

PREPARING FOR WAR

Iran next on the list for military conflict

With the coalition government's decision to send war ships to the Strait of Hormuz, along with French and American ships, and pushing for the imposition of greater trade sanctions against Iran – the EU is to embargo Iranian oil exports from 1st July – it marks an aggressive step forward for an unpopular government in taking the country to war once again in the Middle East.

The Strait of Hormuz has strategic economic significance as tankers carrying 17 million barrels of oil pass through the waterway every day, accounting for 35% of the world's seaborne crude shipments. The UK has a constant naval presence in the area as part of "our enduring contribution to Gulf security", according to the Ministry of Defence. It should be noted that there are also 44 US military bases that surround Iran in several sovereign territories.

The Cameron government has already taken several belligerent steps against Iran, expelling all Iranian diplomats from the UK along with severing all ties with Iranian banks in an unprecedented move forcing all UK credit and financial institutions to cease trading with the country's banks. Chancellor **page 3 ►►**

LENS CAP ARMCHAIR ANARCHIST



The first ever sighting of the elusive armchair anarchist, who finally makes it out onto the streets during the ill-fated Occupy Oakland mass action to occupy an abandoned building after a march which was brutally attacked by police and 400 arrests were made. Rumours that one comrade had dragged his PC along on the back of his fixie bike have yet to be verified.

WOMEN WIN IN THE WORKPLACE

Over a thousand female employees have finally won their seven year battle with Sunderland City Council against the local authorities policy of paying women less than men for jobs of equivalent value. Their claim was based on a disparity in pay bonuses between male-dominated jobs such as street sweepers, gardeners and security guards, and female-dominated roles such as carers, cleaners and teaching assistants.

An employment tribunal found in favour of the women agreeing that the council failed to recognise their jobs were of equal value to those carried out predominantly by men and acted unlawfully in discriminating against them.

The women first lodged their complaint in 2005, which means the council will have to pay out six years' worth of compensation for underpayments in salaries, pensions contribu-

tions, redundancy payments and other compensation.

The council – with the approval and agreement of the trade unions, GMB and Unison – had been paying men up to 50% more than their female colleagues, for work that has been shown to be equal, for no reason other than the fact that they are men. It was described as a 'sham' at the hearing which eventually awarded the women workers the right to claim compensation for years of underpayment.

A similar case was brought against Bury council by female employees who demanded equal pay awards and won. And in Dundee and Perth low paid women workers have succeeded in their legal right to take their claims for backdated pay under equal pay legislation to an employment tribunal.

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NEWS

CLAIMANTS FIGHTBACK

The recent occupation of Oxford Street in central London by a group of disabled, sick and elderly people, disability campaigners and anti-workfare activists was the latest protest against the introduction of the Welfare Reform bill currently passing through Parliament. The legislation seeks to impose benefits caps, mass health and disability testing programmes, workfare and the slashing of benefit for 20% of disabled people.

Groups are becoming more vocal, more visible and more organised in the fight against the victimisation and criminalisation of benefit claimants. Here we give a breakdown of some of the groups involved:

- Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) formed after the 2010 anti-austerity protests outside the Conservative Party Conference and has been at the forefront of the struggle against the Welfare Reform Bill since the beginning. Recently, along with UK Uncut and others, they helped bring traffic in the West End to a standstill for two hours after wheelchairs users chained themselves together and blocked Oxford Street. More action has been promised. See <http://www.dpac.uk.net/>

- Also increasingly active are the Black Triangle Anti-Defamation Campaign in Defence of Disability Rights, who attended at Oxford Street and has been involved in organising against welfare cuts in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool and Dundee. See <http://blacktrianglecampaign.org/>

- Benefits Claimants Fightback began as a Facebook group when the onslaught against claimants first began under Labour and aims to be a meeting place and online organising tool for all benefit claimants. A website of the same name attempts to keep track of action against benefit cuts at <http://benefitclaimantsfightback.wordpress.com/>

- Boycott Workfare has organised actions and protests and is maintaining a register of organisations who refuse to support the government's forced labour scheme. The next action is on 3rd March which has been called as a National Day of Action Against Workfare, with other resistance already planned in Liverpool and Brighton. See <http://www.boycottworkfare.org/>

- Other regional groups include the Crutch Collective in Glasgow who will be continuing their hounding of the local Atos sharks with regular picket outside their offices. The long established Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty have organised countless protests and actions and have a wealth of information on their website at <http://edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk/>

- Winvisible (women with visible and invisible disabilities) and Single Mother's Self-Defence have long been involved in supporting claimants and organised the recent series of lobbies and vigils outside the Lords where the debate was taking place, as well co-ordinating the joint letter to the BMJ and RCN expressing disgust at the activities of Atos Healthcare. See <http://www.winvisible.org/>

Thanks to Johnny Void for the update:
<https://johnnyvoid.wordpress.com/>

LENS CAP FROZEN WASTES



February has had its lowest recorded temperatures since 1954. The coldest place in Britain came in at -18.4°C . The Met Office had to issue a severe weather warning as sub-zero temperatures were commonplace across much of the country. All this comes on the back of a report that says for many people on low incomes there is a stark choice whether to 'heat or eat' in order to save money.

Secret police in the dock

An important high court case is currently being decided that will, whatever the outcome, have a massive impact on radicals and anarchists, especially those who play an active role in putting their politics into practice.

John Catt, a 87 year old anti-war and anti-militarist campaigner based in Brighton, has launched a landmark legal challenge against the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner over their controversial £9 million publicly funded secret 'domestic extremist' intelligence database on political activists.

The lawyer representing Catt told the judges he had come to court to fight for "a citizen's right lawfully to manifest his political views without being labelled a domestic extremist subject to a special and apparently arbitrary form of state surveillance".

The police acknowledged in court that they hold a secret dossier on Catt detailing his attendance at 66 different protests over a four-year period. The documents show police logged personal details, including that of his daughter, which are stored and provide 'intelligence' for other forces to use. It is also understood the data is sold to clients such as energy companies exploiting power plants and airline companies involved in the expansion of airports and flights, and other businesses that may be targeted by campaigns or activists.

The 'domestic extremist' database is run by the discredited National Public Order Intelli-

gence Unit (NPOIU), under the authorisation of ACPO and the Metropolitan Police command. It was this same unit which employed undercover police spy, Mark Kennedy, to infiltrate environmental groups for several years. It also spent £3 million of public money on spy cameras targeting Muslims in Birmingham, which provoked such a public outcry and had to be withdrawn.

ACPO is also currently being investigated internally for its role and the manner in which it employed and encouraged undercover police to infiltrate protest and anarchist groups.

Catt, who has been involved in the Smash EDO campaign to get the illegal arms manufacturer closed down, is challenging the legality of the database under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to private life), the Data Protection Act 1998 (breach of legislation on personal and sensitive personal data). If he wins his judicial review it will have far reaching consequences for the already beleaguered secret political police and their surveillance methods, and will open the doors for all those radicals who data is stored by ACPO to pursue a grievance against the private company and have their database destroyed.

In response the lawyer representing both ACPO and the Metropolitan Police told the court: "Where you engage in public activity [demonstrations] you do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy."

The judges are expected to return their verdict some time in March.



Women against the cuts

The austerity measures force women into greater hardship

The 8th of March is International Women's Day, traditionally a day dedicated to celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women across the world. Throughout the month thousands of events and activities are being organised to express solidarity with women fighting for equal rights and recognition, and to highlight the continued gender inequalities and issues still very much prevalent in today's society.

It is within this context that the current government's attacks on women, both as workers and parents, should be located, as it is women who are being forced to bear the burden of the coalition's austerity measures, and continue to suffer disproportionately through the recession.

The Fawcett Society, the UK's leading campaign group for equality between women and men, has already warned Cameron that

the government's policy of cutting public sector jobs and massively reducing funds to public services and social welfare will "risk pushing progress on women's equality back a generation".

But what does the age of austerity really mean for ordinary women in the UK? The recent unemployment figures revealed that more than one million women are now out of work – the highest rate for 25 years, with women making up two-thirds of the increase in unemployment. Women are losing their jobs at a greater rate than men with women's unemployment up by 18% since the recession started compared to men's which has increased by only 1%.

Added to that is the coalition's attack on the public sector – 40% of women in work in the UK are employed in the public sector and make up 65% of the public sector work force – so the threatened 700,000 job losses largely in lower paid or part-time jobs, will hit women the hardest.

There is also the prospect of women on low wages being excluded from future pension

schemes when the earnings threshold is raised to £10,000 in October. It is thought 500,000 male workers would lose out but almost two million female workers will be affected.

In terms of social welfare and financial assistance women will also be hit hard. A House of Commons Gender Audit of the government budget found that 72% of cuts will be met from women's income as opposed to 28% from men's. This is because many of the cuts are to the benefits that more women than men rely on, and the changes to the tax system will benefit far more men than women. Financially speaking £11 billion of the £18 billion cuts, through changes to tax and benefits each year, is coming from women's pockets.

As for pay equality at work, women continue to fall behind their male counterparts. The Office of National Statistics Annual Survey of Hourly Earnings show that for every £100 men take home women on average take home £85, which has remained the same for some years.

Preparing for war

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George Osborne defending the decision said: "We believe that the Iranian regime's actions pose a significant threat to the UK's national security". The phrase will be familiar to all those who marched against the war in Iraq, and doubtless the current cabinet will have studied the Labour Party strategy of taking a country to war.

Adopting the Blair approach for legitimising military conflict, the government continues to drip-feed stories to the media about the Iran's military capabilities and nuclear weapons programme as it attempts to build up a picture of the 'necessity' of war. Stories, such as Iran's closer links with al Qaeda who in turn will be targeting the Olympics in the summer,

come franked with the authority of unnamed 'intelligence officials' or 'security experts' and are designed to generate an accepted and inevitable course of action against a nation identified as a threat.

The UK already has troops committed in Afghanistan which operate as a permanent occupying force along with American and other western forces. Their presence continues to act as a catalyst for conflict as the death toll from civilian casualties grows with more than 3,000 ordinary Afghans killed in 2011. The cost of the UK's military operation in Afghanistan currently stands at £4,200m a year. The total UK cost so far of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is £20.34

billion, paid for exclusively through the public purse.

Escalating military conflict in the time of global recession is not easy to justify politically especially to an electorate whose concerns lie much closer to home. With unemployment at record highs, massive job cuts to the public sector and universal attacks on the health and education budgets, it is difficult for the millionaires' club who run the current government to expect support for their military adventures overseas.

If Cameron can stabilise a failing domestic economy, then his government will dutifully follow the US into another costly war nobody can win.

THE BIG PICTURE



Environmentally friendly protest culture: Greenpeace Nordic have been found not guilty in a Danish court of trespassing on commercial fishing boats when it put tracking devices on several vessels to monitor their activities. Despite admitting the action, the Court jury found them not guilty and ruled that illegal fishing was a more serious breach of law than Greenpeace's alleged violation of private property and acquitted the group.

Photo by Capitan Gloria



Syon Lane Community Allotment, located near Brentford in west London, was founded in January 2010 by a group of ecological activists and sustainable agriculture enthusiasts. Since then it has grown into a thriving communal food growing space and sustainable living education centre. It's part of the Reclaim the Fields project (see page 17 of this issue). The site contact phone number is 07905 283114 and their website <http://www.syonlane.wordpress.com>.

Jock Palfreeman: a man condemned

The story of an anti-fascist who fought back

Paul 'Jock' Palfreeman is a 25-year-old Australian (born 13th November 1986) currently serving a 20-year prison sentence in Sofia, Bulgaria. An anarchist and anti-fascist, one night in Sofia in December 2007, Jock intervened to stop a racist assault. As a result, one man died and, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, Jock was convicted of the crime of 'murder with hooliganism'. Jock's story is a compelling one, and there is an ongoing international campaign to free him: a day of action is taking place on 15th March.

Background

Originally from Sydney, Jock left Australia for Europe in 2006. Having spent most of 2007 in the UK, in December Jock travelled to Bulgaria, where he had previously spent many months working. On the night of 28th December 2007, Jock was celebrating with a small group of friends in the capital Sofia when he witnessed a large group of football hooligans assault two Roma men. When Jock intervened in an attempt to stop the assault, the gang turned on him. In the ensuing melee, one of the gang, Andrey Monov, was stabbed and later died on the way to hospital.

Arrested on the night of the incident, Jock was charged with murder and attempted murder. His trial commenced in May 2008. In December 2009, after numerous delays, Jock was found guilty of the murder of 20-year-old law student Monov and the attempted murder of 19-year-old Antoan Zahariev. In addition to a prison term, Jock was also fined 400,000 leva (approximately £200,000). Subsequent appeals have failed to either overturn the verdict or reduce the sentence, and Jock's final avenue of legal redress is the European Court of Human Rights – a very difficult, lengthy and expensive process.

Trial

From the beginning, Jock has always maintained that he acted in self-defence. "When I saw the 15 men attack the two homeless men, I was presented with a choice.



Stand back and let the injustice continue or [intervene] in an attempt to save human life" (February 2011). While elsewhere in Europe 'hooliganism' is a term used to downplay fascist abuses, in Jock's case it serves to rob his action of political meaning.

There are numerous other reasons to question the verdict in Jock's case, a useful summary of which has been provided by Jock's father, Dr Simon Palfreeman, who – through a quirk in the Bulgarian judicial system – was able to join Jock's defence team. Aside from motivation – the prosecution claimed Jock is a violent psychotic – the central flaws in the prosecution case are conflicting eyewitness testimonies, the disappearance of crucial CCTV footage, and numerous procedural irregularities.

Andrey's father is a well-known and influential figure in Bulgarian society, and Bulgaria's justice system has a deserved and well-documented reputation for corruption. Many police officers, judges and politicians attended Monov's funeral, and the overall legal, political and social context for the trial has been overwhelmingly hostile to the defence.



Media

Jock's case has received considerable coverage in Australia and been the subject of two ABC television documentaries, the most recent (*Conviction*) broadcast in June 2011 and the earlier account (*One Night in Sofia*) in June 2009 (both available for viewing online and highly-recommended). When Jock was first charged, a false story was circulated claiming that he had previously stabbed a man in Sydney; later, it was falsely reported that the dead man, Monov, had been stabbed in the back.

Within Bulgaria, the media reportage has been almost universally hostile, and Jock portrayed as being psychologically unbalanced; a psychological report conducted by the court concluded that he is neither violent nor aggressive and, on the contrary, possesses a highly-developed sense of social justice.

Campaign

There have been sporadic attempts to publicise Jock's case in Europe and Australia (most recently with a banner drop in Sydney over NYE 2011) and an international day of action was held in October 2010 with events organised in Australia, Austria, France and



Russia. Support for Jock within Bulgaria appears to be minimal, and public expressions of same dangerous for those concerned: the far right has held public demonstrations condemning Jock and threatened violent retaliation against any who dare to publicly oppose them. This hostile political climate helps to explain the position of the Federation of Anarchists in Bulgaria, which has denounced Jock and in response to his trial called for the maximum penalty to be imposed upon him.

Context

The fact that the two men on whose behalf Jock attempted to intervene are Roma is significant, both because the police were unable to locate them to act as witnesses and also because harnessing widespread anti-Roma sentiment is a key mobilising strategy for the far right in Bulgaria, especially the Attack party. In September 2011, anti-Roma pogroms took place in Bulgaria, the *New York Times* reporting that protesters shouted racist slogans like 'Gypsies into soap' and 'Turks under the knife'.

Jock's case is an important one for anarchists and other anti-fascists to publicise as part of ongoing efforts to combat the rising tide of racism and fascism within Bulgaria and Europe as a whole. Jock's actions were informed by a sense of solidarity, one which transcends ethnic boundaries and national borders, and his punishment is a register of the perverted nature of criminal justice in capitalist society.

Jock welcomes correspondence and may be reached at Sofia Central Prison, 21 General Stoletov Boulevard, Sofia 1309, BULGARIA. Further information on his case, along with updates and how to help, can be found at <http://www.freejock.com/>

Andy Fleming

Andy runs the slackbastard anarchist blog in Australia: <http://slackbastard.anarchobase.com/>

There is a Solidarity Demonstration planned for Thursday 15th March outside the Bulgarian Embassy in London in solidarity with Jock. Anarchists and anti-fascists are mobilising to attend. The campaign also asks if other comrades can organise other demos at Bulgarian embassies and Bulgarian tourist offices in other cities all the better.

Thursday 15th March, from 11am to 2pm at Bulgaria Embassy, 186-188 Queen's Gate, London SW7 5HL.

ANALYSIS

London 2012: hypocrisy and farce

How the Olympics business does green politics

In January this year, Meredith Alexander, a member of the Commission for a Sustainable London (CSL) affiliated with the Olympics, resigned her position citing the Commission's refusal to oppose Dow Chemical Company. Dow, of the Bhopal gas disaster fame, is one of the 'stakeholders' (sponsors) of the Games, and is supplying a 900 metre long decorative wrap that will envelop the main Olympic stadium in London. The wrap will cost over £7m and provide no useful function whatsoever.

Bhopal

Alexander resigned in conscientious opposition to the involvement of Dow whose subsidiary, the Union Carbide Company (UCC), is responsible for the worst industrial disaster in history – a horrific chapter that continues to unfold. Around 25,000 people have died since the initial incident on 3rd December 1984 in the city of Bhopal in central India, and well over 500,000 people have suffered injury, disease and abnormalities. The environment is so poisoned with lead, mercury



and other toxic chemicals that water from the area even to this day is undrinkable.

Alexander was not even consulted on the matter of Dow's involvement by a body that is supposed to oversee 'green and sustainable' practices of corporate 'suppliers' of the Games and advise the London 2012 Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) on such matters. However, in their response to the commissioner's resignation, the CSL have declared that the decision to sack sponsors lies solely with LOCOG or the International Olympic Commission (IOC). Their statement also says, "the decision to select Dow Chemical as the stadium wrap supplier was made without consulting the Commission".

Coe accused

While the IOC does not seem to be involved in the debate, LOCOG's chairman, former Olympic gold medalist and Conservative



MP, Sebastian Coe, has come out in full support of Dow, saying that Dow bears no responsibility for the disaster since it bought UCC only in 2001, after the latter had settled all liabilities.

This is blatantly false. UCC paid a measly sum of around £298m when the Indian government asked for £2bn, and did not conduct the most needed clean-up operation, as a result of which children in Bhopal are still born with birth defects, and people suffer everything from tuberculosis to cancer to various skin disorders. Warren Anderson, the then CEO of UCC, is listed as a fugitive, now 90 and enjoying the protection of the United States (with Indian state collusion). UCC have continued to claim that the accident was a 'sabotage' and not due to negligence.

Legal challenge

What's more, an ongoing case in a Connecticut district court against Dow Chemical has revealed new evidence that falsifies Dow's claim that it bears no responsibility for UCC's actions. Leaked emails reveal that the top brass of Dow continued to sell Union Carbide products in India through a front company despite India declaring that all UCC assets be seized. Later Dow even set up new subsidiaries of its own in Asia to continue the sales using their untainted name. Now Dow claims (which the evidence belies) that UCC is a separate company and therefore Dow is not responsible for the clean-up.

Greenwash

The farce in all this is the UK government's promotion of the 2012 Games as 'green and sustainable', one of whose sponsors is Dow, along with other stellar names like McDonald's, Coca Cola and BP, whose environmental track records are less than admirable. This despite the fact that these

sponsors are supposed to adhere to LOCOG's 'Sustainable Sourcing Code', which stipulates that "suppliers and licensees will ensure that products and services are sourced and produced under a set of internationally acceptable environmental, social and ethical guidelines and standards," and that labour practices should be in line with Ethical Trading Initiative base code which says working conditions should be safe and hygienic.

But these codes do not specify how 'acceptable' the "environmental, social and ethical guidelines and standards" should be. The sourcing code also has no provision to exclude companies that are mired in serious judicial cases and allegations of violating those very 'acceptable guidelines and standards'. Dow, for example, has no less a charge than "culpable homicide" against it.

Boycott

Although the Indian government, keen to bend over backwards to attract foreign investors and wants to 'negotiate' with the Olympics Committee, Indian Paralympics' athletes are threatening to boycott the games unless Dow is sacked. There have been furious protests in Bhopal in December, in which the victims faced not just international apathy, but also repression by the Indian police. Bad press all around has caused Dow to remove its logo from the wrap; perhaps thinking that lying low is the shrewdest option.

However, Dow supported by Coe and company has no intention of backing off. In fact, it is one of the companies that have signed a 10 year contract with the IOC. After all there are billions to be made in "bringing Olympic values to life" – as long as it is for the right people.

Freedom will be featuring an article on the 2012 Olympics in each issue of the paper from now until the Games itself.

FREEDOM STOCKISTS

You can now pick up your monthly copy of *Freedom* at the following venues.

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- **Cowley Club Social Centre**, 12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA, tel 01273 696104 email cowleyclub@riseup.net <http://cowleyclub.org.uk/>

BIRMINGHAM

- **Birmingham Bike Foundry**, 1539 Pershore Road, Stirchley, Birmingham B30 2JH, tel: 0121 459 7276, email: info@birminghambikefoundry.org <http://birminghambikefoundry.org>

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- **Hydra Books**, 34 Old Market, Bristol BS2 0EZ tel: 0117 3297401 email info@hydrabooks.org <http://www.hydrabooks.org/>
- **Kebele Social Centre**, 14 Robertson Road, Bristol BS5 6JY, tel 0117 9513086, email kebelesocialcentre@riseup.net <http://www.kebelecoop.org>

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- **Sumac Centre**, 245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX, tel 0115 960 8254, email sumac@veggies.org.uk <http://www.veggies.org.uk/sumac>

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- **News from Nowhere Bookshop**, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY, tel 0151 708 7270 email nfn@newsfromnowhere.org.uk <http://www.newsfromnowhere.org.uk/>

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- **Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE)** 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA tel 0131 557 6242 email ace@autonomous.org.uk <http://www.autonomous.org.uk/>
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- **October Books**, 243 Portswood Road, Southampton SO17 2NG, tel 023 8058 1030 email info@octoberbooks.org

Café doors closed

Another setback for the people of Edinburgh as occupied social centre is closed. So what went wrong?

The proposed centre for 'non-commercial activity' re-opened its doors to the public on 30th November last year with a programme of participatory events that involved other non-profit organisations, local residents, activists and members of the Bilston Glen community. The People's Café website was set up and a mission statement clearly set out their simple objective; "Direct action has been taken to ensure that the space is not left unused but can be reopened for the benefit of the local community."

The radical measures in place to provide a social centre for dialogue and creative space were to be short lived as a civil motion was applied for by the administrators PricewaterhouseCooper (PWC) and a court date was posted within two weeks of the occupation. The eviction date was set for 21st December in order to take full advantage of the working week before the Christmas holidays. The occupiers left the premises accordingly under the surveillance of two court officials and two police officers. Other officers and vans stationed strategically on adjacent streets were not required. Contrary to the courts concerns of health and safety, the building was not damaged by the occupiers and improvements were made whilst the building was in use.

Although The People's Café was offered an extension on the eviction date until

February, the offer was declined on the pretence that there was an insufficient number of managerial staff that could run the centre. The two court representatives for The People's Café were initially involved in the Occupy Edinburgh movement and took onboard the running of the café in order to provide a premises for the three-day National Occupy Conference on 16th December. Many of those who initially showed interest in building a social centre inside the former Forest Café wanted to distance themselves from the Occupy Movement. These activists feel betrayed by those who represented them in court and believe members of the Occupy Edinburgh movement hijacked their social centre: "We didn't know about the extension in court... certain individuals from the Occupy Movement destroyed The People's Café."

The steel shutters, chains and padlocks sealing the windows and doors of what was The Peoples Café in Edinburgh only serve to remind its residents of how little our councillors and politicians care for community space in Scotland. In this climate of political realisation and social unrest, the reopening of 3 Bristo Place was perhaps an opportunity to expand on people's requirement for an autonomous space within the community. What this story highlights is not only the extreme conditions initiated in order to open up a space for dialogue and organisation but the requirement for all social movements to forget their political agenda and remember the source of this struggle; our basic human right to gather in numbers as a means of self-empowerment and organic community strength.

Otis Shaw



INTERNATIONAL

BELGRADE SIX RETRIAL

On the 8th February the prosecution was resumed against four members of the Serbian Anarcho-syndicalist Initiative (ASI), who are connected to the International Workers Association (IWA), as well as two unaffiliated Belgrade anarchists, as part of the fabricated legal case of the Belgrade Six (BG6) and renewed trial began.

The six Belgrade libertarians have been accused of inciting, assisting in and executing an attack on the Greek Embassy in Belgrade at the end of August 2009, in solidarity with a hunger-striking Greek political prisoner. Soon after the attack on the embassy, BG6 (Tadej Kurepa, Ratibor Trivunac, Ivan Savic, Ivan Vulovic, Nikola Mitrovic and Sanja Dojkic) were arrested and held in custody for the next six months charged with 'international terrorism'. Thanks to a mass mobilisation of support both globally and locally, they were released early before their trial date. In June 2010, they were finally fully acquitted at a High Court in Belgrade, which decided that there is no basis for a guilty verdict on any of the charges.

The prosecution filed a complaint, but the Court of Appeals failed to respond until a moment when suitable political reasons emerged. Only days after antimilitarist protests against the NATO summit that took place in Belgrade in June 2011, at which Ratibor Trivunac was arrested, the Court of Appeals granted the prosecution's complaint and ruled on a renewed case against BG6.

Currently, there are criminal proceedings against seven members of the Belgrade local group of ASI, and they are all politically motivated. The renewal of the case against the BG6 can only be seen as the continuation of state repression against those who stand up to pillage and exploitation. Bearing in mind that Serbia is a peripheral banana-state, ruled by a layer of 'compradorial' bourgeoisie, it has been shown that in this phase of the struggle, the greatest force against the state repressive apparatus is international solidarity.

The ASI call for "all comrades and *compañeras*, anarcho-syndicalists, revolutionary syndicalists and class struggle anarchists everywhere to join in an international day of solidarity with BG6" on 6th February, adding that "The freedom of our comrades depends largely on the activities of the international libertarian movement and we are convinced that international solidarity will once again show its strength."

In Moscow a picket was held outside the Serbian Embassy organised by Autonomous Action and attended by members of the Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-syndicalists (Russian section of the International Workers' Association) and Muscovite libertarian activists. Participants held black and red flags, carried a banner that read 'Freedom for Serbian anarchists'.

LENS CAP GUATEMALA'S GYNO GRAVEYARDS



As Guatemala's former dictator, Rios Montt, faces trial for war crimes in Guatemala, the most brutalised section of society – women – are speaking out against cruelties aimed at them. In 2011 alone, 705 women were murdered in a country steeped in dictatorships and civil wars. Guatemala has one of the highest 'femicide' rates in the world, with thousands of women deliberately murdered in a decade. Meanwhile, another genocide architect, Otto Perez Molina, is in power.

BP faces trial for oil spill

Almost two years after the oil rig explosion off the Gulf of Mexico that killed eleven workers and spewed nearly five million barrels of oil into the sea, British Petroleum will face a civil lawsuit in New Orleans. The non-jury trial will be divided into three phases, the first of which begins in late February.

But the trial already looks like it is designed to shield BP and other corporate offenders such as Halliburton Co., who produced parts of the rig, from the full consequences of their actions. For instance, the judge has ruled that previous BP industrial accidents will not be considered as evidence in the current phase of the trial. In one of these accidents – the Texas City refinery explosion in 2005 – fifteen people died.

The oil spill has polluted coastal areas of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, etc., and, according to the locals, the sludge is moving inland. BP had set up a compensation fund of its own of \$20bn for claimants who run to nearly a million people. So far only around \$5bn have been paid out. Meanwhile, workers cleaning up sludge have been complaining of several health problems, including respiratory ailments. At the moment it is only the American national health department that seems even remotely interested in the plight of those workers.

The next issue of *Freedom* will present a more thorough analysis of the incident, all the players involved, the impact on the environment and the politics of the trial as it unfolds.

Notes from the US

Fascism

It's getting harder and harder to resist the temptation to see the United States as heading for true fascism and totalitarianism. If not across the board, then noticeably in geographical pockets and specific areas of legislation.

Locally, in mid-January the Tucson (Arizona) School District released a list of books which are now banned from the school system. On the surface, of course, this is a logical follow-through on the vote taken the previous week

to suspend the district's acclaimed Mexican American Studies program. That in turn is to be attributed to the wider State law making the teaching of 'ethnic studies' illegal.

Now we have the books' titles. Hardly surprising is *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*, edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson. Clearly to re-examine the accepted view of Columbus as an enlightened coloniser would not be wise.

Furore across Europe

Unrest spreads over increasing austerity

In response to a new round of austerity measures Greek people are taking to the streets in tens of thousands yet again [pictured right], confronting riot police hurling tear gas canisters at the protesters. This has been preceded by waves of general strikes that shut down everything from schools to transport systems. In Kilkis, workers occupied their hospital, to be run on the principles of direct democracy.

The unelected Greek government's policy includes reducing minimum wages and cutting 15,000 more jobs in return for £109b from the European cabal and a meagre debt write-off from private banks. Spending cuts worth £272m will be implemented. Greece has over a million unemployed and a severe recession in which at least 60,000 businesses have shut down over the last three years.

To add insult to injury, private electricity companies are increasing their prices by 15% to 20%, and trade unionists taking action against them are being charged. This at a time when one of the harshest winters in recent years has claimed well over 400 lives on the continent, a death toll that continues to mount.

Meanwhile, Romania, one of the poorest countries in Europe, is implementing its own austerity and privatising healthcare in return



for a £17b bailout. Romanians haven't accepted this lying down and there have been fierce clashes with police on the streets and several days of protest in January, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Emil Bloc who is now replaced by an unelected government.

A recession-hit Hungary is angling for a similar loan from the IMF, but its newly elected right-wing government is talking nationalist rhetoric. Prime Minister Viktor Orban is in the process of rewriting laws that could make its connection to the EU very tenuous. People are beginning to express fears of repression and autocracy.

In Belgium firefighters took on the police, spraying them with hoses in anger against the government's decision to raise the retirement age to 67. In Lisbon over 100,000 people came out in a symbolic rally

against austerity measures and dire economic hardships.

In Russia [pictured left], the anti-Putin protests continue to gain momentum. In early February, an estimated 120,000 people were out on the streets demanding reforms to the system monopolised by Putin.

It is curious to note that at a time of economic and social confusion, EU is trying to pass a law called the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) that seems designed to complement the Stop Online Piracy Act of the US. ACTA has already been hurriedly signed by 22 countries in the EU. This has drawn protests from people all over Europe, including Poland, Slovenia, UK, Germany and France. One Euro Parliament MP has resigned as ACTA rapporteur saying that this has been pursued in a suspicious and non-transparent way.

Notes from the US

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Equally predictable is the ban on *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* by Rodolfo Acuna. It would obviously be dangerous to know more than is barely necessary about your enemy in case there are facts that conflict with your stereotypes. The same probably applies to *Chicano! The History of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement* (F. Arturo Rosales). Indeed teachers have been warned to avoid books where "race, ethnicity and oppression are central themes". Heaven forbid that tolerance should be encouraged in pupils.

But the most revealing title now named as banned for use with students in Tucson, the

one that best gives an indication of the bigotry, racism and, yes, neo-fascism of the elite there will surely come as a surprise: it's Shakespeare's *The Tempest*!

In similar vein, certain software companies are being asked by the FBI to build an application to scour social networking sites (like Facebook and Twitter) for 'potential security threats' – and display them on maps.

Then at the end of last month Google announced that it will now track the web activities of its users across its email, search, and YouTube services – ostensibly the better to match advertising to users.

Economy

If there were any doubt left as to who runs the country, a report published last month by the US Public Interest Research Group identified 30 leading corporations in the country who actually spend more on lobbying Congress than they do in taxes.

The so-called 'Dirty Thirty' paid no federal income taxes between 2008 and 2011, yet spent more than US\$475 (£307) million on lobbying in that three-year period. Still more amazing, 29 of the firms actually collected tax rebates and 22 of them used off-shore tax havens.

Louis Further

ECONOMICS

UK credit downgrade: big deal?



Early in February, the American rating agency Moody's, declared that they have placed UK's sovereign credit ratings under review, suggesting that in the coming months UK might lose its perfect Aaa rating. Moody's has already downgraded the debt status of Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Portugal and Italy. This news comes in the backdrop of France losing its triple A rating last year.

But what does a credit downgrade mean in real terms, for the general population? Is it good, bad, or meaningless? Does it mean austerity will get worse, or that the economy will tank even more than it has? At the moment there are very few, if any, who are actually assessing this and providing the answers that we really need.

The rating business

Credit ratings essentially assess the solvency of a company or country. That is if the company or country is doing enough business to keep paying off its debt indefinitely, it receives good ratings. The best rating any country can have is a triple A, which is what the UK is at risk of losing. These ratings are currently bestowed by three American companies, Moody's, Standard & Poor (S&P) and Fitch, who dominate almost the entire global financial market.

These are private companies, operating transnationally, which are deemed qualified by the governments of countries in which they are based (in this case the US) to provide ratings. Various businesses and investors then use these grades to assess whether it is lucrative to invest in that particular country. The criteria involves both default risk as well as risks of political

instability (like in Greece). The higher these risks the lower the ratings.

Unless the rating is for the short term (one year), there appears to be no immediate effect on the economy. For example, it will not lead to rise in prices of goods and commodities that we use. A loss of one grade, from triple A to Aa1 or AA+, which is what UK might get and France currently has, does not make much of a difference. In comparison, Greece's S&P rating is a CC (two grades from the worst possible) which means 'in default with little prospect of recovery'.

So, should we simply ignore all this abstraction? Not quite. In a highly complicated system, knowledge is our first weapon and credit ratings do perform one useful function: they tell us how fragile the system is and from where and how the blows may come. We must remember that in the case of another collapse, which is not unlikely, the people are always first in the firing line.

Downgrades and the current crisis

One of the reasons for a UK downgrade is its exposure to the EU. UK's imports have significantly decreased both from EU and non-EU countries because of recession in Europe, which has had adverse impact on global markets. We import more than we export, running a trade deficit. UK has an external debt (owed to foreign countries and investors) of around £6 trillion. It has a net public debt (debt minus earnings) of £1,003.9bn. At the moment, this level of debt is dangerous because of a possible Eurozone crash.

A significant credit downgrade has far-reaching systemic implications. Investors may become unwilling to lend or create new

business ventures, so in order to lure them the UK government may have to offer higher interest rates in order to borrow. Italy, for instance, is paying nearly 6% interest rate on its debt. This amount is bad enough, but a few months ago this rate was actually at a jaw-dropping 7%. To illustrate, Italy would pay £7,000 for every £100,000 borrowed. There is speculation at the moment that Italy's debt rate might return to 7%.

In this situation, one way for the UK to raise such high levels of debt money is by transferring that burden on to people, since businesses are failing to prop up the economy. The government might even bring anti-people policies quietly through the back door to raise that sum, or failing that, attempt to invigorate production by going to war. Another worst-case-scenario is if Italy defaulted on its debt, which would see another, perhaps bigger, Lehman-style shock to the system.

Looking to a shaky future

None of this is mere speculation. Late last year S&P downgraded nine European countries. Moody's is now planning to downgrade 17 banks and financial institutions, including RBS, Barclay's and HSBC. This was preceded by the downgrade of 12 financial entities last October. Meanwhile, the International Labour Organization's 'Global Employment Trends 2012' report warns, "to generate sustainable growth while maintaining social cohesion, the world must rise to the urgent challenge of creating 600 million productive jobs over the next decade, which would still leave 900 million



workers living with their families below the UD\$2 a day poverty line, largely in developing countries."

As if to underscore ILO's point, the IMF says in its 'World Economic Outlook Update': "The global recovery is threatened by intensifying strains in the euro area and fragilities elsewhere. Financial conditions have deteriorated, growth prospects have dimmed, and downside risks have escalated." All that's needed now is an oil-shock because of a war in Syria or Iran.

The Battle of Saltley Gate

On one cold February morning in 1972, as planned, they marched down to big iron gates of the Saltley Coke Depot in the centre of Birmingham. They began arriving early that morning, thousands upon thousands of them, stretched down the main road as far as the eye could see, and they didn't stop coming, hundred strong contingents from all sides making their way down to the entrance with union banners and placards, chanting, singing and readying themselves for the job ahead.

The Battle of Saltley Gate is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year and it was, by any standard of workplace militancy, an outstanding act of solidarity, one that won the striking miners their pay conditions and brought a floundering Tory government to the brink of collapse. The '70s were that kind of decade.

The strike was already four weeks old and solid at the pits when the NUM recognised that to force the government's hand they would have to target other strategic industry points and prevent the movement of coal. Saltley was always going to be the flash point for the dispute.

A month previously miners put in a pay claim of between £5 and £9, only to be met with a National Coal Board counter offer of just £1.60. It was provocation that led to the miner's first national strike in over 40 years. The pits were closed but the fuel depots were still supplying industry and the national grid.

The NUM and the government, who were at the time forcing through pay restraints across all industries, agreed that coking works should only supply priority customers like hospitals during the dispute, but Saltley ignored the directive.

Already employing flying pickets from around the country it wasn't enough to close



the depot, so on 10th February the miners appealed to the local engineering plants and car factories to come out in support. Some 30,000 workers immediately walked out, with at least 15,000 making their way down to Saltley to join with the 2,000 flying pickets already there.

They came down from the Valor factory, the GEC, the Rover car works and several other British Leyland factories. Others marched under the red banner of the East District of the AUEW, crowds of women from the SU Carburettor factory, the GEC

and Valor swelled the ranks. It was solidarity action on an unprecedented scale, one of the largest mass pickets the country had ever seen.

With the fuel trucks forced back the gates stayed firmly closed after weeks of being kept open by police, the tactics of flying pickets, mass action and solidarity strikes was to prove decisive in defeating the government. As one participant remembered: "The victory on the 10th February was a battle between the working class and the government, which the working class won."

A short history of Freedom Press

EPILOGUE

To celebrate 125 years of Freedom, Donald Room gives us his final part of the turbulent history of the UK's longest running anarchist paper

Vero and Albert Meltzer met at the Anarchist Bookfair in 1995, and enjoyed a bantering argument like they'd had during the twenty years they had worked together on *Freedom*. Among the insults, Albert told Vero he was senile (he was older than Albert by five years), and Vero replied "I'll be writing your obituary". Albert died in 1996, at a conference of the Syndicalist Federation.

An obituary of Albert was published in *The Guardian*, written by one of Albert's legatees and evidently using Albert's reminiscences as its only source of information.

Vero replied with an obituary in *Freedom*, headed 'Instead of an obituary', correcting some of the lies and recalling his joke that he would write Albert's obituary. The resulting spat provided the peg for an article on anarchism in *The Guardian* by Richard Boston, which brought in a lot of new *Freedom* subscribers.

In his last years Vero published four books of his photographs, at his own expense but with the Freedom Press imprint, and retired from activity. The editing of *Freedom* and the work of the bookshop fell to the two comrades hired by Vero. They meant well, but kept up the quarrel between Vero's faction and Albert's faction, even after Vero died in 2001.

Rescue came in the form of a big, energetic, young man who had been General Secretary

of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (a Marxist party, but not Marxist-Leninist, with a constitution unchangeable since 1904). He persuaded Freedom Press to discontinue the Vero-Albert split and reach out to other anarchist groups. Three years after he arrived he changed his allegiance again, and is now a priest of the Church of England. This does not alter the fact of his importance to Freedom Press, while he was present.

Freedom Press is now going well, with a keen group of volunteers, and the prospect of a bright future. There seems to be no current conflicts with other comrades, which of course is a relief. But the splits may not have damaged the movement as a whole. They may have increased the total output of anarchist propaganda.

FEATURE

THE REAL ROLE OF

Examining what it means to work within the penal system

Until very recently any mention of the words 'prison labour' tended to conjure up an image of the classic chain-gang – predominantly black, save for some white A- or B-list Hollywood star – all dressed in prison-issue uniforms and surrounded by an all-white armed guard force as they carried out some monotonous back-breaking job under a baking hot rural Southern States sun. That is until the advent of the cash-strapped Coalition government and its claims that prison labour ('real work' in Coalition-speak) would be at the heart of its so-called 'Rehabilitation Revolution'. So what exactly is this prison labour?

Not working on a chain-gang

Unsurprisingly, even in today's America the chain-gang is a somewhat anachronistic form of prison labour, though they are making a bit of a comeback with prisoners filling the jobs vacuum caused by global financial crisis and Tea Party ideologue-inspired municipal cutbacks. Instead, most US prisoners are simply warehoused and left to fend for themselves, it being by far the cheapest option with the concept of rehabilitation rarely enters the criminological equation. The only exception to this rule is the select minority currently employed by the various state and federal prison industries boards working for the likes of Nike, McDonnell Douglas/Boeing, Dell, Microsoft, Nintendo, Starbucks and Burger King, making much more than the traditional US prison fare of car license plates: in fact everything from office furniture and lingerie to army flak jackets and circuit boards for Patriot missiles. They even have prisoners working in service sector industries like call centres behind the prison walls. So lucrative has this proved



that UNICOR, the Federal Prisons Industries corporation, is now the second largest US employer with yearly sales of around \$2.4bn.

China in turn has taken the notion of prison labour to a whole other level, creating a massively profitable industrial prison sector that is the envy of many liberal democracies that find themselves unable to exploit their captive workforces in quiet such a ruthless manner, despite a shared widespread public contempt for all prisoners. In this Laogai system, prisoners undergoing 'reform through labour' end up in one of the 12,000 or so prison work camps (many run as full-blooded capitalist enterprises trading as limited companies) doing anything from packing China tea or making the cheap DIY tools one finds in Pound Shops to manufacturing commercial vehicles or mining uranium ore. The Myanmar (Burmese) authorities go even further, forcing prisoners to act as "disposable human pack-mules"¹ for their Army, carrying heavy loads into combat zones and performing 'human shield'-style mines-clearance.

In contrast, European prison labour is held to be a much more humane system, supposedly providing both useful occupation (of otherwise empty time) and teaching skills towards post-release employment. Except this is far from the reality in most states, save for the liberal Scandinavian countries where, in Sweden for example, prisoners have to have some form of work placement prior to conditional release at the two-thirds point in their sentence.

Prison labour UK style

Historically, prison labour in the UK really only began with the ending of transportation and the establishment of imprisonment as the default method of punishment. Prior to that, apart from debtor prisons and the work-house, judicial confinement had previously been used only before trial and punishment took the form of flogging, branding, hanging, etc., with imprisonment reserved solely for the wealthy, the landed gentry and for royalty. Designed to keep the occupants of late C18th prison hulks occupied whilst being punished under a sentence of hard labour – reforming prisoners whilst teaching them to be industrious, this work consisted mainly in 'picking coir or oakum'² weaving or dredging military docks.

When transportation finally ended in the mid nineteenth century, it was replaced by penal servitude (often with an additional sentence of hard labour) in one of the swathe of new prisons constructed across the country. Yet much of this was pointless, unproductive work, turning a Crank [pictured left] or working the Treadmill [pictured right], done simply to keep prisoners occupied, keeping them tired and compliant so that they did not cause their captors any trouble, instilling upon them a regimented and often brutal discipline whilst ostensibly providing



some form of mindless occupation that allowed time for the 'rehabilitative' contemplation of one's 'sins'. Longer-term prisoners however usually 'progressed' onto the 'public works' prisons³ where they engaged in quarrying, rock-breaking for road repair and reclamation works – just the sort of work (as punishment) they would have been forced to carry out if they had been transported to Australia. Under this regime many such prisoners ended up maimed or in the dead-house – killed in quarrying accidents or having committed suicide as their only possible route of escape.

Not so hard labour

This broadly was the default setting until hard labour was finally abolished in 1948, though sewing mailbags had admittedly replaced the Crank and Treadmill and the 'public works' prisons had been reformed prior to the First World War, leaving little other work post-World War Two beyond mopping corridors and keeping the prison freshly painted.⁴ A classic illustration of the 'constructive' nature of prison labour is the humble Post Office mailbag itself. Largely the only job in some prisons, the contract quota was regularly exceeded and sewn mailbags had to be sent to other prisons for prisoners to unpick there. This practice continued long after the Post Office contract ended, mainly as there was no other work available to replace it.⁵

One area of prison labour however had gradually developed alongside this largely

PRISON LABOUR



‘purposeless’ activity, to become the major prison employment: infrastructure jobs – cleaning and cooking for the prison population alongside the workshops making virtually everything consumed within prisons: from socks and Y-fronts to cell furniture and the very prison bars themselves. Everything that is except the prison’s locks and keys! Prisoners even used to have to make the screw’s uniforms until the complaints from prison officers about the shoddy ill-fitting nature of the prisoners’ efforts forced the Prison Service to look elsewhere, finding that they could get cheaper and better quality uniforms made by Chinese prisoners instead.

What a con

Despite this thriving in-house industry, whose prime function was to subsidise the Prison Service’s massive running costs, the majority of prisoners continued to endure enforced inactivity, banged up in overcrowded cells⁶ for large parts of the day. Even after the reforms to the prison regime brought in in the wake of the 1990 Strangeways rebellion and the introduction of the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (IEPS), little has changed. Except that IEPS has replaced the more overt forms of brutality inherent within the prison regime with a more pernicious culture of compliance and control, one built on earning ‘privileges’⁷ above a bare minimum level, and scarcely compliant with Human Rights legislation, by being willing to work in whatever job one is given. Thus contact with one’s family via visits, phone calls and

letters became a tool to ensure conformity, despite it being officially recognised that a key essential for the successful rehabilitation of prisoners is the maintenance of familial contact.

Massively successful, IEPS has been largely responsible, along with the widespread availability of heroin within the prison system, for the virtual ending of the widespread prison disturbances that were so prevalent during the 1970s, ’80s and early ’90s. That and the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998, which forced the Prison Service to begin to grudgingly treat those in their custody with something other than borderline contempt, even beginning to publicly talk about a ‘duty of care’.

Yet that ‘duty of care’ still appears to end at the prison gates and the poor, supposedly rehabilitated, cons disgorged into society at the end of their prison terms are thrown in at the deep end, left to sink or swim by their own efforts. One only has to look at a prison educational and training system that has been subject to increasingly brutal cuts or to the almost total lack effort put into both helping prisoners find accommodation and employment prior to release⁸ or helping end the widespread prejudice that sees ex-prisoners condemned to the ‘core jobless group’ that more than 60% of employers deliberately exclude when recruiting, together with the fact that the prisoner discharge grant (£46.75) has not changed since 1995, to see exactly how high a governmental priority preventing reoffending really is.

Indentured labour

No, prison labour is not and has never been about rehabilitation, about turning prisoners into useful working class drones. Instead it is really all about establishing and maintaining control over a potentially restive captive population. True, some skills are learnt and qualifications gained, but this is rare and most jobs are low-to-no-skill forced mind-numbing drudgery paying peanuts that rarely equip one for a life on the ‘straight and narrow’ post-release. And even if Ken Clarke really does manage to introduce his policy of ‘real work’ into English and Welsh prisons to any significant extent, alongside its accompanying sop to the burgeoning power of the ‘victims lobby’ in the guise of a ‘Victims Tax’ on prisoners’ meagre earnings, little will really have changed – other than an already repressed prison population having become little more than a captive pool of indentured labour.

Footnotes

- 1 *Burma: War Crimes Against Convict Porters*, Human Rights Watch report, 2011.
- 2 Splitting old tarred rope into individual fibres.
- 3 Chatham, Portland, Portsmouth or Dartmoor.
- 4 Between the wars the prison population fell by a half and prisons were actually being closed, which meant that the massive post-WWII increase in the prison population led to overcrowding worse than that experienced by today’s prisoners.
- 5 In some prisons rock-breaking was reintroduced when mailbag sewing ended!
- 6 Victorian prison cells were originally designed to hold single prisoners, not to be double or triple-bunked as has become the norm.
- 7 For example, additional enhanced visits, the right to wear one’s own clothes, to rent a TV, access to more personal cash, higher prison wages, more time out of one’s cell, etc.
- 8 Prisoners who have both employment and accommodation problems post-release have a reoffending rate of 74% during the year after custody, compared to 43% for those with no problems.

Campaign Against Prison Slavery
<http://www.againstprisonslavery.org/>



INTERVIEW

Robb Johnson: folks like us

Interview with our last great political singer songwriter

"Faces of the poor finally make the front page, When Tottenham burned."

How do you know you're in the presence of musical greatness? Good question, sometimes it's not that obvious. In the upstairs of a south London pub, Robb Johnson, who's just about to perform for a Radical London benefit, sits opposite me talking about what it is he does and where it all came from?

"I always wanted to be a writer. As a kid I thought I'd like to be a poet and then I thought if you're a poet you only ever talk to posh people in ivory towers, but if you had a guitar you could go up and talk to all sorts of people everywhere. And I was always interested in songs that had something to say, worth listening to. As a kid I liked the Velvet Underground a lot, and from them I found the Stooges and MC5, and MC5 were really righteous and very political."

"But the flames spread out of their control, When Tottenham burned."

And Johnson too is very political. Last year's album, *Some Recent Protest Songs*, featured an anti-cuts placard on the cover and was bang up to date in terms of subject matter – Libya's no fly zone, the student riots ('The Man Who Poked Camilla'), coalition cabinet and city bankers – "don't ask me why, I don't like the rich". But there were also moments of reflection about those who rarely get songs written about them, whose lives are rarely documented and never celebrated, trying to extract a sense of beauty and hope from the society we live in. It's something he learned from Victor Jara, the famous Chilean political activist and musician who was brutally murdered during the Pinochet coup in 1973.

"The nicest thing about Victor Jara, he was very much up against really nasty fascist bastards but always insisted his songs should be beautiful. And one of the things I personally find disappointing about a lot of the punk music is they kind of want to be ugly. Whereas I think it's important that we don't let people take away our capacity for beauty, and Victor Jara songs always insisted upon the people's capacity for beauty."

And it's that capacity to create beauty in often ugly circumstances from often ugly situations that marks Johnson out.

"I bet they all slept safe and sound in Eton, When Tottenham burned."

'When Tottenham Burned' was recorded last August about the death of Mark Duggan and resultant four days of rioting, and it won the



prestigious FATEA magazine song of the year. It neither glorifies nor disdains and lists in the lyric all those that were killed during the rioting. It's a remarkably poignant song. It's a remarkable song.

"Funnily enough I was at Broadstairs festival. We got up on Monday morning and noticed all the newspapers had these headlines, 'London burning', all these very colourful photographs, and we thought surely not, and we were all going 'Wow this is just...' And part of the function of what I do, I think, is within that folk tradition of providing alternative perspectives to the ruling cultural discourse.

"And the other thing is what the media always try and persuade us is a riot is composed of people who are all there for the same thing. So I tried to get the idea of there being a multiplicity of perspectives on the riot, and also different ways of looking at it, and I hope at the end I try and put it into its perspective that it's a class issue, not a criminal issue."

"Politicians flew home, eventually, When Tottenham burned."

For those of us who lived through it, the 1980s remains like a scar across the memory and if you're going to talk politics you're going to have to talk about those dark days of Thatcherism that politicised through necessity a generation. We talk long and hard about the 1980s and try and draw parallels to what's happening now.

"Thatcher destroyed the working community; she destroyed the working classes traditional forms of organisation. On the other hand she didn't destroy the working class because what did for her was the

popular working class resistance to the poll tax. It was because people took a principled stand and self-organise that she got..."

He trails off. Johnson's optimism remains undiminished in his belief in our capacity to fight back, even when I mention the floundering anti-cuts movement.

"It's more complex because it's not a single issue, but I think there's more energy now amongst ordinary people, there's more organisation and there's more anger than at any time since the poll tax."

Later that evening I'm sitting at the computer in the near dark writing this and listening to 'When Saturday Came', Johnson's song about the 96 Liverpool fans killed at Hillsborough. I look down and see the keyboard flooded with tears. I'm crying like a child to a voice, a guitar and a few well-chosen words. Then I understood that's when you realise you're in the presence of musical greatness.

*Gone for good our fathers town,
The great dock labour scheme,
The only thing they ain't knocked down,
Our fathers football team*

*We live and die for our Saturdays,
And when that Saturday came,
No greater love than the push and shove,
At the gates of the Hillsborough game.
(‘When Saturday Came’)*

Some Recent Protest Songs (IRR080) is available in most records shops, as is his latest LP *Once Upon A Time* (IRR082). 'When Saturday Came' is from the album *The Big Wheel* (IRR036). All are released on Johnson's own Irregular Records and can be ordered from <http://www.robbjohnson.co.uk/> Victor Jara's songs can be heard on YouTube.

INSIDE NEWS

- Mumia Abu-Jamal had his second ever contact visit in over 30 years in February after being moved off death row into general population at the State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania in January. Unlike previous occasions which took place in small, isolated visiting cell behind sterile plexiglass, these visits have been in large visitor's area, amidst numerous circles of families and spouses who were visiting other inmates. Jamal, a political activist and former Black Panther, was sentenced to death in 1982 after being convicted of killing a cop in Philadelphia. He has been on death row for most of the time in prison until a court appeal rescinded the death penalty decision and he was moved off death row in January this year.

- Still in the States, enterprising prison inmates have been using their creative talents to get back at the police on the outside. The painted emblems that go on the side of Vermont state trooper police cars had an extra item added to it in the shape of a pig hidden amongst the crest design. The emblems were printed by prison inmates at Vermont's Northwest State Correctional Facility, and the pig went unnoticed, with up to 30 police cars driving around brandishing the amended logo. A Vermont State Police spokeswoman said the prank was "disrespectful and insulting to officers who serve the Green Mountain State".

- In an extraordinary act of defiance nearly 2,000 prisoners in Kyrgyzstan have sewn their lips together in an ongoing protest against the appalling jail conditions. The protest began when prisoners demanded to be allowed to visit each others' cells and has spread throughout the prison system. Nearly 7,000 prisoners went on a hunger strike, with 1,197 sewing shut their lips.

- In Yemen least eight prisoners were killed and around 20 others injured after prison guards opened fire during an escape attempt on 8th February at Dhamar Central prison. According to unnamed prison official, family members had smuggled arms in to the prison 100km south of Damascus. It was the second escape attempt at the prison in less than a month.

- The prison population has broken the 90,000 barrier if one includes those prisoners currently on 'tag' – Home Detention Curfew, specifically designed to ease overcrowding by granting early release to low risk prisoners. At the end of the second week in February the prison population was 90,396, with 2,702 on HDC.

- In a Brown Acid moment, Minnesota prison officials have blamed a Christmas Eve prison disturbance on six prisoners 'overdosing' on smuggled in LSD.

Deaths in custody

Since *Freedom* shifted from fortnightly to monthly publication, the prison news just comes too thick and fast to really be able to give all the often startling (even for an old hand like yours truly) news a fair crack with regards to column inches. So it has become a question of either short pointers to as many stories as can be jammed into 550 words or longer analysis of one or two more of the important issues. Last month it tended towards the latter, with POA scaremongering, non-riots, deaths in custody and restraint techniques.

All these have been in the news yet again over the past four weeks and, in the case of self-inflicted deaths, the news is even more startling than last time, with the four deaths in the first two weeks of January being added to with a further nine in the month following. This means that the self-inflicted death rate is currently running at twice that for 2011, constituting 42% of the 31 prison deaths so far in 2012 (two of which await an inquest and could still be classified as self-inflicted). So, with all the budget cuts, the overcrowding (especially in the youth prisons) and the belligerence of prison officers doing their best to work to rule without falling foul of their no strike regulations, we can expect to see this trend continue.

And speaking of the belligerence of screws, it appears that they are in cahoots with prison governors over the practice of over-categorisation of prisoners – where individual prisoners have their security category inflated so that jobs in the better paid and more expensive high-security end of the prison estate can be protected. For those of you not in the know, local remand prisons are all Category B (high risk) prisons, though

they have lower Category C (medium risk) wings, and all remandees are automatically classified as 'B cat', even those on the most minor of charges. Following conviction, most prisoners are then reclassified as 'C cat', except those considered an escape threat (not that anyone has escaped from a UK prison in a long time); the more high profile prisoners convicted of violent or sexual offences; and, needless, to say the trouble-makers – the prison resisters who refuse to consent to the system.

So, what is happening now, above and beyond the escalating invention of non-scientific psychiatric categories, such as Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder, and the opening of the Close Supervision Centres, is that prisoners who shouldn't even be 'B cat' are ending up languishing in 'A cat' prisons and many are being forced into applying for judicial reviews in order to get a sniff of open prison ('D cat') as they near the end of their sentences. Of course it doesn't help that there is such a long waiting list for lifers to be allocated 'D cat' places, together with the vast backlog of IPP prisoners awaiting parole hearings, all further slowing the glaciers-like pace that prevails in all Prison Service-related activities.

In other news, the cheeky chappy that half-inched the master keys last October at a then newly-privatised HMP Birmingham has apparently been arrested, and the Prison Service's new flagship nick, HMP/YOI Isis, is having a terrible time with its hi-tech biometric roll call system. It appears that unhelpful prisoners are failing to submit an electronic thumbprint as they pass through security doors, leaving the prison on automatic lockdown, sometimes for hours on end.



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

What excitement has been livening up the lives of the inhabitants of Angel Alley we hear you ask? Okay, maybe not, but here's all the news that's fit to publish anyhow. On the boring side we've had the electrics checked for health and safety and also had an asbestos survey done on the building. If it turns out we've has asbestos all along without knowing it we will be very upset.

As always, the building is used most evenings for meetings by various anarchist and radical groups and we like to think of ourselves as more than just a shop but also as a place where comrades can come to relax, hang out and share experiences.

While donations are always appreciated few will be more well received than the lovely pot plant donated by the mum of someone who got off with a suspended sentence.

Lastly, one of our comrades from the Advisory Service for Squatters has been arrested in Australia and there will be a benefit for her and her co-defendant at the Grosvenor public house, Sidney Road, Stockwell, London SW9 0TP on Sunday 26th February from 8pm until 11pm. Organised by Acoustic Insurgency, it features Captain Hotknives, Ren Spits at Magpies, Dangerous Dinky and other pop and roll artistes so beloved of young folk today.

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NEXT ISSUE DEADLINE

The next issue will be dated April 2012 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Monday 12th March. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

Some time ago a colleague had a serious accident. It meant that for a time he couldn't walk or put any weight on his legs. He coped okay with all that, but found it really difficult when he tried to get anywhere, and the reaction of people to him once he was seen as 'disabled'. Buses would drive straight past the stop even though they were empty and, even when they did stop, he would have to wait for several to pass until one arrived where the wheelchair space wasn't taken up by a buggy. The driver didn't see it as his job to ask the parent and child to move; therefore a bus journey becomes entirely unpredictable.

Once on the bus, or at the shops, people would stare and just talk to his wife, ignoring him. Some would glare and make comments like "you don't look disabled". He knew he would get better, but learned a real appreciation of the struggles faced by another colleague who was permanently disabled, and deteriorating.

I recount this because if you are not disabled or in regular contact with someone who is, you might miss just how hard it can be. And it's about to get harder. I'm not going to address the use of the term 'disabled' or what it means in today's society. Some things which are classified as disabilities only really apply in capitalist society, other conditions may not be recognised.

I believe in "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs." I suspect the government and their chums in big business find this whole idea a bit threatening. If someone needs extra support because of their disability, they should get it. The government and their allies in the right wing media have whipped up a storm about "disabled scroungers". As part of their blatant divide and rule strategy, there has been a constant flow of stories about bogus claimants, taxpayer funded cars and people

on disability allowances performing amazing physical feats. People lap this up and some imagine that the majority of claims for disabled benefits are fraudulent. In fact, the actual proportion is 1 in 200, and it is less than the proportion of mistakes made by officials.

In this climate, people start to get hurt. A man with MS in the North East was taunted and had his house attacked by a neighbour. In 2007 in Leicestershire, Fiona Pilkington killed herself and her daughter, who had learning difficulties, after a campaign of bullying by local youths. She had reported it to the police over thirty times. Charities are reporting a rise in calls from people who are afraid to go out. One woman using crutches reported being abused for "scrounging" on her way to work!

Bear in mind this is being driven by Ian Duncan Smith, a "compassionate conservative". Who knows how bad it would be if one of the real vicious bastards was in charge?

Disabled activists have responded on several levels to the government's attacks. They have taken apart the government's plans with the Spartacus Report, written by activists, which went viral on the internet and contributed to some of the government's plans being voted down. The report showed that the government had "entirely misrepresented the views submitted as part of the consultation, giving a partial and biased view." Or lied, if you want to use plain English.

They have also organised demonstrations and other actions. This self-organisation is excellent, but it needs solidarity, particularly as the very act of fighting is itself a stress. The solidarity of others better able to fight is not just an ideal though, it is in our own interests. After all, if we live long enough we will all end up disabled in one shape or form.



FEEDBACK

Kicking off!

Newham bookshop has managed to persuade *Newsnight* economics editor and author Paul Mason to talk about his book *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere* at Wanstead Library on Saturday 17th March at 7pm.

Mason's book explores the wave of protest that emerged in 2011, from the so-called 'Arab Spring' to the Occupy movement, and whether new forms of activism involving dynamic networks of young, social media savvy cyber-protesters are redefining what 'revolution' and political alternatives to capitalism now means.

Paul Mason, *Why it's Kicking off Everywhere*, Saturday 17th March at 7pm, Wanstead Library, Spratt Hall Road, London E11 2RQ. Tickets £5 from Newham Bookshop. Tickets for the event, which is likely to sell out very quickly, can be reserved by calling 020 8552 9993.

Green shoots

The first Reclaim the Fields Gathering of the year will be taking place this March at the Wilderness Centre in the Forest of Dean. Accommodation is available from the evening of Wednesday 7th. Otherwise the gathering is two full days Thursday and Friday 8th and 9th March. The Forest always welcomes visitors so arrange with them if you want to stay and help out before hand. Reclaim the Fields is a constellation of people and collective projects willing to go back to the land and reassume the control over food production.

We are determined to create alternatives to capitalism through cooperative, collective, autonomous, real needs oriented small scale production and initiatives, putting theory into practice and linking local practical action with global political struggles. Contact the UK team at uk@reclaimthefields.org <http://www.reclaimthefields.org.uk/>

Popped in

Glasgow Social Centre (GSC) aims to create a safe and healthy space, open to all members

of the community, that will operate as a hub for a variety of community and social groups in Glasgow.

Working on principles of mutual aid, solidarity and co-operation, we will strive to provide a space which promotes and educates around issues of environmental and social justice.

GSC invites you to take part in a series of events spanning across the coming year in various locations around the city. These events, known as Pop-Up Social Centres, are intended to increase our collective confidence through sharing our stories and ideas. These events are intended to produce practical actions that defy the possessive logic of capitalist greed by creating collective ways of being-in-the-world.

The last Pop-Up was great stuff, with gardening, craft and bike fixing. Thanks to everyone, especially the Glasgow Bike Station and Urban Roots. It was a fantastic weekend event, and we are already planning many more.

Glasgow Social Centre

glasgowsocialcentre@riseup.net

<http://glasgowsocialcentre.blogspot.com/>

Sold out

The leadership of the public sector unions UNISON and GMB decided on 12th January to start negotiating with the government over pensions. Meanwhile TUC leader Brendan Barber pontificated that "We have reached a stage where the emphasis in most cases is in giving active consideration to the new proposals that have emerged rather than considering the prospect of further industrial action." The smaller civil service and teaching unions Prospect, ATL, NAHT, etc., swung in behind this.

But these new proposals are exactly the same as before with workers having to pay more in contributions and having to work longer. On top of this, we have had to swallow a two year pay freeze and a further two years of so-called pay rises limited to 1%. Having a laugh?

The union leaders are scared that further strike action threatens their position as mediators and cops over the working class.

Now is the time to ignore these so called leaders, now is the time to organise our own actions and not wait on ballots and bureaucrats. That means action at the base, that means joint action between workers in both the public and private sector, that means total rejection of the attacks on pensions this government is trying to force through.

The boss class is trying to make us pay for their crisis whether this is voiced through the Coalition government or through the Labour Party with Balls and Miliband arguing that cuts are necessary.

This doesn't have to be the case. We are many – we showed that on 30th November when we came out in vast numbers. We can stop the bosses and the government in their tracks.

Resistance bulletin #138 of the Anarchist Federation, <http://www.afed.org.uk/>

Sliced up

Twenty Pizza Hut workers and their supporters in Sheffield braved freezing temperatures and billowing snow to stage a protest against what they say are 'insulting' conditions and pay.

Members of the Pizza Hut Worker's Union surrounded the company's tiny store in Crookes, Sheffield carrying placards and leaflets that demanded management return to the negotiating table to discuss their frustrations over holiday pay and mileage rates.

Despite the perceived downward trend in spending, takeaways like Pizza Hut have been bucking the trend and continue to make huge profits. Workers are angry that this boom in business has not been reflected in their own pay.

Supporters staged solidarity protests in Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Wessex, Bradford, Hull, Brighton, Liverpool and Bristol.

The Pizza Hut Worker's Union is part of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), <http://iww.org.uk/>

DONATE YOUR OLD BOOKS

The ravaging wolves of capitalist depredation are constantly howling around Angel Alley seeking the destruction of our noble bookshop.

You can help keep these fey hounds at bay by donating books that you no longer want so that we may sell them on to knowledge-hungry proletarians for a pound a piece (more to rich arty types who only came in 'cos they got lost on the way to the Whitechapel Art Gallery).

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GETTING ACTIVE

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

■ **27th to 4th March** Bristol Radical Film Festival, see www.bristolradicalfilm.org.uk/ for details of screenings and venues.

MARCH

■ **1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd** London group of The Anarchist Federation meets weekly on Thursday evenings at Freedom Bookshop 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. If you would like to attend please email london@afed.org.uk beforehand.

■ **6th and 20th** Practical Squatting Evening at Offmarket, 68 Dalston Lanes, London E8 3AH from 7pm to 8pm, contact offmarket@riseup.net or call 07583870733 for details.

■ **7th** To launch the annual Women's History Month celebrations, a talk with Jessica Metheringham-Owlett, 'Women's History: half the future, half the past', from 7pm at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, see www.housmans.com

■ **10th** News from Nowhere Club presents 'The Theatre Royal: A People's Theatre' with Murray Melvin at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone E11 4LJ, buffet 7.30pm, talk starts 8pm, for further details see <http://www.newsfromnowhereclub.org/>

■ **13th and 27th** Practical Squatting Evening at 56a Infoshop, 56a Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE from 7pm to 8pm, see <http://www.56a.org.uk/> for details.

■ **15th** Jock Palfreeman Solidarity Demo at 11am outside the Bulgarian Embassy, 186-188 Queen's Gate, London SW7 5HL, see <http://www.facebook.com/events/182053191892851/> for details.

■ **17th** Paul Mason will be discussing his latest book *Why it's Kicking off Everywhere*, from 7pm until 9pm at Wanstead Library, Spratt Hall Road, London E11 2RQ, tickets £5 are available from Newham Bookshop (020 8552 9993) or from Wanstead Library (020 8708 7400).

■ **17th** Brighton Anti Fascists Benefit Gig at the Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA, tel 01273 696104, from 8pm till late.

■ **23rd** The Red & Black Club at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES from 8pm, Dissident Island Radio will be broadcasting live as the local anarchists host a traditional east end knees-up.

■ **28th** Zero Books presents *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?* with Mark Fisher from 7pm at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, see www.housmans.com for details.

APRIL

■ **14th** News from Nowhere Club presents Guerilla Gardening with Richard Reynolds at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone E11 4LJ, buffet 7.30pm, talk starts 8pm, see <http://www.newsfromnowhereclub.org/> for details.



● After John Foley's impressive action in handcuffing himself to the goalposts during an important Premiership match to highlight his **Ryanair Don't Care** campaign Solidarity Federation have formally put their support behind the International Week of Action Against Ryanair on 12th to 18th March. They are urging other groups to organise their own actions in supporting the struggle of workers against exploitative employers. They suggest anything from phoning, faxing and emailing Ryanair to complain about their exploitative recruitment practices to visiting and leafleting offices of Ryanair and their agents. There will also be a big picket of the Ryanair Chase on Thursday 15th March at the Cheltenham Festival races.

Solfed are also expanding as an organisation. Hull is the latest in a line of groups joining the federation which shows an upturn in interest in anarchist ideas. Other groups also in the process of actively forming locals are Glasgow, Chester, Hastings, Portsmouth/Southampton, Dorset, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Cambridge.

To find out about the Ryanair actions check the website <http://www.solfed.org.uk/>

● **Glasgow Solidarity Network (GSN)** won a significant first victory over unscrupulous letting agents who tried to rip off tenants for renting accommodation in the city. When three people, two involved in Anarchist Federation, found out the letting agent was charging them illegally for non-existent services they made a formal complaint to the company. This was ignored so 15 people involved in the GSN visited the offices with a written demand to return the owed money within two weeks. The money was returned in full in four days.

GSN is a volunteer network of people who organise to deal with specific housing, job and other problems caused by the greed of the

rich and powerful. They recognise that housing and employment law protects landlords and bosses more often than tenants and workers, so take direct action to build solidarity and protect themselves.

Email glasgowsolnet@gmail.com or call 07806 997358 to find out more, or check the website <http://www.glasgowsolnet.tk/>

● As a new initiative that has come out of the city's Anarchist Against the Cuts group, **Nottingham Solidarity Network** has set itself up with the purpose of fighting cuts and fostering community action locally across Nottingham.

They describe themselves as working people and tenants who work to defend themselves and others through direct action and mutual support. They also list the activities they seek to engage with, including help in retrieving stolen wages and deposits, getting repairs made and stopping evictions. Nottingham has a rich history of radical activity and, along with the Sumac centre, a strong base for activists.

If you think you'd like to get involved, contact them at nsn@riseup.net or phone 07423631681.

● Finally *Freedom* would like to extend our congratulations to the legendary anarchist **1 in 12 Club** in Bradford which has been saved from closure and continues to provide the city an essential local resource and venue. The building was threatened with legal action and closure due to fire regulations but spent the best part of six months getting the building up to local authority standards. This was all down to the support, goodwill, donations and good old fashioned graft put in by so many people. They want to say a massive thank you to everyone who helped! We say, good to know you're still here! Send them messages of support, see their website at <http://www.1in12.com/>

Football not cannonballs

After the devastation of the 1914–18 Great War, a war that had traumatised much of Europe and saw masses of ordinary young men slaughtered in the trenches as a matter of government policy, political and peace movements began to grow and develop a more sustained and ingenious way of championing their anti-militarism. One such example was the famous Clarion Cycling Club which became part of the labour movement's attempt to promote "international unity and peace through sport".

The Club had originally been set up some 25 years previously as a way for working class radicals to "combine the pleasures of cycling with the propaganda of Socialism" through organising bike rides to the country. It grew into a genuine popular movement with over 70 clubs spread throughout the UK by the end of the nineteenth century. It also branched out into Clarion scouts, singing and rambling clubs which proved popular.

It was also during this period that mass organised socialist sporting events flourished, mainly held in Europe countries amongst radical workers that went under such names as International Workers' Federation For Physical Education and Sport and International Workers Sports Federation. There were even attempts to organise regular International Workers Olympiads where the red flag would be substituted for national

flags, but which eventually got mired in Communist party ideology.

The UK was rarely represented at these events except by the Clarion Cycling Club who they themselves acknowledged were "the only working-class athletic society in this country with any pretence to a national organisation".

In 1921 a football team from the Labour Sports Federation in France came over to the Clarion Cycling Club meet at Chester to play a Clarion team. The following summer the Clarion football team played a return fixture in Paris, by invitation of the International Workers Sports Federation, as part of a

European sporting tour, which included cyclists, footballers and swimmers.

The Clarion football team walked out onto the pitch to a rendition of the Internationale at the stadium in Saint Denis, an industrial suburb of northern Paris, which was then a militant stronghold nicknamed the red city, with a communist elected mayor. As was reported at the time, 10,000 people "had come to watch 22 working lads battle with a football instead of cannon balls!"

The Clarion boys lost the match, due to a dodgy pitch and an injured goalie, but we are assured fraternal relations were cemented in the beer garden afterwards.



The Clarion International Football Team, Chester, 1921.

Against modern football

◀ page 24

When Woolwich Arsenal factory team decided to join the Football League as professionals in 1893, the workers at the Royal Arsenal, some of whom still played as amateurs for Arsenal, proposed a new workers team and Royal Ordnance Factories FC was born. Immediately five Arsenal

players defected to the breakaway club, followed by two more, which two years later beat their professional rivals 1-0 in a friendly.

There is a growing awareness amongst fans that football cannot continue on its current trajectory where we are excluded

and ultimately invisible beneath the demands of capitalism. Against modern football is a rallying cry that articulates that resentment, not for a return to 'the good old days' of freezing terraces and rusty turnstiles but for reclaiming the sport and returning it back to the ordinary fans.



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REVIEWS

FICTION

Denunciation

Connie blinked and reached for the phone. It was Dave, her chief counterpart in the Hurstbourne Anarchist Group.

“Dave, it’s only just gone nine,” she said. “I know,” he replied, “but have you seen the latest *Freedom*? We’ve been denounced.” “What?”

“There’s a letter in it accusing us of being ineffectual and assets of the state,” he said. “Who’s it from?”

“Jack Hughes.”

“Any idea who it’s really from?” she asked.

“I think it’s probably Pete.”

Pete had been a member until quite recently. An action had gone wrong and Pete and Dave had clashed at the meeting where they discussed it. Connie had asked Steve, another member of the group, to talk to Pete and try and patch things up. Obviously it hadn’t worked.

She called over at Dave’s and together they went through the allegations.

“Ineffectual is just a matter of opinion,” said Dave.

“Yes, but we should be self-critical. Too often we chase after whatever is the latest activist theme and don’t ground ourselves,” replied Connie.

“I’m very grounded,” replied Dave.

“Dave, this isn’t about you – it’s about us as a group. I agree you are, but I think we sometimes end up trying to be all things to all people.”

“Okay, the next item is ‘co-operate with the state,’” said Dave.

“That’s just so vague as to not mean anything,” replied Connie.

“Pete’s view is that you should attack the police always, whenever you come into contact with them.”

“Well, in all those tales of stewarding AFA events he always seemed to work okay with the police,” replied Connie.

“I think it’s a dig at me for working at the dole office,” said Dave.

“Okay, we’re agreed there’s not any substance to this?” asked Connie. Dave nodded.

“Right the last main point implies that we’ve got a mole,” said Dave. “Too many of HAG’s activities, or joint actions they have participated in, have been compromised by police action. The police seem to know what is happening in advance. Whether the leak is an active mole or just lax security, it needs to be addressed,” he read.

“This is the worst one,” said Connie. “It’s true that we have had a lot of bad luck, but has it been because the police have known what we were doing?”

They spent the next couple of hours going through the last couple of years’ activities. Connie phoned round and compared notes. Her last call was to a former AFA militant. At least one person from HAG had been telling tall tales.

Martin H.

To be continued...

MUSIC



The War on Terra

Verbal Terrorists

This superb hip-hop set from Newcastle’s finest trumps their accomplished debut *Small Axe* (reviewed in *Freedom*, 17th January 2009), which evoked Bob Marley’s David and Goliath metaphor while hinting at humility against the grandiose grains both of rap’s trademark arrogance and MCs Nobull and Drop Dead Fred’s ideological ferocity. *The War On Terra* similarly cuts and scratches potentially conflicting components and worldviews, with overarching lyrical themes of class struggle and economic domination integrating different dimensions of oppression as well as environmental degradation in a powerful melange of agitated agitprop. The beats from Mr Blazey (and collaborators Joonipah, Shangxi, Steady, Bertie Buster, Professor Ojo, and Truescribe) have progressed too. Previous artful dodges and rousing developments of VT’s influences now morph into mellower sonics (reminiscent, to my ears, of the high points of New York production styles) which are as sophisticated as the most imaginative and innovative UK new-school maestros. Diverse samples, rhythms and moods fashioned to suit and synergise the spoken word thereby seamlessly incorporate drum-and-bass and dubstep nuances and Latin, Caribbean and African flavours without ever disrupting the flow.

Deterritorial Attack Group

Most gratifyingly, the rhetoric permeating the album weaves anarchistic left-communist sensitivities into local and global subject matter with sharp contemporary specificity and acute historical abstraction – avoiding misconceptions of wishy-washy trendy-leftism or the shallow streetwise pretensions of so many so-called ‘conscious’ rappers. The unifying military/militant concept implies

a dialectic of reproduction against the blind productivism of capitalism and classical Marxism – a trajectory which can transcend deep ecology’s mystical primitivism as well as the comparably baleful conspiratorial reifications underlying fashionable 99%-liberalism and the menaces of Leninist manipulation. Thus, when it counts – whether in righteous invective against the hi-jinks of high-finance and its parliamentary poodles, elaborating on lower-class riotous rage and the mediated reign of the commodity, or lambasting the multiply precarious dead-ends neoliberalism intends for us all – VT unerringly assume grass-roots libertarian positions advocating solidaristic direct action in resistance by all means necessary.

Profundity is consistently delivered without dry analytic patronisation, in immensely skilful wordplay and condensed wit aided by London MCs Akala, Efeks and Cyclonius, Rick Fury of the North-East’s Dialect crew and, most notably, the legendary *Revolutionary But Gangsta* Stic.man of Dead Prez whose relaxed conversational cadence on the title track encapsulates the art of saying less while meaning more. The guests furnish further tonal variation recalling the collective genius of hip-hop’s cultural heritage – blending different poetic registers in embodying mass experience to entertain, energise and speak truth to power. The full armoury would prioritise first-person storytelling with greater deployment of proletarian humour, sentimentality and spirituality amongst the blistering barrages of educational anger and cogency – politics emerging from the whole mess of life, not just heightened awareness. But only so much fits into fifteen tracks – and anyway, for sheer breadth of coverage, depth of heartfelt insight, vocal dexterity and passionate musical intensity, *The War On Terra* is hard (-left) to (banging) beat.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk
<http://libcom.org/blog/4271>

*Get *The War On Terra* from <http://verbalterrorists.bandcamp.com>, with free download of anti-cuts anthem ‘No Ifs No Buts’; plus look out for the official launch party coming soon at the Star and Shadow, Newcastle.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. The wrong person looked like winning – i.e. not the country’s military dictator Bainimarama. In the end the dictator won after threatening the television station that hosted it into allowing 1,500 votes cast by two of his staff after the poll closed. Vodaphone alerted the government to this, in much the same way it so gallantly helped Egyptian protesters by switching its network off.
2. Miniature toy protestors holding tiny placards. The Lego figures and other toys

were described by Andrei Mulintsev, the city’s deputy police chief, as “a new technology to carry out protests”. He added that “in our opinion, this is still an unsanctioned public event”.

3. Predictably they slated it as communist propaganda. A 1947 memo says “the film represented rather obvious attempts to discredit bankers”.
4. He said “If schools made you bright, if the better the school made you a brighter person, Parliament would be full of geniuses. And it ain’t.”

The (anarchist) idea of communism

Brian Morris surveys a collection of recent Marxist essays about communism and finds the Marxists are finally doing some catching up

In March 2009 a large conference was held at the Institute of Education in London to discuss the ‘Idea’ of communism. It brought together a number of Marxist philosophers, mostly academic celebrities, scholars such as Jacques Ranciere, Antonio Negri, Terry Eagleton, Jean-Luc Nancy and Slavoj Žižek. It was focused around a keynote address by Alain Badiou. An ex-Maoist, Badiou is now heralded as one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century, at least by his Marxist friends. Badiou, a latter-day Platonist, suggested that communism was the only political Idea worthy of the true philosopher, and that it had the status of an eternal idea. It was essentially a kind of hypothesis about emancipation. The question was therefore posed as to whether the term ‘communism’, given its association with that ‘historical failure’ – the communism of the Soviet regime under Stalin – could be usefully applied to the ‘new forms’ of radical politics that the Marxist academics at the conference clearly felt they were initiating. This book is thus a collection of some rather abstruse reflections on the ‘Idea’ of communism by some fifteen academics, although who they are and where they came from is never indicated in the text.

The term communism, of course, has many different meanings and connotations – the determinate negation of capitalism, the state control of the economy, the visions of the nineteenth century utopian socialists, the state capitalism of the current Chinese Communist Party, or, as Marx wrote, “the positive expression of the abolition of private property” (139). As Michael Hardt puts it, in an essay relatively free of scholastic jargon, communism is the affirmation of common property, as opposed to that of private and state(public) property (144). Kropotkin of course was suggesting this at the end of the nineteenth century.

The book has a rather in-house feel to it, as the likes of Badiou, Žižek, Ranciere, and Negri form a kind of exclusive Marxist coterie who continually refer to each other’s work. The reflections offered in the text are also rather exclusive, for many of the essays simply offer rather scholastic commentaries on such luminaries as Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong, reflecting on what they had to say about communism, although such political reactionaries as Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger often get an affirmative mention. These academic Marxists seem blissfully

unaware that there have been socialists/communists outside the Marxist tradition. When reference is made to political theorists outside the usual Marxist canon, what are we offered? – the radical universalism of the Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutb, the intellectual inspiration of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the plebeian socialism of Garcia Linera, the current vice-president of Bolivia. Moreover, some of the essays are written in the kind of scholastic Marxism that is barely intelligible. Thus we get such expressions as: “the ideological operation of the Idea of communism is the imaginary projection of the political real into the symbolic fiction of History” (11). The book in fact is full of platitudes wrapped up in scholastic jargon. Interestingly, some of the more informative and insightful essays – Hallward on political will, Bosteels on Lenin and left-wing communism, and Douzinas on human rights – are not in fact by the famous academic gurus.

What then constitutes the ‘new’ Marxist politics, and its vision of a “radical emancipatory project”? Firstly, whereas generations of radical scholars and activists have usually thought that the concepts of socialism and communism are virtually synonymous, we are now informed that socialism implies the welfare capitalism of the Keynesian variety and is quite distinct from the pure communism that Badiou writes about. That welfare capitalism is a form of socialism is a contradiction in terms, although it may incorporate socialist elements in order to counter the malign effects of capitalism.

Secondly, there is the recognition the modern state is essentially an “agent of capitalism”. This surely is hardly news. Marx and Kropotkin were emphasising this more than a hundred years ago.

Thirdly, we are told that the new form of politics will be a “politics without a party” and will take its “distance from statism”. Being a communist, Antonio Negri tells us, means “being against the state”. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao all clearly argued for a political party that would represent the interests of the working class, and that real politics would involve the “conquest of state power,” the destruction of capitalism, and then, allegedly, the “withering” away of the state. The autonomous Marxists now seem to repudiate entirely this Marxist political strategy. They have thus embraced, without any acknowledgement, the kind of politics that has been advocated and practised by anarchist communists (libertarian socialists) for more than a century.

Fourthly, Jacques Ranciere, the guru of the post-anarchists, suggests that communism is enacted when workers and ordinary people struggle for basic rights and run the factories, schools, administrations, etc., themselves. Again, self-management is something that Kropotkin and anarchists generally have been emphasising for many generations. Being a



communist, Negri suggests, means “building a world where the exploitation of capital and subjection to the state are eliminated” (161). Isn’t this what anarchists have always advocated?

Fifthly, there is constant reference throughout the text to human rights, the class struggle, universal values, and the emancipation of humanity. Does this imply that postmodernism, along with post-Marxism, has had its day?

Finally, it is worth noting that Slavoj Žižek, in contrast to the anti-Marxist Marxists like Badiou and Negri, is a latter-day Jacobin and Marxist-Leninist. His vision of the “new emancipatory politics” thus involves the establishment of a “centralised dictatorial power” to enact “strict egalitarian justice” through “disciplinary terror.” How this fits in with the two other concepts of the eternal Idea of communism, political voluntarism and trust in the people is never explained. Peter Hallward, in contrast, emphasises the importance of voluntary and autonomous action and direct participation, but throughout most of the discussions in this book, in true Marxist fashion, there is very little mention of liberty, and not very much about community. The concept of free communism emphasised by Kropotkin and libertarian socialists (anarchist communists) is quite beyond its radar. Although, we are informed that one of the themes of the conference is that “Freedom cannot flourish without equality and equality does not exist without freedom” (x). The Marxists are just discovering for themselves what Bakunin was affirming way back in the nineteenth century in his opposition to the statist politics of Karl Marx.

The Idea of Communism edited by Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, Verso, £14.99.

THE ARTS

HAITI GHETTO BI

PART TWO

One month before the earthquake and, in this second instalment, two years later...

In December 2009, Tracey Moberly traveled to Haiti as a participating artist in the first Ghetto Biennale, returning in December 2011 as a participant in the second biennale. These photographs were taken in downtown Port-au-Prince, an area that suffered immense damage from the devastating earthquake.

I set off on the two hour plane journey from an affluent Miami with its oversized meal portions counter-balanced by its over-subscribed gym culture. Arriving at the departure lounge for Haiti, I spotted some familiar faces. A woman I'd first met in London a few years ago at the Foundry who'd translated Creole/English for the Grand Rue artists when they first guested on my radio show. Another, Richard Morse, lead singer of the band RAM and owner of the Oloffson hotel, who'd been a subject in my new book *Text-Me-Up!* Richard, along with two other Haitian men, had been the first to start tweeting news of the earthquake directly after it had happened. He greeted me and began to fill me in with the news since my last visit to Haiti. He told me how his cousin was now President of Haiti and how he'd been involved in campaign trail and now held an official governmental position for Haiti with an office in Washington. He was returning to play with the band for the Ghetto Biennale at the Oloffson.

We board the plane and I find my seat, which is next to an ex-pilot who is building toilet and sewer systems in Port-Au-Prince, and my apprehension of landing starts to mount as images of the earthquake's aftermath fills my thoughts.

As we land and file out into a newly built section of the airport, outside the windows are the half destroyed pillars and corridors



Photo © Tracey Moberly

of the old airport building with cracks appearing like a giant vein system running through it. Looking battle-scarred as if ready to topple, my attention is drawn to an ordered file of Japanese troops heading toward the airport closely followed by another militia uniform with an unrecognisable flag, all with passports in hand ready to leave Port-Au-Prince.

Passport stamped and bag collected, I'm greeted outside by a bag handler with a sign saying my name as he tells me how the driver can not make it into the airport to park and collect me and how he must take me to him. He asks for my support and would I give him a generous tip for doing this, as he has to feed and support a much larger family due to the loss suffered of family members following the earthquake. Bags placed in the car, central locking on, windows closed and we set off into the shocking devastation as I witness, almost two years on from my previous visit, the aftermath of the earthquake. It has long since gone back to the routine of everyday life here for the inhabitants as I pass people

with outward physical scarring and missing limbs, whilst others bore the psychological scars only visible through their eyes.

There seem to be many more cars on the road jostling for position at each turn and corner; concrete and rubble are spewed up into uneven piles. The air is thick with dust clouds in the dry heat as the battered cars, now void of suspension, pound into the rubble mounds creating explosive dust clouds on the badly damaged roads. There are five million cubic metres of debris (enough to fill five football stadiums) already cleared with the same amount still remaining. This still entombs many of the unfound corpses that lay beneath. We seem to pass what seems like 'tent city' after 'tent city', which are much larger than one imagines. Over 500,000 people live in these makeshift refugee camps known as 'tent cities' across Haiti. Although providing some protection against the elements, they have become the breeding grounds for violence and disease against women and girls. Following the earthquake women and girls throughout Haiti have been at a heightened risk in the form of sexual assault.

We arrive at the hotel, where the older front part which hadn't been built in an anti-seismic way had been shaved off from the building, walking into the newer anti-seismic built exterior part which still stood proud. I quickly change to accommodate the Caribbean heat and head down to the Grand Rue. A lingering odour of urine and sewage fills the air at points. Rotting and decaying matter lines up along the streets and converges in a twisted mass on street corners – some have been burning for days, emitting toxic gases, while others are smouldering half submerged in the dirty water that leaks onto the streets heavy with traffic. I reach the Grand Rue, where the entrance way to 622 Boulevard Jean Jaques Dessalines and the arched concrete structure with its 'Haitian barber's type painted sign' saying 'Ghetto Biennale' had fallen in the earthquake – hundreds of



Photo © Tracey Moberly

ENNALE

Haitian artists sculptures greet the second Ghetto Biennale members and visitors alike. Another figure similar to Papa Legba type only dressed in bright red held court amongst these, welcoming people in, his phallus as extreme as the other which remained unaffected by the earthquake. After meeting and greeting a handful of this year's biennale members, the Jakmel Eskperys performance began. This was followed by the church service and procession funeral band took place for the artists from the first Ghetto Biennale who had died in the earthquake – one of the main reasons I had wanted to return being to honour the dead.

Many events soaked up the days in the lead up to the Ghetto Biennale opening day. These included everything from a vodou ceremony for Ezili Danto at Papa Da's hounfo with Floris Schonfeld; a *Life on Earth* BBC Wildlife film translated into Kreyol which was produced by Arcade Fire; film screenings showing a selection of Tele Ghetto and artists' films and more. I orchestrated one in a series of socio-political tea parties – which is part of a current project – in an empty swimming pool, inviting artists to air their view points on their vision of the city as members of the Ghetto Biennale, discussing social and political aspects of the country post earthquake. I also collected the next three editions for my long term exhibition from vodou flag maker Marie Ketty Paul who had been working on three of my designs for the Haitian section of my intricately crafted text message exhibition titled 'Text-Me-Up-

Sex-Drugs & Rock'n'Roll', a section of which I'm working on with Ketty over a five year period. One of the tea party guests and Ghetto Biennale artists, Karen Miranda Augustine, was also working with Marie Ketty Paul on a piece titled *The Three Erzulies / Ezilis yo Twa*. It comprised of three *pacquets kongo*, 'medicine bags' given to Vodou initiates. They contain herbs, charms and special healing tools associated with the lwa that they are being initiated under. They were made to honour three unsung Haitian heroines, one of whom being Kay Fanm, co-founder Magalie Marcelin. Kay Fanm is a shelter for women and girls who have been victims of domestic and sexual assault in Haiti.

Another tea party guest and Ghetto Biennale member Kwynne Johnstone's work, assisted by Paul Kain, revved up a mass audience and participation group which took over a street off the Grand Rue. The artist developed the work from two individual events as she tried not to conceptualise the work. The first one occurred in Port-au-Prince and the other at her home in Trinidad. During the first anniversary of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Kwynne was standing near the tents by the Presidential Palace waiting for a taxi when a boy of 7-years trotted by, pulling behind him a toy car led by a string. The body of the car was made by recycling a plastic water bottle. The axle was made from two wooden skewers, which punctured the bottle on either end. The wheels were bottle-caps, with rubber bands



Photo © Tracey Moberly

securing its wheel knots. The other occurred to her on returning to another Caribbean country and her home Trinidad when her 31 year old brother, who is getting married this year along with his two friends (both fathers), invested US\$1,000 each on remote-controlled toy cars which they race personally. The juxtaposition of these two events leads to the The Gran Rue Grand Prix sculpture and performance.

I look forward to the third Ghetto Biennale and another new creative use for the discarded water bottle, along with the development of the Haitian artists' work and other projects that still continue to stand outside of the mainstream and raise the beacon for the underground art world.

Tracey Moberly is the author of the recently published book *Text-Me-Up!* which details Haiti in several of its chapters, with over 2,500 photographs and images accompanying the text, see www.text-me-up.com.



Photo © Tracey Moberly

Clockwise from above, tea party in an empty pool; Ghetto Biennale entrance; twisted roads; Karen Miranda Augustine's work.

SPORT

Against modern football

Football's amateur rebels

The current slogan 'Against modern football' is gaining currency amongst those independent clubs and dissident supporters who see the game being taken away from them, channelled towards the multinational media empires for the benefit of the billionaire club owners and backers, where money not only rules off the field but is the decisive factor in generating success on the field.

'Modern' here is an insult to the working class traditions of the game; the histories and loyalties of all those fans whose voices through the years echoed with passion around every main stand, who gloried in every goal



and trembled at every defeat, where football was sewn into the social fabric of the everyday lives of each community. What was once a life-long obsession and fervent identification with your local team is now being held in contempt by those in charge and in power, and represented like any other big business interest.

And football is big business. Very big business. The English Premier League has the highest revenue of any football league in the world totalling €2.479 billion in the 2009-10 season, with the revenue from broadcasting more than double than that of matchday takings. The League also received the Queen's award for Enterprise which recognised its "outstanding contribution to international trade and the value it brings to English football and the United Kingdom's broadcasting industry".

Breakaway clubs

The commercialisation of the game though is nothing new and the fight against it is as old as the football league itself. Even the current trend of breakaway clubs, such as FC United and AFC Wimbledon, has a long tradition. In the early days of professional football a number of teams split from established clubs, keen to retain their amateur status amongst the growing demand for a

more business orientated Football League.

Sunderland Albion FC was formed in 1888 after Sunderland were disqualified from the FA Cup due to illegal payments to players. Concerned with the commercial takeover of the club, eight players, including the original founder of Sunderland, left to form Albion. There was a bitter rivalry between two sides, which came to an end only when Albion narrowly missed being accepted in the Football League.

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THE QUIZ

1. What happened when tax-dodging mobile company Vodaphone organised a text-message poll vote for Personality of the Year in Fiji?
2. Which dangerous radicals did police in the Siberian city of Barnaul find themselves up against in January?
3. What did the FBI have to say about the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*?
4. According to broadcaster Danny Baker, what shows that schools don't make as much difference as is claimed?

Answers on page 20

WILDCAT

