

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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PRIVATE HEALTH CENTRES FALL FLAT

EXCLUSIVE

A leading NHS watchdog has attacked the government's excuses for continuing their flagship Independent Sector Treatment Centre (ISTC) programme, even in the face of criticism from their own health committee. ISTCs are private-sector providers of operations which are currently being licensed by the government as an alternative to the NHS.

In an exclusive interview with *Freedom*, London Health Emergency group director John Lister explained that the government has missed crucial information, misrepresents what it does talk about and paints an inaccurate picture of ISTCs.

He said: "They seem to have substituted a lot of blather for real information. This figure that 80,000 procedures have been done, for example, underlines that they have had a really marginal effect compared to the six million operations done this year. It shows that virtually all the improvements to the NHS have been due to work within the system rather than by this very expensive process."

John explained that even the operations that had been done were not an adequate test to justify expansion of the project, and added his own criticisms of the committee's proposed solutions.

"They only use the most basic and easy cases, and while the Health Committee have not picked up on it the government haven't said anything about this.

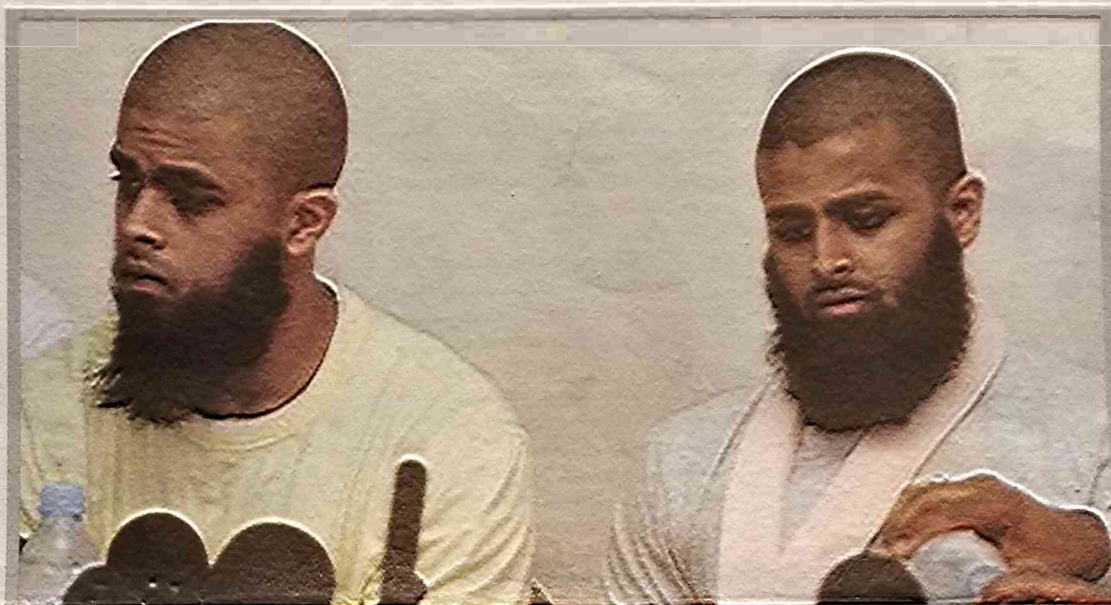
"The HSL favour giving them a training role. The patients have been chosen to have only the most minor conditions, unlike any other hospitals which have a varied role. I'm not sure what real benefits there would be in this - it baffles me. They seem to be encouraging people to move into the private sector and anything which encourages that I think is a backwards step."

In its original report, the Commons Committee raised major questions over the financial viability of the plan, citing excessive costs for patchy service that was undermining core functions of the NHS itself.

Concerns were also raised at the prospect of Phase II, due to begin next year, introducing ISTCs to areas where there is no need for them and actively closing existing NHS sites to do so.

John agrees with this analysis, and remains unconvinced by the government's rebuttal, fearing that they will simply ignore any pressure over placement from local government. He said: "The government say that ISTCs will 'only' be 7.5% of patients by 2010 but it's still a lot of people and a lot of money flowing out of the NHS, especially at the enhanced rates because they don't say anywhere that they will impose the flat rates for operations. All the guarantees are with the private sector, all the risks with the NHS.

"Some parts of the NHS will escape it and others will lose out heavily, for example 85% of the orthopaedics work



INNOCENT: Mohammed Abdul Kahar (right of picture sitting next to his brother, Abul Koyair) has had charges of paedophilia dropped against him after a months-long ordeal. The 23-year-old was accused shortly after being shot in a mistaken police terror-raid in Forest gate, London. The accusation led to widespread allegations that the police were simply trying to ruin his reputation in the face of mounting public disapproval for the raid. His family have called for a public enquiry into how the smear was leaked to the press and why.

is going from Brighton Hospital, 15% of the toughest operations will be left but with budgets slashed.

"There will be five year contracts for the private sector but it's entirely payment by results for the NHS, it's a completely one-sided process and the government seems to be saying it's deliberate.

"In the government reply they are

saying it will be done over the head of the local authorities. No one with influence will have any say at all. PCTs are being squeezed out of the picture."

The report concluded: "We are not convinced that ISTCs provide better value for money than other options such as more NHS Treatment Centres, greater use of NHS facilities out-of-

hours or partnership arrangements."

Despite this damning phrase, John believes the government was given an easy ride. He concluded: "The committee missed tricks as well in the questions they have asked. We still don't have half the information we should do."

Rob Ray

AFTER THE BOOKFAIR

October 21st saw the London Anarchist Bookfair take over Holloway Road for the first time since the resignation of one of its most experienced organisers.

Freedom interviewed Alex, one of the bookfair collective's new members, who is cautiously optimistic about how it went, with decent turnouts and enough funds raised to cover costs.

"We have some people who are new to the collective and are still finding our way. The collective are quite pleased that it worked. It's the first year since the main organiser quit. He was very efficient at doing it and we think we have done pretty well.

"There weren't any problems. The meetings were of a better quality, partly because we decided on a few we wanted and chased up people to do them. People also came to us with some good stuff."

Comments have been encouraging, Alex found, despite some anger over the intrusion by members of 'anarcho-capitalist' group the Libertarian Alliance, whose politics significantly clash with the bookfair's ethos by promoting the retention of private property and business in an otherwise lawless society.

"It has been pretty good so far. Most people who have made comments have been very positive and it was good day, apart from the usual complaints about other groups being allowed in.

"I've no idea how long the Libertarian Alliance were there but they got thrown out at around 1.30pm. The stallholder next door to them said they claimed they'd been here three years running! They took over a stall from someone who didn't show up, but they were a sideshow really."

One recurring complaint, was overheating in the main ante-room, particularly

later in the day when large crowds had gathered.

"We haven't had a proper debrief but we think that number may have been slightly down on last year, two or three thousand, but it followed the usual pattern of getting busy at around 1pm.

"There's air conditioning, but the problem with that room is that if you have all the doors open it tries to cool the entire building and goes wrong. Unfortunately they only had a couple of fans in the building. It's something we'll have to talk about for next time," Alex explained.

"I think there are problems with the venue and it's not an ideal position. There's no communal free space and we are looking at hiring another part of the building to possibly have just open for people - it hasn't had that the last couple of years."

However the venue organisers have been very helpful, according to Alex, and there are no plans to move just yet. "They seem quite cool, they aren't freaked out by us or the tight last year."

WEAPON TESTING

Under pressure regarding their alleged use of experimental weapons technology in raids against Palestinian settlements, and following claims from Palestinian Solidarity Organisations that non-lethal experimental weapons are being used against civilian anti-wall protesters, Israel has admitted the use of Phosphorus bombs during their recent war with Hezbollah.

Minister Jacob Edery, in charge of government-Kaesset relations, said in an interview "The IDF made use of phosphorous shells during the war against Hezbollah in attacks against military targets in open ground."

Phosphorous is considered a chemical weapon due to the often-lethal burns it inflicts on its victims, and Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons prohibits its use against civilians or in civilian areas. However, Edery was careful to specify it was only used outside 'civilian areas', which is not explicitly banned by any treaty.

Israel have further denied that a new weapon which has been baffling doctors

in Gaza is a Dime bomb (Dense Inert Metal Explosive) despite strong circumstantial evidence.

The weapon reportedly uses dense metal dust to create a powerful localised blast, resulting in no shrapnel but devastating effects on nearby people.

Reports from medical professionals investigating attacks on Gaza in August found that a large number of victims showed no shrapnel wounding but had quantities of metal dust in their bodies and unusual wound patterns.

In an interview with the Al Jazeera media group, Jumaa Saqa'a, a doctor at the Shifa hospital, in Gaza City said: "Bodies arrived severely fragmented, melted and disfigured. We found internal burning of organs, while externally there were minute pieces of shrapnel. When we opened many of the injured people we found dusting on their internal organs."

The news follows reports in a previous edition of *Freedom* that non-lethal 'Shock Rounds' (electrically charged rubber bullets) have been employed against anti-wall demonstrators.

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Home and away

More Olympic woes

Following *Freedom's* expose of the way residents in the area marked out for the Olympic park in London are being treated, more problems have been revealed for the residents that remain.

Ken Livingstone has pledged that post-Olympics, £10 million would be found every year to maintain the facilities. However if this cannot be found every year from sponsorship and surpluses from the Games, residents would be made to pay increased ground rent or service charges to make up the shortfall, it was announced by his office.

TV squeezey

The entertainment industry has continued its major reshuffling of pension schemes across the sector. Following a heavily criticised attempt by the BBC to change its pensions scheme away from final salary despite adequate funding provision, ITN and Siemens have decided to switch from the more generous final salary schemes currently in place to defined pensions. BECTU, who revealed the changes, said members who had been at the BBC were particularly angry, as they had been given assurances when transferred to a Siemens unit in 2004 that their pensions would remain on final salary.

ITN are planning to raise the retirement age, as well as capping automatic inflationary increase for pensioners at 2.5% or RPI.

Superunion!

Despite saying that a merger between Amicus, the T&G and the GMB will only happen if members vote it through, a full timetable has been announced for the proposed transition to a new 'super-union'. A proposed 'vesting day' of 1st May 2007 has been proposed, which would begin a five-year wind down period for the executives and staff of the three contributing members.

More information can be found at amicustheunion.org/Default.aspx?page=3647.

First to hike

A report by lobbying group CPT has attacked First Group for raising prices across the country, after an investigation revealed no justification for the massive hikes. In the last six years, the price paid by bus companies for their fuel has risen by just 6%. The CPT report also shows bus operating costs have remained virtually static for several years. By contrast, many fares have almost doubled in Bristol in the same period. Meanwhile the number of buses outside London is down by a quarter in the last decade.

Gitmo vigil

On 21st October around a dozen activists from the Birmingham Guantanamo Campaign staged a 'vigil' outside Starbucks in New Street to protest against the fact that the multinational leaves no stone unturned in its quest for a profit – they're only too happy to have branch in Gitmo. After all, there must be nothing like a refreshing frappuccino at four in the morning to keep you pepped up when you're busy beating a confession out of a 'terrorist' suspect.

Tops turned up around lunchtime in response to an allegation that the shop entrance was being obstructed. After all, shoppers have a right to a cup of coffee – rampant consumerism can be a tiring business. Unsurprisingly, it was the shop manager himself who made the complaint, and coppers obliged by dishing out a few threats of breach of the peace in the ensuing debate with protesters.

Around the world

FRANCE: Over the past week, six buses have been set alight in the Parisian suburbs. On Wednesday night buses were burnt in Nanterre (Seine-Saint-Denis), Montreuil (Hauts-de-Seine), Athis-Mons (Essonne) and a bus was burnt in Grigny (Essonne) last Sunday.

The two most recent cases were in Blanc-Mesnil (Seine-Saint-Denis) and took place on the anniversary of the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré. In the first incident two masked men boarded the bus, ordered the passengers and drivers off and then pour petrol over the seats and set it alight, in the second incident a group of 10 to 15 youths ordered passengers off the bus before throwing petrol bombs through the windows. Twelve Bus routes were suspended within the area.

MEXICO: William Bradley Roland, also known as Brad Will, 36, a documentary filmmaker and reporter for Indymedia New York in Mexico, Bolivia and Brazil, died today of a gunshot to the chest when pro-government attackers opened fire on a barricade in the neighborhood of Santa Lucia El Camino, on the outskirts of Oaxaca, Mexico. He died with his video camera in his hands (source: Narconews).

Brad had been in Oaxaca taking video and reporting on the state-wide popular uprising and teacher strike that began in June with the violent attempted



removal of the striking teachers from their encampment in the center of Oaxaca City by federal police forces. Three others were also killed alongside him (making four dead in total); one member of Radio Universidad was also injured – he was taken to the hospital in a volkswagen van as police would not let any ambulances come (also see page 4).

PERU: Local residents have returned to their homes having reached an agreement over oil waste after a 15-day protest.

Protesters from the Achuar Indian communities in the northern Peru forest have won an agreement for an Argentine oil drilling firm to stop dumping toxic waste into the rainforest. The Native Federation of the Corrientes River brought jungle operations of Pluspetrol Norte to a standstill, demanding a clean-up of the harmful waste produced by 30 years of drilling in the area.

The group signed an agreement with Pluspetrol and the Peruvian government, promising to end all dumping of oil waste into the rain forest by 2008.

SPAIN: A solidarity march has been called in Madrid on 21st October to pressure the US to free five anti-terror operatives imprisoned by the state.

Five thousand people marched through the capitol, starting in the crowded square of Tirso de Molina, in the old part of the Madrid, and finishing at Paseo de Recoletos Avenue. Hundreds of Cuban flags, banners and photos of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Rene Gonzalez and Fernando Gonzalez, the five Cubans jailed in the US, were seen along the several block-long demonstration.

The five are accused by the US government of committing espionage

against the United States, and other related charges.

In their defence they said that they were involved in monitoring the actions of Miami-based terrorist groups, in order to prevent attacks on Cuba.

The five are serving four life sentences and 75 years collectively, after being convicted in Miami in 2001.

SWEDEN: In October, 55 delegates from the Swedish syndicalist union SAC gathered for the union's 28th congress.

The congress voted to radically cut down on the number of staff in the union's central office in Stockholm. Six paid positions – half of the central office staff – were either made into voluntary positions, or gotten rid of altogether. The cut in staff is not mainly motivated by economic considerations, but are part of a more general reorganisation, according to the union. Advocates of the job cuts argue that fewer paid negotiators will lead to increased local activity, and a more self reliant membership.

URUGUAY: The entire country was brought to a standstill late last month when lorry and taxi drivers went on strike against rising diesel prices. Around 20,000 lorry drivers and 5,000 taxi drivers stopped work after the Uruguayan government increased taxes to pay for a subsidy of bus fares.

There have been some shortages of fruit and vegetables in the capital and other than staple foods, there could be shortages of most general items.

VENEZUELA: Ex-workers for Coca-Cola have gone out on strike over the multinational conglomerate's refusal to pay them social benefits they are owed.

Up to 10,000 former workers of the company's Venezuelan subsidiary are



blockading bottling plants and depots.

Another subsidiary of Coke based in Mexico owes them large sums of money in unpaid social benefits, they claim.

At one plant in Caracas 500 people blocked all movement in or out of the factory.

The workforce is demanding that millions of dollars in promised pensions and severance pay be honoured by Coca-Cola Femsa.

Up to 75 Coke buildings were blocked at the time of writing.

"This blockade is just the prelude to Coca-Cola being nationalised and turned over to the Venezuelan state," Nixon Lopez, a workers' leader, told the BBC.

"We're showing the world," he added, "that no multi-national company can just come here to humiliate Venezuelan employees."

ZIMBABWE: Zimbabwean labour leaders, some still cast in bandages

from alleged police and army assaults last month, accused the government of systematic violence and intimidation against labour organisations.

The main labour federation, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, released an official court ruling saying police and army troops lied about their action against strikers at a steelworks in which three strikers died in gunfire and 22 were injured.

Prison news

'Gun them down'

The true mentality of former Home Secretary David Blunkett and his political supporters within the government was chillingly revealed in October of this year with the revelation that he had ordered an ex-Director General of the prison system to sanction the machine gunning of rioting prisoners at Lincoln jail four years ago.

Former Director General Martin Narey and a prison governor claimed that during an uprising at Lincoln jail in 2002, during which prisoners held part of the jail overnight, Blunkett contacted Narey and ordered him to call in the army and massacre the rioters. Blunkett is said to have "shrieked" down the telephone to Narey that he did not care about the loss of life when re-taking the jail and promised Narey absolute political cover for dealing with the uprising. Narey refused Blunkett's order and was accused by him of "dithering", while describing his own behaviour as "bold and decisive".

The prisoners Blunkett wanted slaughtered Attica-style were, for the most part, short-term petty offenders or untried prisoners who had revolted over intolerable conditions at Lincoln. In Blunkett's twisted view however,

they had forfeited the right to life by challenging the system and should have been eradicated as a consequence.

Blunkett's credentials as a racist and extreme right winger are well established, but his response to the Lincoln jail uprising reveal the true extent of his fascist mentality and show just how far he was prepared to pursue state repression in the interests of the system. The critical point, however, is that Blunkett wasn't some maverick right-wing lunatic whose opinion of how the rioting prisoners at Lincoln should be dealt with was an isolated one in the Home Office. The truth is that Blunkett's reactionary, brutish views regarding prisoners are sentiments representative of a whole mindset within the Home Office and absolutely consistent with the treatment of 'unmanageable' prisoners for years. Blunkett, always fearful of another protracted Strangeways-like revolt whilst Home Secretary was simply giving verbal expression to a view of how such revolts should be put down in future that is keenly subscribed to by a whole core element within the Home Office and prison officer movement and a view absolutely central to the New

Labour project of viciously crushing resistance and defiance amongst the poor and oppressed wherever it manifests itself.

Philippine anarchists solidarity

The 'Sagada 11' are a group of anarchist prisoners falsely accused of taking part in an attack by communist guerrillas on a military outpost in the northern Philippines. Please spread information about this case – they have been in prison for seven months now, and have received very little international support.

On 14th February 2006, a group of 11 anarcho-punks from across the Philippines set out on a trip to Sagada, a well-known camping and hiking spot in the mountains of Northern Luzon. They knew each other through groups like Food not Bombs and Earth First, and were anticipating a nature trip in one of the most beautiful and remote parts of the Philippines. They never arrived.

Instead, police stopped the truck they were hitching a ride on, and ordered the group to get down at gunpoint. Without any explanation, the police detained the 11 travellers, kicked, beat, manacled and blindfolded them, and confiscated their belongings. None of the punks had

any idea why they had been detained, until hours after their arrest, when a cafgu [member of regional paramilitary group] arrived at the station. He identified the punks as members of a guerrilla force that conducted an arms raid on a military outpost on 10th February, which resulted in the deaths of four soldiers and cafgus. This was the first the punks had heard about the attack, and they denied the charges, pointing out that they were in a different region when the attack occurred, and had no involvement with guerrilla groups like the New People's Army.

In response to their denials the police, joined by military and cafgus, brutally physically and psychologically tortured the detainees. They were beaten, electrocuted, stripped naked and had water poured over them, had water forced down their throats to simulate drowning, were suffocated with plastic bags, told their companions had been shot, made to stand in holes the size of graves and subjected to mock executions, and forced to sign false confessions. Fortunately, on the night of 15th February, one of the prisoners, Rundren Lao, was able to escape, jumping into a ravine and fleeing

News

Paying the price

Slashed pay for nurses is following a trend of cuts across the NHS, report Richard Griffin and Rob Ray

In the latest manifestation of an acute funding crisis at the NHS, pay for nurses is set to fall in real terms following a pay offer of just 1.5%. The offer, far below the current rate of over 2% inflation and even further behind the retail price index (3.6%), comes as the Bank of England has been warned that unless drastic measures are taken, inflation is set to hike dramatically.

The payment levels undermine governmental claims that spending on the NHS will rise 8% in the next year, and add to an ongoing and deepening series of crisis measures in the public service.

Deficits – likely to top £1bn this year – are resulting in job losses and cuts in patient care. Maternity services and A&E departments across the country are at risk from closure. The government has called for health workers to take a pay cut this year. Training budgets for staff are being slashed.

“Last year was bad but this year is set to be even worse,” one health worker told *Freedom*. “If Labour get their way we will see more job losses and more hospitals close.”

Labour's privatisation scheme has been a major cause of the decline. While hospitals and primary care trusts struggle to balance the books private companies are creaming off profits regardless of whether they do any work or not. Netcare, a South African company, has been paid £1.7m for operations it did not undertake. In Oxfordshire a privately run Independent Sector Treatment Centre (ISTC) has been given £1.3m even though it has carried out no treatments at all. It is a similar story across the

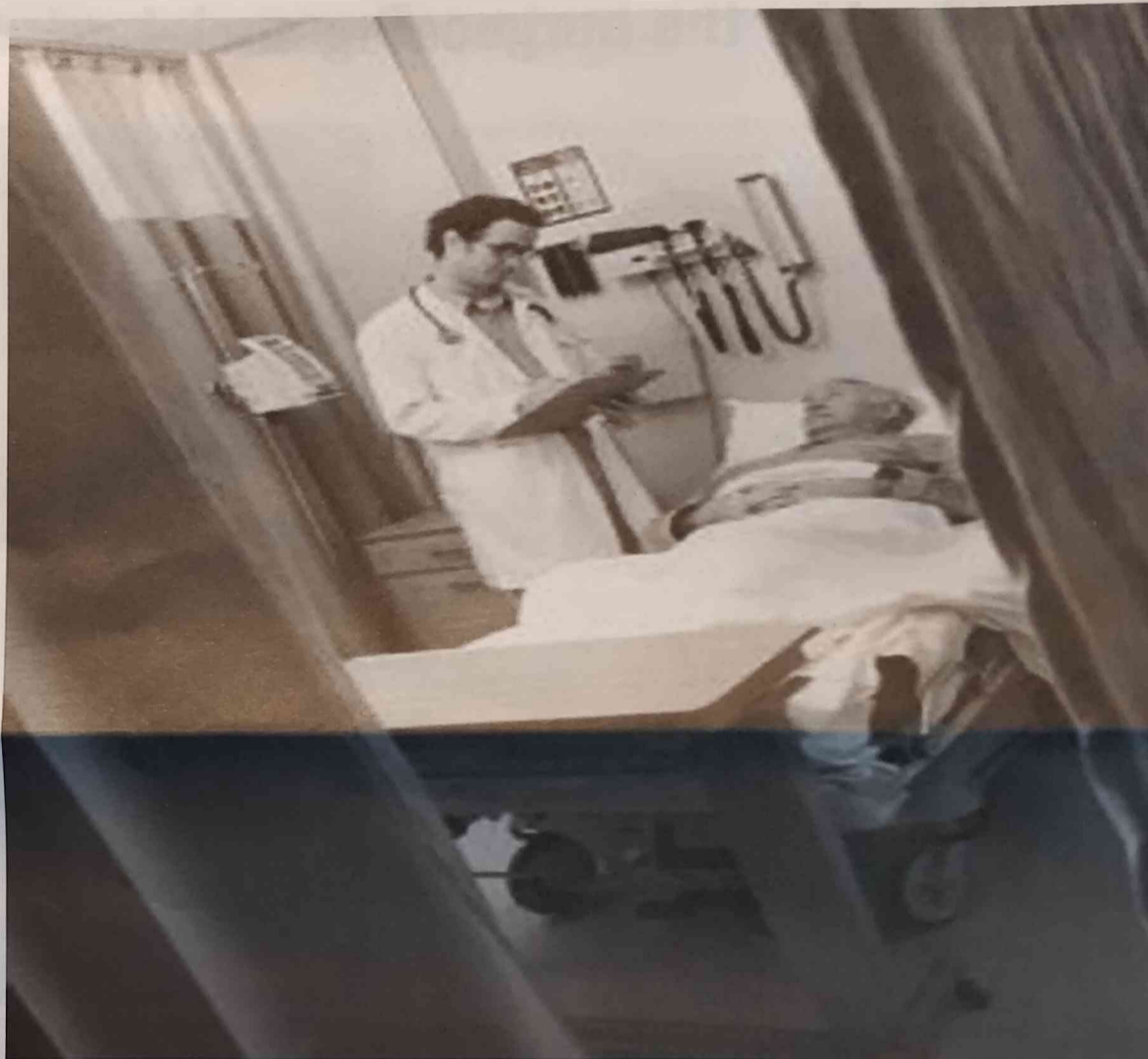
country. In Kent the deficit of the Medway PCT is roughly equivalent to the amount of money its ISTC received for work it did not carry out.

In the last year the NHS has also spent £172m on management consultant fees, at a time when staff are being denied training, and student nurses are being barred by cash-strapped authorities.

The real drain on the NHS is PFI. PFI-built facilities are on average costing hospitals three times as much as they are worth. Private sector companies are making an average 15 pence profit for every pound that they spend, although the company behind the new build at Norfolk and Norwich hospital have made a whopping 60% profit and PFI at Dartford is costing the hospital 20% of their total budget each year.

While the private sector makes big profits out of the health service NHS workers and patients are paying the price with wards closing, increasing waiting lists, cuts in services and job losses. NHS Confederation has admitted that a figure of 20,000 nurses, doctors, porters and other health workers is not far off the mark. Furthermore up to half of A&E departments are threatened with closure as are 60 NHS departments and 30 smaller community hospitals.

Communities have begun to organise around the issue. Recent weeks have seen an upsurge in protests with 7,000 recently marching in Haywards Heath and others in Ipswich, Guildford, Brighton and Worthing. Unison members at NHS Logistics, the health service supplies organisation have struck against plans to hand their



contract to DHL. At the start of this month NHS unions and the TUC organised a lobby of Parliament.

While this is all well and good, it is

nowhere near enough. One-day strikes, petitions and lobbies of Parliament are not going to stop Labour dismantling the health service. Unions have not even

organised a national demonstration.

If the NHS is to be saved health workers, patient groups, communities and unions need to step the fight up.

Cancerous computers

Following the clearing in 2004 of IBM in a lawsuit alleging they knew about carcinogens found in their computer chip factories, a new scientific study has been brought out confirming that workers in computer facilities have a high risk of developing cancer.

A new report published by online science journal *Environmental Health* (ehjournal.net) has found that US workers in the computer manufacturing centre have a significantly greater likelihood of contracting a wide range of cancers than the rest of the population.

It is the first truly comprehensive document on the subject, following a number of allegations over the last two years, and has largely vindicated campaigners' claims as it uses information released under the court case, compared with standard national and state data.

The study looked at 31,941 workers who died between 1969 and 2001, who had worked for at least five years and whose details were in the corporation's mortality file.

In their provisional documentation, researchers have found that proportional cancer mortality ratios (PCMRs) for brain and central nervous system cancer were elevated, while kidney cancer, melanoma of skin and pancreatic cancer were significantly elevated in male manufacturing workers.

Kidney cancer and cancer of all lymphatic and hematopoietic tissue were significantly elevated in female manufacturing workers.

Mortality was elevated due to specific cancers and among workers more likely to be exposed to solvents and other chemical exposures in manufacturing operations.

The UK has seen a massive drop-off in the number of people working in the computer manufacturing sector as part of de-industrialisation, but large sectors of the population could be affected, as illness and disabilities connected to manufacturing have continued to grow in other manufacturing sectors, such as in construction, due to long gestation periods.

Amicus was the main union involved when computer manufacturing was at its height in the UK. When contacted regarding the new figures, Amicus had not completed analysis.

National Officer for IT Peter Skyte told *Freedom*: “We will certainly be looking at the implications, because although there is not a lot of computer manufacturing these days in the UK there are a lot of people working in similar fields like electronics and who used to work in the computer manufacturing industry.”

Publisher of the report Richard Clapp, an epidemiologist at Boston University School of Public Health, used data he had access to as he was “paid a consultancy by the plaintiff's law firm” (though the law firm did not design the study or review or approve the report).

The case saw 200 former IBM workers, led by James Moore and Alida Hernandez, who suffer non-Hodgkins lymphoma and breast cancer respectively, attempt to prove not only that cancer was caused by working for the company, but that IBM had prior knowledge.

Company law forlorn

As the Company Law Reform Bill draws to its close, strong criticisms have come to light over the legislation, which is supposedly hoping to simultaneously improve corporate reporting of ethical practice and cut back on red tape.

The legislation looking likely to stand when it goes into session would require corporations to submit corporate social responsibility documents to the government, but would operate on a largely voluntary system.

Members of the Trade Justice Movement and the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition have criticised the voluntary nature of the reporting, saying that it will lead, as in current reporting, to companies merely excluding activities which paint them in a poor light.

Huge pressure has been put on the government to water down the Bill. The CBI have complained over even minor changes such as the requirement to supply information on their supply chains which is routinely held by businesses.

The Conservatives have also attacked

the bill, attempting, in direct contravention of their assumed green credentials, to amend the Bill so that reporting of corporate environmental issues is also made voluntary.

In part 14 of the CLR Bill, both all party parliamentary groups and Trade Unions have been newly excluded from the term ‘political organisations’. The Bill requires that company donations must be ratified by the directors of a company (and thus made public to shareholders).

However, this will not apply to payments to union officials or groups, making the detection of malpractice less likely. The exemption will cover any form of ‘donation’, including the provision of company rooms for trade union meetings, the use of company vehicles by trade union officials and paid time off for trade union officials.

Fears were also raised, though withdrawn, by Cambridge MP David Howarth that companies might be able to ‘launder’ political donations through the union exemption.

News

Oaxaca is crushed

After five months of fighting, the Mexican government has stepped in and broken the burgeoning social movement

Having stabilised the new government in central Mexico against accusations of vote rigging, President Fox has sent in 4,000 riot police to crush the insurgency in Oaxaca.

The new president used the death of US Indymedia journalist Brad Will as an excuse to send in troops over the head of disgraced governor Ulises Ruiz, who they say had lost control of the situation.

Will, who was killed by paramilitaries on the side of the Mexican government (unconfirmed reports are that supporters of the state-controlling PRI party were the gunmen), was working to report on the insurgency, which had at the heart of its demands better conditions across the state and the ousting of the hugely unpopular Ruiz.

Early reports have suggested at least one death at the hands of the police invasion, which has reportedly resulted in a stand-off between the popular forces in the city and governmental armed response units.

Tear gas and water cannons backed up the police attacks which tore through the city in the early hours of 30th October, forcing the abandonment of the headquarters camp for resistance groups in the heart of the city.

Over the past fortnight, two other major incidents had happened in the Mexican insurgent state. Nine members of the region's Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) have been murdered over the past couple of weeks, while many teachers in the area are refusing to follow their union's leadership in ending a strike over pay.

The latest round of violence towards

APPO started on 10th October as police and hired thugs, working on behalf of governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, opened fire on the popular assembly's 'mobile brigade'. Ruiz's supporters fired around 60-80 shots, with four people being wounded.

It is thought that Ruiz's supporters' hardline stance has been an attempt to make Oaxaca seem governable. Moves were made to try and re-open some of the offices that are occupied by members of the social movement.

There were two casualties on the 14th and 18th. Alejandro Garcia Hernandez, an APPO member, was killed by a man dressed in civilian clothing, shouting pro-Ruiz slogans. The latter of the two, Panfilo Hernandez, was a teacher from the Zimlantan section.

As a result of this state-sponsored violence, the local teachers' union had discussed suspending their strike action. Without consulting the rank and file membership, the union's leader, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, announced on national television that the strike was to end.

Teachers are claiming that Rueda Pacheco's actions are illegal, as Section 22's principles state that widespread consultation with the union's membership should be held before concrete decisions are made.

Many of the union's members are angry with his decision, and graffiti – such as 'Rueda P, you are a traitor to the teachers and to the APPO' – has been daubed on walls.

At the time of writing however, it looks as though the teachers have agreed to go back to work which, along with the



Brad Will on 25th October, just days before he was shot and killed by pro-government forces (also see page 2).

armed response, has largely ended the uprising for the time being.

The Oaxaca insurgency began during the annual teachers' strike when it began asking for better pay conditions across the state, and a rise in the minimum

wage along with their own demands for schooling across the impoverished state.

Protesting teachers set up a camp in the city square for several days during the strike, but when popular support started to grow for the strikers governor

Ortiz sent in state troops.

In reaction, teachers and supporting unions, NGOs and communities ran the troopers out of large sections of the city, taking over local radio and demanding Ortiz's resignation.

US roundup

In a radio interview at the end of October United States vice president Dick Cheney endorsed 'water-boarding' (the illegal torture technique which holds detainees under water long enough to induce sensations and fear of drowning) saying "that's been a very important tool that we've had to be able to secure the nation."

Extraordinary rendition, the practice of 'ghosting' prisoners to other countries to hide even more serious types of torture, has also been brought back under the spotlight.

One survivor of the practice is Maher Arar, who was awarded the Institute for Policy Studies' 30th Annual Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Awards in mid-October. A Canadian citizen with no ties or sympathies with any known terrorist organisation, Arar was illegally detained in September 2002 at New York's JFK airport whilst en route home, shipped to Jordan (where he was beaten) and then tortured and kept at length in Syria in cells about the size of graves,

three feet by six with up to seven other prisoners. He was eventually released. It is thought that several hundred people have been subject to this programme.

In the same week three prominent Muslims were successively barred from entering the United States: Adam Habib, executive director of the Democracy and Governance Research Program for South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council, was detained for several hours and questioned about his views on terrorism. US border agents eventually cancelled his visa and put him on a return flight to Johannesburg. This followed the exclusion of Fazlur Rahman Azmi (also from South Africa) and Kamal Helbawy (from Britain).

Keeping people out was also the apparent motive for a huge (700 mile long) wall at the border which Bush 'opened' in the last week of October, after building costs of hundreds of millions of dollars. Over two dozen countries have joined Mexico in

protesting the 'American Apartheid Wall'.

On the subject of South America, US ambassador Paul Trivelli has recently explained that the election of FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua will not be accepted by the present US government.

The US has also been busy bullying United Nations delegates into accepting Guatemala (the country with perhaps the worst human rights record in the region) rather than Venezuela to occupy the vacant South American seat on the Security Council.

And finally, School of the Americas Watch is mounting an Action with a thousand grandparents who will stand at the gates of the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia on November 17-19. Their ultimate aim is to close the site. The 'school' is thought to be a base for black ops work with substantial links to paramilitary death squads in the South Americas.

Louis Further

Iran: workers robbed

Hundreds of thousands of Iranian workers have gone unpaid for months perpetuating mass poverty in the Islamic Republic according to the leader of Iran's only official trade union body. According to Alireza Mahjoub, the head of the Iranian House of Labour and also a member of parliament, "close to 200,000 workers from 500 factories, such as Poushineh-Baf, Naz-Nakh, and Semin-No, have not received their salaries for months." Many of them have apparently been working unpaid for over four years. Mahjoub was asking for the 'delayed' salaries to be considered in the upcoming budget debate, and was also concerned about the effect of price inflation on poverty.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed the criticism by blaming the media, both inside and outside the country, for inflationary problems. The hard-liner's election was said to reflect a base among some urban poor, after promises to attack corruption and poverty were buttressed by his own humble background.

Mahjoub, a Tehran MP and supporter of the current clerical regime, also claimed that supplements owed to pensioners had also failed to materialise, seven months after the amount had been agreed.

This kind of exploitation, in a country where only the regime's official labour organisations are able to act freely and independent workers' action is harshly repressed, comes on the back of an intensification of the class struggle in Iran. A report from 13th October talks of attacks on Iran Khodro and Iran Khodro Diesel workers, where houses were raided during the day with people at work, doors were broken and satellite dishes (a vital source of outside news) were taken. This was seen by many workers as an attempt to intimidate, after they had previously taken strike action. Workers at a carpet factory elsewhere were also arrested and beaten by security forces. Late September also saw other strikes and protests against unpaid wages and unemployment.

Jack Ray

New thinking in the Kibbutz

In response to criticism of his two-part feature in *Freedom*, James Horrox expands on the Kibbutz movement's external relationships

Anarchists, according to *Freedom* newspaper's own definition, work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation, rejecting government and all forms of exploitation and domination. The kibbutz has always sought to do exactly that. Internally it has succeeded: it has created a society with all the defining characteristics of Kropotkin's anarchist commune in which men and women live in equality and freedom, in which the antagonism between employer and employee is non-existent, in which direct democracy flourishes and coercive power is absent. Built on an agro-industrial economy functioning by means of voluntary co-operation and free association, in terms of their internal workings the kibbutzim represent one of the greatest success stories in the entire history of anarchism.

But their geographical location means that they have an external element also. The view of the Jews as merciless oppressors of the Palestinian Arabs may well hold true when applied to the activities of what is nowadays sweepingly termed 'the Zionist movement' and the Israeli State. But for the kibbutzim it has always been a different story.

The kibbutz movement has its very roots in the revulsion expressed by the early pioneers of the Second Aliya at the fact that First Aliya settlements employed/exploited hired Arab labour, which the Second Aliya immigrants felt merely recreated the socio-economic structure of the Diaspora where the Jews worked in clean jobs, relying on others to do the hard work. They recognised that this would lead to a Palestine composed of a Jewish economic bourgeoisie as the oppressors of an Arab working class; such social stratification was flagrantly antithetical to the Second Aliya pioneers' radical socialist intentions for the country, and thus the kibbutz was born.

In the early years relations between the kibbutz pioneers and the Arab population were amicable; virtually every kibbutz (or kvutza as they were then) was located in close proximity to at least one Arab community and there developed during the early part of the century a great many local and personal contacts between Arab and Jew, often to the extent of real friendship, with widespread relationships of cooperation and mutual aid between the kvutzot and the Arab villagers. Unwilling to exploit Arab labour, the early settlers did the work themselves, exchanging knowledge and resources with their Arab brethren and even earning their respect for the gargantuan task which they took upon their shoulders.

In a letter published in *Freedom* in 1940, a British airman stationed in Palestine at the time articulated his

conclusions as to the attitude of the kibbutzniks towards their Arab compatriots: "No kibbutz I visited" he said, "or any member I spoke with ... wanted to establish Palestine for the Jews only. 'We have suffered too much to wish to exclude anyone from this land as we were hunted from the countries of our birth' one of them said to me. Their main idea is to see all men living with one another in the same relations of equality and freedom as they live in a kibbutz."

To this end the kibbutzniks encouraged the Arabs to set up similar collectives with the main Jewish pioneering group of the time, Hashomer Hatzair, creating an Arab youth group modelled on itself, optimistic that between them they could create an organic anarchist society of which the kibbutz model would be the basic social cell, in which the two national entities could peacefully co-exist.

The ideological program drawn up at the 1927 meeting of the Hashomer Hatzair council contends that "it is directly incumbent upon the General Federation of Jewish Workers to proceed by degrees, towards creating an international organisation of Jewish and Arab workers, based upon mutual understanding for the special national needs of each national entity. Only an international workers' organisation will realise the social revolution in the country." In the eyes of Hashomer Hatzair, peaceful and egalitarian co-existence would be facilitated by ensuring that the Left "encourage the joint organisation of Jewish and Arab workers", and accordingly Arabs were incorporated into the country's Trade Union movement, the Histadrut.

The organisation has long maintained this integrationist viewpoint, putting forward a policy based on "the common interests of Jewish and Arab workers in the class struggle", illustrative of the fact that the kibbutzim viewed the Arabs as their natural political allies in the class war and opposition to British imperialism. The enemies of the Arabs, thought the kibbutzniks, were the Arab *effendis* (landowners), not their Jewish fellow-workers.

The 1927 programme not only constitutes the first codified indication of an idea which would become a defining feature of Hashomer Hatzair thought, and subsequently that of Kibbutz Artzi (the 'ideological backbone' of the movement, into which Hashomer Hatzair would evolve), but according to the kibbutz historian Henry Near, "at this stage ... it expressed an aspiration common to many on the left of the Labour Zionist movement."

Zionism in its statist form was never popular among the kibbutzniks, the vast majority of whom were openly hostile to the idea of a Jewish State. While the renaissance of the Jewish



Degania was the first kvutza established in the region in 1909. This picture was taken in the 1930s.

nation in Palestine, the kibbutzniks reasoned, could be successfully reconciled with the Arab population, a Jewish State could not. In his pamphlet on non-western anarchisms, Jason Adams rightly highlights the fact that the anarchist movement which constituted the driving force behind the early kibbutzim had seen the Arab situation as one of the main reasons for resisting the creation of the state, instead defining their ultimate objective as a stateless, directly democratic pluralistic society embracing both Jews and Arabs. Adams stresses that the communitarian Zionists behind the kibbutz movement recognised that whereas a nation built on anarcho-federalist ideas could potentially provide the means for Judeo-Arab integration, the creation of the State of Israel would "necessitate carving up the territory and marginalising, on the basis of religion, a significant portion of its poor and oppressed population, rather than uniting them on the basis of socialist principles."

And this is of course exactly what happened. One must bear in mind that the kibbutzim housed only a relatively minute percentage of the immigrants, and as the century wore on the extreme Left of the Labour Zionist movement of which the kibbutzim were viewed as the 'revolutionary vanguard' became increasingly powerless against the forces of the Zionist Right and Western imperialism which would ultimately result in the Western state-capitalist model bludgeoning its way into the country.

Indeed the kibbutzniks' positive attitude to the Arab population was not necessarily one shared by the majority of the Jews flooding into Palestine, or indeed the Western nations eager to install a bastion of Western power in the Middle East, and while it is true that the Jewish colonisation of the country occurred with little regard for the land's native population, it would be a mistake to argue that the kibbutz was party to the 'fuck the Arabs' sentiment expressed by many involved with the creation of the State of Israel.

As had been predicted time and time again by the kibbutz pioneers during the early part of the century, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 immediately created more problems for both national groups than it could possibly have ever hoped to solve, which is why a solution to the perpetual hostility which has characterised the region ever since will only be reached as and when the atmosphere of the early years is rekindled.

And that is not necessarily as impossible a task as it sounds. By organising from the grass-roots upwards to promote integration, mutual understanding and mutual aid, the urban kibbutzim and the anarcho-socialist graduate groups discussed in earlier articles in *Freedom* are slowly but surely working towards this goal. Far from being inherently antithetical to the aims and ideals of anarchism, the new groups are the anarchist alternative in the region, and from any self-respecting anarchist perspective it is potentially in their hands

that the future of the region lies.

If one looks at the geographical distribution of the new urban kibbutzim and graduate groups, one finds that they are situated for the most part in developing towns, areas which house the country's poorest and most disadvantaged people, those marginalised and left behind by the Israeli State more often than not being the Arabs. Rejecting the validity or potency of government and the State, the new groups' projects are geared towards local-level integration and improving the lives of their Arab brethren. In developing towns like Be'er Sheva and Migdal Ha'Emeq the 'Ma'agal Hakvutzot' groups work on educational initiatives designed not only to promote a greater understanding of communal, anarcho-socialist living, but mutual understanding of each national entity by means of a whole host of different projects, projects which include running a boarding school for disadvantaged youth, teaching English to Arab children, after-school clubs, museum guiding, establishing and running democratic schools, legally representing the rights of working youth and establishing seminar centres.

Any artificially created 'roadmap' for peace drawn up by Western powers in cahoots with the Israeli government will inevitably fall flat on its face. The projects undertaken by the Ma'agal Hakvutzot groups on the other hand, local-level integration and the fostering of cooperation and mutual understanding are the brightest, the most innovative, indeed perhaps the only realistic hope for peace and equality in the region.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 67 Number 21

Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject government, and all forms of exploitation and domination.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher, founded in 1886. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice – see our website for a full list.

In our building in East London we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host the Autonomy Club meeting room and the Freedom Hacklab open-access IT space.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that people can work together and use direct action to practically improve our lives and build a better world.

Freedom's editors wish to present a broad range of anarchist thought, and as such the views expressed in the paper are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.

Angel Alley

Following a couple of fairly major upheavals, things at Freedom seem to be starting to settle back down to normality. Changes to the editorial team mean that a different editor is working on alternate issues. This should be a huge boon to how the paper shapes up, not only helping to alleviate pressure on any one individual, but also introducing new ideas and priorities into the process.

After a slightly hurried start (our new editor only had a week to sort the everything out), schedules are back on a two-week cycle and hopefully lateness will be kept to a minimum.

The other big event recently was, of course, the bookfair. Our revamped *ABC of Anarchism* proved to be an outstanding seller – which is perhaps an encouraging sign that the bookfair is drawing in more new people – and the new *Anarchist Quiz Book* also did extremely well.

The people who populated the stall, in the steaming heat of the entrance hall, did an amazing job just staying upright all day and have been absolutely wiped out by the experience, so hopefully things will be a bit slower for the next couple of weeks!

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 18th November 2006 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 9th November. You can send articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

Paperchase

Your paper, sent in regularly to me, has just been stopped by reception staff. I will RLC this as it is not national policy and it is against the Human Right Act to stop the receiving of information.

Freedom is not the only one they have decided to stop coming in, as *FRFI*, *Statewatch*, *Class War*, *Organise*, *Socialist* and *Socialist Worker* are all receiving the same treatment.

You can help me overturn this embargo by contacting the prison governor and, if there is no satisfaction, get in contact with the Prisoners' Advice Service on 020 7253 3323 to seek advice on a legal challenge to this action.

Ray Gilbert

PCS apolitical

On 13th October 2006 members of Liverpool Defy-ID heard about the strike by PCS members over pay and the attempted closure of the Liverpool passport office and decided to go down and show some solidarity with the strikers and give out our leaflet *Why Public Sector Workers Should Oppose ID*.

I arrived early and approached the shop steward to explain why we were there and our wish to join them in solidarity and was given pretty short shrift. The main argument by one striker was that the strike was about pay and not 'political' as if decisions to hold down wages in the public sector aren't made by politicians!

More tellingly, "ID Cards mean a lot of work for PCS members" we were informed by the Passport Office regional manager – to nods from the workers – who came out to make sure they took the bosses' party line.

ID Cards mean nothing of the sort. ID Cards mean jobs for agency staff working in some anonymous warehouse off the M1 or the kinds of people even then crossing the picket line (people who will do any dirty work for pay and sod the union) but not trade unionists of any stripe.

I was left with the impression that on ID PCS is indeed a trojan horse that will undermine the public sector unions opposed to ID Cards, whose members will have to face angry and distraught claimants or service-users, denied access to benefit because they've lost their ID card or had it stolen, or when the computers break down.

There's a strong and growing movement against ID and surveillance society but – with honourable exceptions – most unions and their members are largely depoliticised and make no connection between themselves as workers and as subjects of an increasingly authoritarian state system.

In the end I left after giving out our leaflet to some of the strikers. You could see by their faces that some of them shared our views and weren't happy about the decision or that the picket line was having no effect. I left with the words "Friends, I respect the decision but unless we hang together we'll hang separately" – hopefully the next time workers in Liverpool strike they'll welcome support wherever it comes from and not cut their throats by turning their backs.

Jerry

Liverpool Defy-ID/Merseyside Anarchist Federation

Send in the clowns

Before anyone from CIRCA complains, this isn't a direct dig at the Clown Army, it's merely an appropriate title.

This article comes as a result of a discussion of 'Stuntism' at the political web forum meanwhileatthebar.org.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a 'stunt' as "Something unusual done to attract attention". 'Stuntism' is, to me anyway, a series of unusual things done to attract attention. And nothing more.

Whether or not a policy of continuing with stunt after stunt to highlight some deserving cause (or undeserving cause, depending on your opinion) is necessarily a good thing is always debatable. Personally, I don't think it is.

There's a difference between a stunt and 'stuntism.' A stunt on its own can be very effective in highlighting causes or events that need publicity, photo opportunities and so on. Football clubs announce a new star player, 'A' list actors show off their latest movie and so on. A stunt on its own is worth doing.

But it's only worth doing if it's well-conceived, well-planned and well-executed, with as clear a message as possible about what's being done and why. A stunt that seems witty and appropriate to activists might leave a passer-by thinking 'What on Earth's going on?' At best people won't understand it, at worst they'll laugh at whoever's doing it and, by extension, at whatever cause they're seeking to highlight.

That doesn't mean that a stunt can't be humorous, but stunts that people either don't understand or leaves them laughing at whoever's it rather than taking them seriously is a waste of time and effort and can only have negative consequences. Verbiage about how 'ironic' and 'apt' an action will be simply doesn't cut it when the public laugh, point and think the *Rocky Horror Show* is on tour again.

The acid test of stunts is the same as anything else, results, not sentimental

dreaming. If it gets people discussing the issue and raises some publicity, then it's a good stunt. If it's simply an ego boost for a bunch of performing monkeys to get some free airtime then it's a waste of time and effort and a major disservice to the cause concerned.

Which brings us to 'Stuntism'. 'Stuntism', to me anyway, largely fails the acid test. At least it does when it isn't rooted firmly in reality (the reality of regular people and not activists) and used as part of a campaign and not as a campaign in itself.

Just doing stunts is like eating only cereal bars and thinking that you're on a healthy diet. You aren't, and your body (and the cause you're supposed to represent) will suffer.

'Stuntism' is little more than folk who seem to have forgotten what they are representing and why they're doing a stunt in the first place. Rather than plan a stunt to highlight a cause, performing a stunt becomes an end in itself. It's a troupe of performing monkeys hankering after a bit of media coverage rather than drawing attention to something meaningful. Hence, the series of stunts themselves become meaningless.

Stunts should be a part of a campaign, not simply a campaign of stunts for the sake of doing stunts.

Fathers For Justice (F4J) have had a lot of success in raising press attention to their cause. Whatever you may think of their cause their methods seem to work in terms of gaining column inches. But those column inches haven't all been good for their campaign as the *Tonight* investigation on ITV led to the 'disbandment' of the group and the appearance 'Real F4J'.

They seem to have run into the trap of pursuing media coverage as an end in and of itself, rather than laying down solid policies and maybe lobbying where direct action isn't appropriate. I wouldn't insult those who are genuinely unfairly barred from having access to their children, but having seemingly exhausted the array of stunts that they can enact, and lost some public support, I'd say that F4J shows the dangers of simply relying on stunts rather than using them as one tool in their arsenal in conjunction with others.

Theirs seems to be a tactical mistake that they aren't alone in making. They also seem to have run into the law of diminishing returns. The media, who F4J seem to target relentlessly, have jaded tastes. They become bored very easily when being served the same diet of rehashed actions that are essentially the same thing in a different time and place.

There's also the issue of having to up the ante with successive actions in order to maintain public and media interest in a campaign. The more successful direct action groups such as Trident Ploughshares change their tactics when a situation demands. There'll be a blockade one day, an infiltration the next and some graffiti the day after. And all the time TP works on conventional protest such as leafleting, marches, vigils and so on when not doing actions.

Regarding F4J, a better example of how it could be done could be the Haringey Bin Strike. There was a strike, and, according to one report, some residents went and dumped their rubbish outside the civic centre while the strike was continuing.

Had the public been encouraged to dump their rubbish directly outside the civic centre and councillors' homes while the strike was on, using the media to publicise the issue, this could have been

a prime example of using the rubbish dumps as a stunt while the strike would be more 'conventional' struggle. It could have made the difference between a seemingly disjointed campaign and a good combination of methods.

To sum up, stunts, as part of a broader campaign, are worthwhile, provided they're well-planned and well-executed. They can raise attention and provide the press a story to work with. So, on that basis, they're worth doing.

If a stunt is simply a spectacle and the supposed purpose has been forgotten in favour of simply providing the spectacle, then it's a waste of time and effort.

Robert Walsh

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Prison news

page 2

police fire, and alerted people to their whereabouts before being turned back in to the police.

On 16th February, the punks were formally charged with arson and murder, and transferred to Benguet Provincial Jail in La Trinidad. A charge of arson was later added to the case. In April, a change in national law shielding minors from prosecution led to the release of the two youngest, Lester Mendoza, 16, and Frances Ann Bernal, 15. The other nine remain in prison. Their trial has been indefinitely postponed.

All of the prisoners read at least some English, and they are very interested in connecting with other anarchists, learning about punk and activism, as well as daily life, around the world. Gig posters and photos, flyers, stickers, patches and shirts would also be very well received. Bear in mind though, that they are accused of being communist guerillas and overtly political material could be used against them.

- Darwin Alagar, Cell 1 (age 21)
 - Rundren Lao, Cell 3 (age 24)
 - Jefferson Dela Rosa, Cell 3 (age 22)
 - Metro Vilegracia, Cell 4 (age 24)
 - Neil Russell Balajadia, Cell 5 (age 25)
 - Ronron Pandino, Cell 8 (age 23)
 - Arnie Nunez, Cell 8 (age 23)
 - Aldous Christian Mafosa, Cell 9 (age 19)
 - Anderson Alonzo, Cell 12 (age 18).
- Mail can be sent to: [name and cell number], c/o Jail Warden James Simon, Benguet Provincial Jail, Justice Hill, La Trinidad, Benguet 2601, Philippines.

compiled by Mark Barnsley

Quiz answers

1. Albert Meltzer. It was published in 1977 by Simian Press.
2. Richard Warren.
3. Gustav Landauer.
4. Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue in a letter to Engels. To help matters, the Marxist newspaper *La Emancipation* published the names of leading anarchists in spite of the International being banned six months previously.

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REVIEW

Volver achieves rather more than simply reaffirming its director's affectionate respect for women, concludes Tom Jennings

Pedro Almodóvar's early trash aesthetic exemplified the exuberant post-Franco cultural renaissance in Spain, juggling marginal sexualities, misfits and fuck-ups to subvert bourgeois morality like an Iberian Warhol or John Waters.

From a recurrent motif of the performative nature of identity – where destructive impulses mingle with liberatory expressive yearnings in the pursuit of happiness – he has developed a unique cinematic language of character and motivation, recalling Hitchcock and Bunuel but favouring decidedly downmarket narratives. Consistently flouting all social, artistic, moral and political conventions (of Left and Right), and despite leading calls for withdrawal from the Iraq war, he is usually touted as apolitical, preoccupied with fashion and celebrity; his films dismissed as superficial. So, variously seen as enjoyably trivial, crowd-pleasing but conservative, or lazy postmodern whimsy, his sixteenth feature *Volver* (Spanish for 'return') stars Penelope Cruz (fresh from Hollywood flops) as Raimunda, a glamorous Madrid cleaner, with Carmen Maura (the director's muse in the 1980s) her estranged mother Irene, in a comic tale of family dysfunction, motherly love, old age and death.

Whereas his previous film (*Bad Education*, 2004) detailed the tortuous effects on the lives of boyhood friends of the abuse and oppression perpetrated by the Catholic church, this time the 'revenge' against the dark days of fascist dictatorship continues more obliquely – showing cultural patterns from traditional peasant communities in La Mancha transformed into the contemporary urban lower class.

In both settings the tasks of facilitating social reproduction and ameliorating the damage wrought by the patriarchs fall on women. The village folklore, which comfortingly rationalised suffering and hardship while sanctioning existing power, is now replaced by injunctions to hysterical narcissism on daytime and reality TV amid the inherently chaotic

economics and social pathologies of the city – provoking a 'return of the repressed' where feminine frustration and lack of fulfilment feed generational tangles of trauma, resentment and reconciliation.

However, *Volver* transcends the soapy limits of Hollywood melodrama and neo-realism's tragic heroines and earth mothers, with its exaggerated sentimentality concealing deep ambivalence rippling throughout the social fabric. Overweening efforts to care for others shade into domination: producing smothering instead of nurturance; loneliness along with cohesion; loss overshadowing love; and, most tellingly, denial and duplicity reverberating among mothers, daughters, sisters, neighbours and friends. So, having disavowed her husband's sexual abuse of Raimunda, Irene was promptly banished from her life. Now, Raimunda not only similarly fails to protect her own teenage daughter Paula – who kills stepfather Paco when he attempts rape – but monopolises the fallout, disempowering and infantilising her too. On cue, the ghost of Irene appears, and old wounds finally heal while new ones inevitably open. Far subtler than the critics credited, this poignant, occasionally hilarious, but troubled tribute to female solidarity thus also marks matriarchal omnipotence – like all wish-fulfilment fantasies – as coping mechanism rather than (re)solution.

Sometimes sufficiently exasperated at machismo's persistence to mercilessly deconstruct its baleful emotional frigidity, Almodóvar more typically dismisses 'normal' masculinity as obtrusive nuisance – privileging women as models for human strength and agency, however circumscribed by prevailing real-life or representational circumstances encouraging passive victimhood and objectification. The legendary alertness to nuances of feminine sociability – with an arguably gay sensitivity to dissimulation, display and masquerade – stems from an impoverished rural childhood in an extended female clan (men largely absent in the fields), followed by work as a Madrid telephonist surrounded by



women colleagues. His labyrinthine narratives expertly undermine gendered clichés of voyeurism and identification ubiquitous in visual culture, intertwining diverse layers of twisted, heightened intricacy from gossip, friendship, rivalry and Oedipal perversion. As boundaries blur between the painful intransigencies of real life and the unconscious fantasy-worlds which mould libidinal excess into personality, monstrous, delirious farces ensue – which, nevertheless, consistently contrast malignant stifled conformity with more exploratory, mobile sensualities.

Volver, though, displaces to backstory the circular cul-de-sacs of reciprocal obsession among neglectful mothers and envious daughters intimately dissected in earlier films, with their sexual transgressiveness appearing only indirectly – as in Raimunda paying the local prostitute 'the going rate' for helping dispose of Paco's body. The cathartic humour equalises status in the messy facts of flesh, beautifully condensing class, gender and generational conflict (Raimunda explaining away blood from

the corpse as 'women's troubles'; the telltale aroma of Irene's farting suggesting that she is indeed no ghost).

But the connective tissues of mutuality now sublimate in shared experience the raw intensity of fetishistic attachment – lifting burdens of unfinished business; redeeming past mistakes and misfortunes; creating chances for the characters to satisfy both their own and each other's needs. Thus even their most urgent worldly activities (sequestering the café to service a visiting film crew; Solé's illicit hairdressing salon) prioritise direct human relations over official economics and professional mediation, in this more balanced dialectic of desire and altruism.

Almodóvar's aesthetic libertarianism evidences Spain's uneven emergence from its feudal hangover – hippies, new romantics and rave culture cross-fertilising in a decadent carnival of pop-punk indulgence. Refusing middle-class taste, intellectual pretension, cinematic propriety and corporate control, it exposes the fundamentally dominative corruption of hierarchical discourse – liberal capitalism and

political correctness included – whereas the uncontrollable, unknowable contingencies of individuality constitute the collective richness of the social ensemble.

Upsetting every po-faced certainty going (anticipating countless trends in fashionable academic gender theory, and travestying them too), his gradual thematic shift expanded the focus to the wider social ramifications of forging one's own selfish course – reflecting the national political climate, as optimistic euphoria concerning consumerist democracy soured with the defeat of the widely-detested Socialists. The recent films signal how violent convulsions can rearticulate historical fragments into fresh configurations – the lawlessness of passion having its own self-determining dynamic, resisting repressive coding, suitable for mobilisation with vulgar intelligence and vigorous goodwill for the benefit of all. Luxuriating in popular pleasures, ridiculing pomposity and skewering superiority, Almodóvar is one of the few mainstream artists in any medium or genre whose work testifies so openly and resolutely to this potential.

THE ROOTS OF 'PRIVATISATION'

The laissez-faire ideological defenders of capitalism are very forthright in their support for 'privatisation'. Many of these are also keen to argue that Hitler was a left-winger. Rather than look at the business backers and role of the Nazi regime as provider of serfs to said capitalists, they simply note that 'Nazi' stood for 'National Socialist'. Such are the intellectual times we live in.

Given this, it comes as a surprise that a recent issue of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* shows how the first use of the term 'privatisation' was by the Nazi regime rather than, as previously, thought by Peter Drucker. According to German Bel, the term seems to have been first

introduced into academic social science by Maxine Yapple Sweezy, although its use in English was predated by *The Economist* in August 1936, reporting on the Nazi plan of 're-privatisation' of certain banks ('The Coming of "Privatization" and Germany's National Socialist Party', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20:3, pages 187-94).

Bel quotes a major work by Sweezy, "devoted to the analysis of economic policy in Germany under the rule of the National Socialist Party." Sweezy states that industrialists supported Hitler's accession to power and his economic policies: "In return for business assistance, the Nazis hastened to give evidence of

their good will by restoring to private capitalism a number of monopolies held or controlled by the state." This policy implied a large-scale programme by which "the government transferred ownership to private hands." Strange behaviour by 'socialists', one would think but does fit in with the analysis of fascism and Nazism as tools of capitalism.

According to Sweezy, one of the main objectives for this policy was to stimulate the propensity to save, since a war economy required low levels of private consumption. High levels of savings were thought to depend on inequality of income, which would be increased by inequality of wealth. This "was thus

secured by 'reprivatisation' ... The practical significance of the transference of government enterprises into private hands was thus that the capitalist class continued to serve as a vessel for the accumulation of income. Profit-making and the return of property to private hands, moreover, have assisted the consolidation of Nazi party power." Sweezy again uses the concept when giving concrete examples of transference of government ownership to private hands: "The United Steel Trust is an outstanding example of 'reprivatisation'."

Bel ends by noting that the "primary modern argument against privatisation is that it only enriches and entrenches

business and political elites, without benefiting consumers or taxpayers. The discussion here suggests a rich historical irony: these modern arguments against privatisation are strikingly similar to the arguments made in favour of privatisation in Germany in the 1930s ... German privatisation of the 1930s was intended to benefit the wealthiest sectors and enhance the economic position and political support of the elite."

All of which places the Thatcherite experiment of 'free market/strong state' into some very required historical context. Little wonder anarchists reject both privatisation and nationalisation.

Iain Mackay

