartbroken to see that the Wildfire Collective had decided to stop submitting their bulletin to Freedom (Green and Black Bulletin, 3rd April). I did think of letting the last one go without comment, but the nature of their contribution provoked me to write. Why did they decide to stop? They're vague on this, implying some sort of conspiracy by the new Freedom editors to silence them.

Apparently "editorial-infantilism" by "junior editors" seeking "to stamp their own agenda on the paper" is to blame. Their "consistent attempts to sabotage the page have succeeded in our withdrawal". Yet the specific instances they give seem to smack of the 'infantilism' they accuse the editors of.

After all, what do they object to? Censorship? No. They didn't like the "layout" of an earlier article. And why did the editors of Freedom lay it out? Because not only were the Wildfire Collective unable to write anything new, they couldn't be bothered to lay it out themselves either. And how did the layout "sabotage" the piece anyway? By including a picture of the world's most famous (fictional) barbarian to illustrate an article which urged the barbarians to "break loose"? Or was it the humorous caption beneath it? Or the word "Hmmm..." in the subtitle?

Is the primitivist message really so weak that it can't survive these minor additions? And does it mean that, if the Freedom editors had included a picture of, say, Genghis Khan, and removed "Hmmm..." we'd still be getting the Bulletin? I somehow doubt it.

What of the last bulletin itself? Did they take the opportunity to address some of the concerns raised about their ideas? No they didn't. For all their talk of debate, Wildfire have consistently refused to take part in any.

They never once answered the "well-argued criticism" they said they'd received. We did, of course, get two letters crammed with the "vitriolic attacks" they accuse their opponents of and which singularly failed to answer the serious criticisms made by others (including myself). After that, silence. Could their decision to stop be related to their inability to answer criticisms of their flawed ideology?

It's probably wise that they didn't seek (so they said) to "convert" other anarchists, but rather to "cause a stir and [to] challenge" ideas from "1930's anarcho-communism". While I find it funny when primitivists accuse others of living in the past, it says a lot about their politics that they admit to thinking they couldn't convince other anarchists of their validity. Given their lack of response to criticism we must conclude that, while "diehard red and blackers" could meet the "challenge" of primitivism, the primitivists couldn't meet the challenge of anarcho-communist critiques.

This probably explains their quickness to smear their opponents. I'm not surprised that they accused the editors of having "editorial ambitions". Accusing other anarchists of power-seeking was a common refrain of theirs (they accused me of wanting to become a "politician" because I supported traditional libertarian organisation). Far easier to besmirch the intentions of others than address the criticisms they made.

All in all, Wildfire proved a distinct disappointment. I'd hoped for a chance to debate (the limitations of) primitivism but, sadly, they avoided this like the plague. But I hope the Green and Black Bulletin will continue without them. As

I said from the start, no modern form of anarchism is complete without being green. Freedom must cover ecological issues and struggles, and the Bulletin could be the means of doing so in depth. Freed from the dogma of primitivism it could become a valuable feature of the paper.

Iain McKay

It's a shame the Wildfire Collective went out on such a sour note. That the new editors allowed the last Green and Black Bulletin to appear unchanged, despite the fact that it contained serious criticisms of them, would suggest the opposite of what Wildfire allege. If the new editors continue to show tolerance and openness of this kind, then Freedom is in good hands.

Toby Crowe

Gee 'em up

I was stunned by Donald Rooum's letter (Commentary, 3rd April). I know that a favourite tactic of corporate PR is to smear campaigners by questioning their motives, but I'm surprised to see an anarchist doing it. Does Donald really think that organisations which campaign against genetic modification are doing so purely to get money? This is the sort of argument I'd expect from someone who thinks anarchists are paid to turn up at demos and cause trouble, not from an experienced anarchist activist.

As for Donald's arguments in favour of GM, they fail to convince. He presents no argument for why GM crops should be grown at all. As for his defence of GM, it seems as flawed as those made by the government and big business, which is unsurprising - they're similar.

He starts by claiming that GM crops are safe. But the fact is, we don't know for sure. Take the example of BSE. Intensive farming techniques and the use of animal corpses as feed were considered safe. No one, after all, died after eating a hamburger. But nature is a complex thing and years later it was found that these things weren't safe after all.

Given that GM crops contaminate their surroundings, it seems incredible to dismiss safety concerns so easily, particularly as any changes would be irreversible and unpredictable. Why take such a chance just so biotech corporations can make more money and capitalism can enclose yet more of our common heritage?

Then there are the trials which, Donald says, prove that GM maize is safe. Yet strangely he fails to mention a relevant fact. The test which, he claims, supports his position was based on comparing GM maize with non-GM varieties, accompanied by the use of atrazine, a herbicide banned by the EU.

So the only reason GM maize got through the British tests was because its effect on the environment was, in effect, compared to that of a pesticide which is so toxic it's now been banned - hardly impressive. And surely testing GM against the most harmful non-GM method of farming indicates a bias in favour of GM to begin with?

Donald seems remarkably unconcerned by the issue of contamination. To oppose GM is, he implies, authoritarian. But grow GM and it will spread. Donald's liberty to eat GM will soon end my liberty not to. I did make this point in my original article, Donald. Surely the fact that GM companies aren't willing to pay compensation for contamination of non-GM crops says it all? (They are, though, willing to sue contaminated farmers for theft). Perhaps Donald can

explain why his willingness to contaminate my food and ecology isn't authoritarian?

He also doesn't seem to be bothered about a key issue regarding GM, namely the commodification of nature. He says that the patent on one GM crop is due to expire in nine years' time. Yet others will be under patent for much longer, giving corporations a monopoly right to accumulate super-profits for a period of 17-20 years.

The monopoly profits these huge firms will make during the period under patent will augment their economic power against farmers, ensuring their control over the food chain. Biotech companies are clear in what they want - to force farmers growing GM crops to buy new supplies of seed every harvest (farmers in Canada have even been sued for re-planting GM seed).

Then there's the genetic engineering of crops to tolerate certain proprietary herbicides, so tying farmers to a corporation even after the seed patent expires (assuming a new development doesn't renew the patent). Donald glibly ignores this.

Finally, he says the reason why people's opposition to GM grows the more they know about it is that they listen to anti-GM activists. But this was actually the conclusion of the government's own national GM debate (yes, our listening government strikes again!). Yet, Donald tells us, we needn't worry. The opposition is irrational and trendy, led astray by pressure groups seeking to bolster their bank balances. Biotech companies who own GM and their government stooges are telling the truth. GM is good for us ... I'd expected better.

Iain McKay

When an editor of Freedom doesn't like a piece it's given a snidy title. Nevertheless, once again Donald Rooum is quite correct in what he says concerning GM crops. When I read Iain McKay's original piece I felt he really didn't have much of an idea about the subject. The problem is that, to appreciate GM and other technologically-based processes, one has to understand something about their science.

Although Donald is an exception, most anarchists are both anti-science and conservative. As I see the issue, there's very little wrong with gene transfer. I'd go further and say there are major advantages in it. The means by which GM is forced on consumers is a different issue.

The transfer of genes between species has always occurred and has resulted in major advantageous evolutionary steps. Genes move with relative ease largely through viral vectors. Have a cold and you could get a gene from someone else. Only recently have scientists managed to replicate the process.

Genes are unreasonably feared and this is, of course, part and parcel of the nature versus nurture debate. People hate the idea of the hidden power of genes. But in time we'll come to love them. What will swing the argument in their favour will be gene therapies. With their increasing use in controlling cancers we'll be on our knees before the genes. Then genes will rule, okay.

As for GM applied to crops, there's no reason for supposing health problems will result from gene transfer. What's likely to happen is that the genes put into plants to protect them against the pesticides used by farms, at a cost, will pass to insect pests. The insects will become resistant to the pesticides and an 'arms race' will develop.

This is seen in the use of antibiotics,

with the race between resistance and treatments and the problem of finding new antibiotics to overcome the resistance. There are no biological methods other than through vectors for moving genes from species to species.

The problem is with the people who make use of the science, and this is universal. By demonising genes, as Iain McKay does, the real problem is side-tracked. This is the same as anarchists demonising politicians. It deflects attention from the basic problem. It's woolly thinking.

There's a simple solution to the GM issue. A moral argument for spying, used by Blunt and others, was that it equalised the strengths of the super-powers. We have the bomb so spies give the technology to the other side. This speeds up an inevitable process. The same principle can be applied to Genetic Modification.

The movement of genes between species is normally slow and all GM scientists have done is speed up the process. If you want to prevent the use of GM crops, an effective method would be to move the gene that confers resistance to pesticides to the insects that feed on the modified crops.

Then the plants will have no advantage and the insecticides become ineffective. Farms won't spend money on useless pesticides. The insects with the new gene will have no advantage when attacking non-modified crops. Were we were to carry the gene in question (we carry many useless genes) it would have no effect on us unless we were sprayed with the offending insecticide.

This is meddling, of course. But when you have a cancer that can be controlled through gene therapy, are you going to refuse the therapy because some meddling has occurred in its development? My arse you are.

Peter Gibson

One can't write on behalf of all anarchists, but Donald Rooum sure hit the nail on the head by referring to the old saying, "scratch an anarchist and find an authoritarian". As regards myself, here resides a dictator bursting to get out - but of course a benevolent one who would most surely do away with GM crops.

Donald said that any genetically modified organism that's passed to the public is subjected to rigorous safety tests. What, really? The precautionary principle was never put to use in this case. The countryside of the UK was itself to be the laboratory (or should one say laboratory, considering the shit that would have been done there in the name of corporate science?).

Considering the risks of the highly hazardous nature of GM technology controlled by a few multinational companies, doesn't Donald admit that this is reason enough to exercise extreme caution in any trial or experiment involving it? And who are we to say that this science isn't harmful? It's still in its infancy and there are scientists that have their own agenda. Donald admits as much when he refers to the American schools which teach children the gross lie that the earth was created in seven days.

Regarding GM foods being toxic, what about the study by John Losey, Linda Rayor and Maureen Carter of Cornell University, published in Nature (20th May 1999)? This showed that the pollen of NAC40-Bt transgenic corn could be toxic for Monarch butterfly larvae.

This experiment was carried out in the laboratory and, while the authors

REVIEW

Paul Maguire on a story of fear, insecurity and the banality of modern life, David Peace's GB84

At a time when British fiction appears to switch between a middle class pastoral of domestic crisis, and a sentimentalisation of poverty, David Peace's novel stands – brilliant, ugly, crude and true – against the tide. GB84 is a novel of the 1984-85 miners' strike but, more than that, it's a portrait of a society gone rotten, where money buys the muscle to crush solidarity and turns working class communities into war zones.

Peace's earlier Red Riding quartet dealt with police corruption, the venality of local politics and the misogyny festering under the surface of everyday life in the Ripper-haunted Yorkshire of the 1970s and early 1980s. GB84 gives us fragments of interlocking stories, lives knotted together through the nexus of the miners strike.

Peter and Martin are rank-and-file NUM members, watching their lives fall apart as they're beaten and battered in the day-to-day battles of the strike. Terry, an NUM chief executive, is moving monies around to keep the union one step ahead of the sequestrators, while sinking deeper into the rot of his own life. Neil Fontaine, The Mechanic and Malcolm Morris are covert ops, hired by the security services to organise and finance scabbing operations. They coordinate private armies of troops and

cops to carry out physical attacks on striking miners, while they themselves are haunted by the consequences of their involvement in the death of a "79 year old rose-grower and antinuclear campaigner" (ring any bells?).

GB84 is a brave novel because its portrait of the state's war against the miners and the consequences of the miners' defeat is unflinching. Peace has drawn on a number of essential works to establish an alternative history of the Thatcher years – among the sources acknowledged are Stephen Dorril, Robin Ramsay's book, Smear: Wilson and the Secret State, Gary Murray's account of his involvement in covert ops, Enemies of the State, and right-wing activist and spook Brian Crozier's confessional Free Agent: The Unseen War 1941-1991.

More than that though, GB84 works as a novel because Peace has crafted a bitter poetry from the miners' struggle and defeat, and from the corruption and reduction of political life to a sewer through which money chases after money. Peace gives us the young kids who died coal-picking because the "DHSS let families and their kids freeze in the dark. That drive young lads out on to slagheaps to sift through spoil for crumbs of black fucking coal that their dads have fucking brung up out of earth in first place."

He notes army sergeants driving police vans during the London demo to



support the miners. He gives us the spectre of fascism, which haunts and threatens behind the activities of the private interests which underwrite the scabbing organisations. He gives us the horror of defeat for all those who gave a year of their lives to a war with the British state for the right to a future for the pit villages now full of scag and futureless. "The country deaf to their laments. Its belly swollen with black corpses and vengeful carrion – rotting in its furrow ... We are but the match-

stick men, with our matchstick hats and clogs – And they shave our heads. Send us to the showers – Put us on their trains."

GB84 is a surreal return to the graveyard of the labour movement, in 1984. "Awake! Awake! This is England, Your England - and the Year is Zero." David Peace gives us the future as a permanent Year Zero, built on the backs of the miners in '84.

He captures life as a wandering through decades of fear, insecurity, the dread of the banal, inevitable unfolding

of a 'what happens next' that you know but can't avoid. He does it in a way too few – Chester Himes, Derek Raymond, James Ellroy, Hubert Selby Jr – have managed. GB84 is a novel you have to read if you want to understand how we came to be where we are today, twenty years on – the cesspit of Blair, buggings and Weapons of Mass Destruction.

GB84 by David Peace, published by Faber, is available from Freedom for £12.99 (add £1.30 postage in the UK, £2.60 elsewhere).

BOOKS

Listen to the Refugee's Story by the Ilisu Dam Campaign Refugee Project, £5

My ancestors on both sides came to Britain as refugees from political and religious persecution and chronic poverty. The Irish were depicted as barbaric, demented Fenian bombers. East European Jews were attacked as poverty stricken aliens and political subversives. Have a look at contemporary political debate and it's very clear that not a lot has changed.

Illustrated by the Kurdish artist Rebwar Saeed and subtitled 'How foreign investment creates refugees and asylum-seekers', this pamphlet is in two parts. In the first part refugees – Kurds, Afghans, Nigerians, Colombians – tell their own, often harrowing, stories. Fazil Kawani, who works with the Asylum Rights Campaign, says "if we believe that the right to be free from persecution is a fundamental human right for every individual, then we should provide this right to everyone on this planet, regardless of his or her race, culture, religion or background."

In the early nineteenth century, political refugees from Karl Marx to Napoleon III could find a safe haven in Britain. Nowadays, they're demonised and blamed for all of society's ills, from bad housing to unemployment. Sensationalised scare stories sell semipornographic tabloids

political capital out of it. They've got a deep pool of racism to tap into.

The white working class has long had it drummed into its head that they may be scum but at least they're not black. They deliberately forget that, if not one foreigner had set foot in Britain since 1066, these problems would still exist. They're endemic to the capitalist system.

Poet Benjamin Zephaniah says, "we should try listening to the refugee's story." He continues, "we have got our priorities wrong. Instead of spending billions of pounds on a war with Iraq that will create thousands more refugees, we should spend that money on making peace." Sadly, under capitalism, war is always more profitable than peace.

In the second part Jean Lambert, the Green Party MEP, looks at how such policies as the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy and the World Trade Organisation's trading agreements tend to uproot poor people from their homes and displace them, forcing them to migrate in search of a living.

Ann Feltham of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade looks at how weapons exports and the subsequent wars create refugees. She points out that the Defence Export Services Organisation, part of the Ministry of Defence, employs 600 civil servants to promote military exports often to the most tyrannical regimes.

Other contributors look at the negative effects of the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the displacement of the poor in India

by large scale dam-building projects and the displacement of indigenous communities in Colombia by British-based mining interests.

A final section looks at campaigns and issues. Organisations campaigning in this area are listed as an appendix. Teresa Hayter makes an excellent case for the free movement of people. Mark Thomas looks at how banning 'terrorist' organisations gives the green light for human rights abuses. If capital can move across borders without problems then so should people.

Terry Liddle

Available from Freedom for £5 (add 50p postage in the UK, £1 elsewhere)

Anarchism by Peter Kropotkin
Dover, £9.99

Just as it did in the 1960s, the upsurge in anarchist activism has resulted in a rise in classic anarchist titles being produced by mainstream publishers. A new generation of radicals are becoming interested in anarchism and a new generation of capitalists want to make money from them. This is a positive side-effect of the prominence we've achieved in news reports about the anti-capitalist movement. Hopefully these new radicals will take the opportunity to learn from some old ones.

Newly reprinted, this book is a valuable

collection of essays by the anarchist formerly known as Prince. Previously available under the title Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, it's now been renamed, simply, Anarchism. For those unfamiliar with Kropotkin's work, it's indispensable reading. Containing such classics as (an abridged) 'Modern science and anarchism', 'The spirit of revolt', 'Revolutionary government', 'Anarchist morality' and 'An appeal to the young', a better collection of works in one volume would be impossible to find. For those interested in communist-anarchism, this is one of the very best places to start.

Probably of particular interest are Kropotkin's comments on the Russian Revolution. The book includes his 'Letter to the workers of Western Europe' and a post-1917 postscript to his essay 'Anarchist Communism'. He reiterates the key idea of anarchism, that a revolution will only succeed if the working masses, through their own organisations, organise their own affairs directly as the only means of achieving socialism and freedom. As he put it, "we are learning in Russia how not to introduce communism". Everything in twentieth century history shows that he was right.

The essays included here indicate the only revolutionary alternative to Bolshevism which, of course, anarchism is. "Communist organisation," as Kropotkin argued years before the

Bolsheviks proved it, "cannot be left to be constructed by legislative bodies called parliaments, municipal or communal councils. It must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."

Iain McKay

Available from Freedom for £9.99 (add £1 postage in the UK, £2 elsewhere)

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Commentary

page 6

admitted that it would be out of place to draw conclusions about the risk for populations in the natural environment solely on the basis of these preliminary results, we're bound to apply the precautionary principle.

These people at least conducted their research in a place of safety, unlike corporations such as Monsanto, who prefer expediency to caution. Even the conservative medical journal, the Lancet, has condemned the irresponsibility of the authorities and of biotechnology firms (29th May 1999).

Observers should note that, contrary to claims that there's no such thing as a Terminator seed, the science is already up and running. I refer all interested Freedom readers to an informative book, *Brave New Seeds*, by R.A. Brac de la Perriere and Franck Seuret (Zed Books).

The Terminator science was developed and patented in 1998. Since then Monsanto has tried to buy up the Delta and Pine Land Company and to negotiate with the US Department of Agriculture on the Terminator patent. This could be construed as the start of the long process of acquiring control of all living organisms.

Mick Cropper

Donald Room's views on genetic modification are well-known. He's often veered towards the irrational in his defence of them. But I was surprised at the depths he sank to in his response to Iain McKay. If that's really the best you can do, Donald, you should retire now, while the going's still good and our memories are fond.

Johnny M.

Failed again

A series of bombs explode in and around Madrid, killing over 200 commuters. Israeli armed forces fire missiles at a mosque, killing the wheelchair-bound Islamic leader, Shaikh Ahmed Yassin. Nine British Asians are arrested in connection with plans to explode bombs in London. US air attacks on a mosque in Faluja kill 40. Sometimes it's easier to retreat from understanding, to seek comfort in an ethics of piety and quietism, to abandon political analysis to horror. But for those of us who claim to want to change the world, this isn't enough. If all we do is mourn, we fail.

Such accusations of failure could be levelled at a good many anarchist organisations in the days following the Madrid atrocities. The Madrid CNT appealed to the political parties "not to make a weapon of the pain," as if Zapatero or the People's Party wouldn't use the carnage for their own ends. The CNT National Committee offered sympathy and the claim that "the workers are the victims of all terrorism". Quite how such logic could be applied to the killing, for instance, of Lord Mountbatten, the bombing of the Conservative Party

in Brighton or the targeting of members of the repressive arm of the Spanish state by ETA, is unclear. In the face of horror, there came a retreat to sentiment and pacifism. Meanwhile, in the pages of Freedom there's been little comment on events of recent weeks - copyright theft seems to be the main concern.

The bombings in Madrid were atrocities. But condemnation isn't enough. Little of what was said about Madrid provided any attempt at context or analysis. We were told by everyone, from the Anarchist Federation to Observer journalist Nick Cohen, that the attacks were products of 'Islamofascism'. If such was indeed the case then there follows logically a choice to side with the 'democratic' West against the 'fascist' terrorists. It's all too easy to forget that these atrocities have wider causes and that it's to these causes we should turn if we want to bring the carnage to an end.

In the weeks leading up to the assassination of Shaikh Ahmed Yassin, Israeli troops killed over 70 people in the occupied territories. Conservative estimates of civilian casualties arising from the US invasion of Iraq stand at around 10,000. The Chechen deputy foreign minister in exile, Usman Feraoui, said recently that more than 38,000 Chechens have been killed during the decade-long struggle for independence. Few tears have been shed in the anarchist press for any of them.

At the heart of atrocities such as that in Madrid lies a desire for revenge and a military strategy of despair - a promise made to the West of "mutually-assured barbarism" if Muslim deaths continue. To pretend that this is blood for the sake of blood, to deny the politics of events, to mourn the dead of Madrid in a manner which suggests that the death of a citizen of Madrid is worth more than that of a child in Baghdad, is to perpetuate the circumstances that bring the deaths we mourn about.

In the end, we have two choices. We can either drown all hope of a better world in our own tears for the dead of Madrid or we can decide that the choice before us can't be reduced to siding with our own bourgeoisie against those who seek to spill our blood, nor to embracing barbarism as a strategy of anti-imperialism. It's necessary to recreate within the working class a current of militant, critical anti-imperialism which doesn't falter in the face of atrocity and won't be reduced to futile marches up and down Whitehall. Part of this process has to involve building a critical, unsentimental anarchist press.

The critic and historian Edmund Wilson wrote at the time of the Cold War, "we have seen, in our most recent wars, how a divided and arguing public opinion may be converted overnight into a near-national unanimity, an obedient flood of energy which will carry the young to destruction and overpower any effort to stem it." Central to our task has to be refusing this unanimity. Over recent weeks, I'd say, we've failed the test.

Paul Maguire



Brickbats

I've read the review of Dogville three times and I still can't get to the end of the piece (Review, 3rd April). I might be a bit thick, but without a dictionary next to me there were loads of words I ain't got a clue what they meant. I was actually interested in the piece as I wanted to know what others thought of the film, but I haven't managed to make it to the end of the article as, when sentences are rambling and aren't clear, people like me just give up.

If this is how I feel, what about other thickos whose use of English is just as bad as mine? Surely Freedom is meant to bring people in, not put them off?

I will give one example of a few, from the Dogville review: "This comprehensively compromises all talk of faith, arrogance and redemption among ordinary people, leaving the film as merely a meditation on the duplicitous malevolence of institutions whose pious pontification is ably backed up by their cultural lapdogs - in this case the megalomania of cinema, recalling Paul Virilio's metaphor of it as a (class) 'war machine'." What? Or is it just me?

Tony

Who was responsible for the bollocks about the AUT strike in Freedom (Strikewatch, 20th March)? Exactly which Unison-organised support workers were asked to do the work of AUT striking members? In the majority of cases Unison members (predominantly admin workers) wouldn't be able to cover the academic duties of AUT members any way.

And as for the strike having little effect, among the gains is a proposed pay deal which sees UCEA's original offer of 6.44% over two years bumped to an average of 12.2% - not bad for a strike which, for the most part, has been treated as a joke in the pages of Freedom.

Lynn

A sideways look

Living where I do, I know several people who regularly attend Millwall football games. Millwall's reputation is such that they attract few celebrity fans of the sort who go to other London clubs. And despite long-term efforts by the club, they don't have a large following among the local black community. All this is important for my story, which isn't about football, but immigration and attitudes. And people make certain assumptions about attitudes, especially those Guardian-reading Arsenal fans.

One friend who regularly goes, an anarchist of over twenty years standing, told me recently he felt asylum-seekers were taking the piss. He had no problem with people fleeing Mugabe or some other tyrant. But he didn't want racists from eastern Europe or Muslim fundamentalists coming here. He does a manual job and mixes mainly with other working class men who do similar work.

I'm still waiting to see how he reconciles anarchism with border controls, but I can see where he's coming from. There have been racist attacks on black people in London perpetrated by east Europeans. Hostility to further immigration is not unknown among immigrant communities. The last row I had at work with someone on this issue was with a Ugandan Asian (with an under-developed sense of irony, obviously).

My other friend has always had liberal attitudes, happily voted for Blair and took an interest in the outside world, but that was pretty much as far as it went. Then he fell in love with an African and was exposed to the underside of the economy of south east England. He would pick up his girlfriend from the care homes where she was working for a pittance.

With the exception of management, nearly everyone caring for the elderly in these homes was a migrant. I use the term 'migrant' because many were bonded labour, coming here on two or three-year contracts and then returning home. He even found some young white men working in one of these homes. They were Bulgarian.

The immigration row that has overtaken the government recently is one of its own making. They've been happy to use the rhetoric of swamping, so they should hardly be surprised when the Daily Mail and the Murdoch press stir it up some more. Of more concern to me (and, I hope, you) are the attitude surveys that show more than half those surveyed saying we don't need any immigrants.

I suspect that some are experiencing similar feelings to my first friend - outrage over the behaviour of some

immigrants, a feeling that scarce resources like health are going on 'them' not 'us'. Few will share the experience of my other friend - that in some cases those scarce resources are the immigrants themselves.

If east Europeans come here with racist attitudes these will be changed through struggle. The chances of Kosovans making common cause with the BNP are slim. Migrant workers themselves need to organise - at the moment they're not conscious of their power. But what would happen to the bubble economy of the south east if their labour was withdrawn? I can imagine the headlines in the Daily Mail already: 'House prices fall - asylum-seekers to blame'.

Svartfrosk

Words we use

SOLIDARITY

An old anarchist was walking by the seashore when he found an old lamp, glistening on the sand. He picked it up, rubbed it, and a genie came out. "Sire, you've freed me from my servitude," said the genie. "You have my eternal gratitude. In return I will do something for you. Only ask and your utmost wish will be granted."

The anarchist pulled out a map of the Middle East. "Make it a place of peace and plenty," he said. "Bring an end to tragedy and war." The genie scratched his head and, after several minutes' thought, replied "Sire, I beg you, ask that I may grant you something else instead. I know I said your utmost wish would be granted, but the solution you ask for lies beyond my powers. Please ask me something else."

The old anarchist pondered. "Okay then," he said. "Bring the anarchist movement together. Even when they don't agree, let the anarchists not hate each other. Let them work together for what's really important in our shared struggle. Let them learn to live the solidarity they profess." The genie blanched and looked away. For some moments he kept his silence. Then he opened his mouth. "Sire, if I may have another look at the map ..."

Johnny M.

The quiz

1. What was Father Hegarty's Wheel?
2. Mount Rushmore was originally going to have three US presidents' heads. Why did sculptor Gutzon Borglum add Teddy Roosevelt?
3. Which singer attended the 1990 poll tax demos dressed as a seven-foot alien called Sqwubbsy?
4. Why did Howard Hughes temporarily close MGM studios in 1952?

Answers on page 6

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