

Inside: No to Parties of War!

Cock O' the North No. 6.

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**Pamphlet:
Locked-out Manchester Electricians -
donation £1.00 -**

from Northern Anarchist Network at 'Springbank', Hebden Bridge HX7 7AA.
West Yorkshire.

Social Forum and NAN.

The Manchester Social Forum (formerly Manchester People's Assembly) is the most exciting thing to happen to Manchester for years. It has given those of us in Greater Manchester on the decentralist left, in the Northern Anarchist Network (NAN), an arena in which to collaborate and produce a force which may be appeal to the general public: a common sense approach free of the loony left label.

I do not use the term 'loony left' lightly. The left-wing writer Nick Cohen in his Observer column (14/12/03) wrote: 'The past 20 years have witnessed the collapse of communism, the triumph of US capitalism and the recognition of the awkward fact that many Third World revolutions are powered by a religious fundamentalism so strange the traditional left can't look it in the eye.'

Mr Cohen says the result of this defeat of the left, which really in Britain goes back to the miner's strike, is 'the corruption of defeat (and) an opposition to whatever America does; a looking-glass politics where hypocrisies of power are matched by equal hypocrisies in the opposite direction.'

Mr Cohen then says: 'Noam Chomsky is the master of looking-glass politics. His writing exemplifies the ability of the Western Left to criticise everything from the West - except itself.'

Nick Cohen quotes Chomsky: 'Recognition that control of opinion is the foundation of government, from the most despotic to the most free, goes back at least to Hulme'. But Chomsky adds: 'It is far more important in the most free societies, where obedience cannot be maintained by the lash.'

Chomsky's assumption, which he repeats many times, is that either our rulers in the West are extraordinarily cunning or that we in the West are dumb, or both. Orwell wrote of the English in 1941: 'You have all the time the sensation of kicking against an impenetrable wall of stupidity.' Then he added: 'But of course at times their stupidity has stood them in good stead.'

Later Orwell felt that we couldn't count on our stupidity to pull us through forever. Orwell is being provocative in using the word 'stupid' and applying to the English people: he just wonders if anything will wake us up; sleeping, as we do, the deep,

deep sleep of England. Orwell admires our doziness which can be used to our advantage. Chomsky, on the other hand, thinks all the human race are dopes with the one possible exception of himself - Professor Chomsky. His whole theory is based on the idea that the public in western society is dumb and easily deceived and conned by public relations men, the media, spin-doctors and governments.

Nick Cohen has spotted the flaws in the older Chomsky's arguments. The letter which we republish from an English academic shows that these blemishes are not confined to Chomsky's politics, but infect his work in linguistics. One doesn't have to agree with Nick Cohen's position on the war to see that he has understood the older Chomsky and grasped the problem of the English left, or that part of the centralist left which is now clearly intellectually and morally impoverished.

This impoverishment of the centralist left makes it necessary that the Manchester Social Forum and the northern anarchists explore new frontiers which engage the general public. In supporting the Manchester electricians; in setting up relations with the trade councils in the North West; in preparing a program on civil liberties and the Civil Contingencies Bill; in defending those arrested at Marks & Spencers and many other things: in all these things the Manchester Social Forum is showing us how to do things - creating a new approach to politics and society.

This will require anarchists to work with other anarchists; affiliated anarchists with unaffiliated anarchists; young anarchists with veteran anarchists and all these with local independent groups and unaligned activists. Barry Woodling in his article 'New Politics' is right to call for consolidation on the local decentralist left.

Mack the Knife.

Review:

Northern Voices No.2.

'Northern Voices' {No. 1 & 2} over 40 pages, £3.20 for two issues (post free) or goodwill donation. Cheques payable to 'Northern Voices' at 'Springbank', Hebden Bridge, HX7 7AA.
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The second edition of Northern Voices managed an interesting spread across topics, though it might not always have been clear to all as to why the articles were chosen:

- For instance an interesting contrast of the effects of large scale capitalist jerry building on Manchester and Barcelona, may have appeared somewhat selective as to place to anyone unacquainted with the editor.
- What was curious, given the background experience of the editor and some of the other writers; there was surprisingly little mention of industrial activism.
- Excellent articles about decay in Burnley and the consequent rise of the BNP there, and on Bradford's race issues which were made all too obviously relevant by recent events.

There were two articles on the destructive effect of wind-farm on the environment; one in Lancashire, one in Wales. Both were fairly argued in themselves, but left me with the nasty memory of Bernard Ingham - sometime Thatcher spin-doctor and now publicist for nuclear power - boasting on the wireless that he was involved in 95% of the local campaigns against wind-farms.

There are two articles on the destruction of the urban environment. One on the Bury black pudding market (you must get a non-vegetarian to judge the merits of that one). Another on the destruction of open land in Swinton, Salford; as one cursed to live in a New Town, it is delightful to read that it is still possible in older towns to have some effect by demonstrations against councils doing such land grabs. No doubt we still have open spaces to destroy down here, but the rate

older towns to have some effect by demonstrations against councils doing such land grabs. No doubt we still have open spaces to destroy down here, but the rate of destruction is far higher.

An article on how a university education can make it harder to get a job doesn't dig deep enough, doesn't question whether it is because bosses don't want workers who are given over to thinking. Anyone who walks for pleasure will be driven by Gwen Goddard's piece on a landlord's destruction of a bridge, thereby blocking a right of way, and the Council's refusal to do anything constructive to force restoration, to retail other such tales. An Earth First! article on the Azerebaijan-Georgia-Turkey pipeline has good material, but it reads too much like a leaflet to ring true in a magazine.

Given that *Northern Voices* already in its main section covers life-style matters, it is anomalous that it then have a section on Art, Sport, Food, Films, Drink called '**A Bit on the Side**', which ranges wider and has an earthier tone. It has the bad effect that the editor feels compelled to have two editorial introductions. No doubt his comments on the articles are witty in themselves, but in part that detracts from the value of the articles, and having a second editorial introduction over-eggs the cake.

Derek Pattison's strange story of the hangman Pierrpoint's friendship with one of those he hanged is intriguing. D.W. Randal's review of the earlier debate on Professor Noam Chomsky managed to avoid the hostility of the earlier articles (see the 'Alternative Raven'). The reviewer (John Lawrence) of George Monbiot, as one would expect, found much to praise, but dismissed his excuse for not accepting the anarchist logic of his own arguments. The final punch line in Mike Fielding's rugby league story was unfortunately rather obvious from the beginning. Then three shorts on food and drink left one feeling bloated.

Laurens Otter.

WAR PARTIES: NO THANKS! **Spanish Events Threatens to Haunt Parties of War.**

Steve Richards, commenting on the Spanish Election in *The Independent*, declared: '...there will be (no) equivalent political coup for the terrorists in Britain. Here the Conservatives were at least as enthusiastic in their support for the war. If a tragedy on the same scale were to happen during a British election campaign the voters would have no constructive way of registering their protest.'

But can a genuine opponent of the Iraq War, in all conscience, continue to vote for either of these two major parties? Surely anyone who is a 'full shilling' can only work up the enthusiasm to vote for either party now out of a sense of nostalgia or sentimentality.

Spain and the World.

Why did the Partido Popular (PP) Government of Jose Maria Aznar support the U.S. adventure in the Iraq War? Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, writing in *The Times*, claimed the Spanish Government had 'become the prisoner of a dogma of its own', and the 'inviolable unity of Spain is a shibboleth of metropolitan Spanish politics'. Senor Armesto says the central government had set its face against doing a deal with ETA and that 'refusal to compromise with terrorism is a hallowed mantra'. The Aznar Government was obsessed in putting down the Basque terrorists: so Senor Armesto writes: 'Spain released a spider to catch a fly. The Spanish government wanted American help in defeating Eta; so it supported an unjustifiable war, against an irrelevant enemy in Iraq.' This move, according to Armesto, 'doubled the threat'; now 'just when Eta was failing, Spain faces a real axis of evil: the day after the hundreds were killed in Madrid, it is impossible to say for certain whether the bombers were Basque terrorists, or new fanatics believed to have infiltrated the country from the Middle East.'

Now, a week later, we are sure we know who it was. But the weekend after the bombings, Spanish anarchists in Madrid were ringing me asking what the British media was saying. They were worried that the Spanish Foreign Office play that it was almost certainly Eta was being accepted uncritically abroad.

Now also we learn that the election upset in Spain and the proposed withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq, reports Frank Bruni in the New York Times ~ Herald Tribune: 'have unequivocally put (Italy's) Berlusconi in a delicate, difficult position.' The Italian daily La Repubblica ran an headline recently which claimed: 'Now Berlusconi Fears the Aznar Syndrome.' The same paper, a less than a week after the bombings, published a poll in which two-thirds of Italians surveyed expressed support for pulling Italian troops out of Iraq in the absence of UN authorisation.

While Aznar wanted to enlist US support for dealing with Eta terrorism, the Blair government probably had a similarly cynical Real Politik approach in its decision to support the US campaign. Privileged treatment in the doling out of contracts for work in Iraq probably featured in the Blair governments' calculations.

Of course, the new Spanish president - Zapatero - has built a get-out clause into his threat to pull his troops out Iraq by June: he said he will pull them out 'if nothing changes by June 30th'. That gives the USA and Britain time to nobble the Zapatero government.

Anarchists and the Parties of War.

If this was addressed to the general public of Britain, we would be mostly preaching to the converted if we were to say there was no valid reason to vote in the forthcoming elections in June. But because this will be mostly read by 'activists', who may feel unwholesome or unworthy if they don't cast a vote we may have to justify ourselves.

We find it so hard to understand how people on the left can continue to fall for the same old patter from the politicians. Surely most of them have lived long enough to nothing from a Labour government. Yet it is almost certain that many of the white liberals who march and demonstrated against the Iraq War, will dutifully go out and vote for the Labour Party at the next elections. The only thing I can think of for this is that many lower middle class people, who feel guilty about their status, think that by voting Labour they become working class or somehow on the side of the underdog. They think they save their souls by voting Labour and going on the odd demo; the rest of the time they will be at work ordering their underlings about in some office job.

Thankfully, many of the Muslim voters are not going to be so daft. A recent poll in the The Guardian showed that the Labour party had lost half of its Muslim vote since the Iraq War. Thus, the Labour Party could lose seats in the North of England; both in the Euro and local elections.

Some in the trade union movement and among the Asian councillors, recognise the problem and fear the British National Party (BNP) may benefit from this shift in loyalties. Thus they are saying vote Labour to keep the BNP out.

In Greater Manchester, we have Unite Against Fascism and Manchester United Against Racism, led by a now pensioned off former Polytechnic lecturer - Colin Barker: life long member of the Socialist Workers Party.

It is an intellectual contortion for these people to endlessly attack the Labour Party until election time, when the only reason they can come up with for voting Labour is to keep the B.N.P. out. Stranger still, when one realises it is in the Labour controlled towns of the North of England where the BNP is often strongest and where the Labour Party have created the conditions of squalor; that is allowing the B.N.P. to develop an opposition to them.

Both the Labour Party and the Tories have collaborated in the disintegration of social solidarity in England; which has been going on at least since the days of Thatcher. Under Thatcher, there was the defeat of the miners, the cutting of taxes on the rich, their flight to the plush suburbs and dormitory towns which the great car economy encouraged. The bad news is that these trends have speeded up under the New Labour government.

In his column in The Observer, Nick Cohen wrote: 'Across Britain, the rich are less likely to live by the poor; the old by the young; the single by the married.' The recent census shows even the gays are forming ghettos, and part of the problem in places like Oldham and Burnley is that the Asians and blacks are banged up together.

The result of this in many areas is Nick Cohen concludes: 'Balkanisation undermines the best of this Government's ambitions. When the respectable working class move out, there is a distinct shortage of responsible men to keep boys in order and customers to keep shops in business. Crime and dereliction follow, and all the Sure Start schemes in the world may not be enough to slow the pace of disintegration. Reversing it would entail tackling the car culture

and redistributing wealth, which is easy to say but almost impossible to imagine.'

Voting Labour or for either of the parties of war, will not solve the problem of racism in our workplaces or local communities, but equally internationally, even if Blair resigns, it will not end this country's penchant for sucking up to the US administration. Chanting 'Blair Out' is a feebleminded slogan dreamt up by someone lacking imagination. It will take more than this to shake some in the British political establishment out their support for the cowboy politics of the USA, especially when one realises they can't even solve the degradation of our local communities by the car culture, supermarkets and the unequal distribution of wealth. *Cofl.*

Centralists takeover Manchester Stop the War.

At a conference on February 14th, the controllers of Manchester Stop the War Coalition created a management structure for the local organisation. The meeting was address by Lindsey German of London Stop the War. Ms German put the managerial case to the northerners in the most patronising fashion: henceforth, there will be officers; transport managers; central committees and overall command structure in Manchester Stop the War.

Gone now will be the spontaneity of the original Manchester Stop the War. The movement in Manchester and district, will not be the same again. Some activists will now clearly vote with their feet, as there was vocal opposition to the authoritarian line pushed mostly by the Socialist Workers Party at the Conference.

What they will end up doing is creating an empty shell organisation. Just as Gore Vidal said the USA is not a country; it is a machine, so the Socialist Workers Party is not a political movement; it is a machine! Its front organisation resemble throw away wind-up mechanical toys: the Anti-Nazi League and the Socialist Alliance have now been chucked on the skip: only to be replaced by Unite Against Fascism and the 'Respect' Party or is it 'Unite' Party?

This kind of activist musical chairs must be very disorienting for the SWP membership, it's bad enough for the rest of us. *Cofl.*

North and South.

'When you go to the industrial North you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery of entering a strange country. There exists in England a curious cult of Northernness, a sort of Northern snobbishness. A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know that he regards you as inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain that it is only in the North that life is "real" life, that the industrial work done in the North is the only "real" work, that the North is inhabited by "real" people. The South merely by rentiers and there parasites. The Northerner has "grit", he is grim, "dour", plucky, warm-hearted and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate and lazy - that at any rate is the theory. Hence the Southerner goes North, at any rate for the first time, with the vague inferiority-complex of a civilised man venturing among savages, while the Yorkshireman, like the Scotchman, comes to London in the spirit of a barbarian out for loot.'

George Orwell in 'Road to Wigan Pier'.

Northern anarchists and others don't need to swallow all this entirely, but though it was written in the 1930s we can still see that there is something in all this. And we perceive of differences between the North and the South: Orwell called it the 'North-South antithesis' which had been rubbed into us for a long time.

Graham Stringer M.P. for Blackley, Manchester and former leader of Manchester City Council, recently claimed on the radio that there is no coherent North West identity, because of the cultural differences between the main cities of Manchester and Liverpool. Yet it is clear there is a Northern identity when it is counterposed to the Southern identity.

As I write this there is a row going on about a regional assembly in the North West of England. Alan Manning, leader of the North West TUC, has asked: 'Is it not better for strategic decisions to be taken in the north west rather than in London?'

With moves to regional assemblies the northern anarchists are going to have to think about developing more regional attitudes and becoming more like the Catalans to the Spanish state. The Manchester Social Forum, the Northern Anarchist Network and the journal Northern Voices could all have a role in this respect.

We have got to read our local papers and think more locally and regionally. We have got to open our eyes and ears, and listen to what people are really saying on buses and in pubs. We have got to focus on what people are really concerned about, not what takes our fancy.

Chomsky's 'bully tactics'.

Thank you for your copy of the 'Alternative Raven', which I read with interest.

The story will not come as a surprise to people acquainted with Chomsky's reputation for bully tactics in suppressing unwelcome publicity.

I don't feel inclined to re-open the issue in ***** partly because this sort of thing just feeds both his paranoia and his megalomania, and partly because I don't see that the contributors to your issue are making any new academic points that are not already familiar to linguists.

I did myself point out the connexions between his politics and his linguistic theory in a review...ten years ago... I gather from reports that it annoyed the great man considerably, so the thrust must have struck home.

English academic's remarks on 'Chomsky & his Critics' in an Alternative Raven.

New Politics.

2004 presents great opportunities as well as challenges for anarchists. Trust in our political rulers already at a low level is likely to be further undermined with the publication of the Hutton report into the death of government scientist; Dr. David Kelly. Thus the healthy cynicism about politicians and the government process, already well rooted, will gather pace.

With the continuing uncertainty in the international situation owing to the Iraq war, and the incidence of terrorism, there are genuine prospects for the anarchist movement to develop.

In 2003 there were clear indications that local anarchist groups were getting their act together. Solidarity Federation, Anarchist Federation and non-aligned anarchists under the umbrella of the Northern Anarchist Network, have co-operated well together in the anti-war movement and the People's Assembly/Social Forum. This bodes well for the future.

The January-2004 NAN conference will hopefully consolidate and strengthen the links between Anarchists, Greens, Libertarian socialists and non-aligned activists, who have all played an important role in the Manchester Social Forum. Indeed, the structure and organisation of the Manchester Social Forum, with its emphasis on non-hierarchical forms and consensus is, some would say anarchist in all but name.

The ethos of the Social Forum stands in stark contrast to the authoritarian, bureaucratic, political organisations of the political left; which continue to alienate many good political activists and radicals.

The January NAN agenda has been drawn up in order to reflect the central importance of an alternative politics; which embraces autonomous direct action at the grass roots level, to encourage a new way of thinking and organising to build a new society.

Barry Woodling

Manchester Lock-out of electricians:

The lock-out of Manchester electricians by Daf Electricians last May is now approaching an appeal to the Industrial Tribunal. The boss of Daf, Dave Fahey, has told the regional journal *Northern Voices* that though the electricians claim to be whistle-blowers; they had, in fact, sought to frame-up and discredit the company by manufacturing dodgy wiring and photographing it before they were made redundant. The electricians claim they were made redundant shortly after they set up a T&G union shop on the site.

The Manchester Social Forum and the Greater Manchester County Association of TUCs, is supporting the dispute by publicising the issues and organising support activities.

On 12th, March a 16 page pamphlet on the dispute of the Manchester electricians was published by the Manchester Social Forum and Greater Manchester County Association: Donation £1 to the picket in Crown Square. This is now sold out. Another 20 page booklet will be out by 24th, March. A meeting supporting the dispute and the Simon Jones Campaign was held on 13th, March in Manchester.



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