

## Hi-tech cowardice over Balkans

“It will not be another ‘Desert Storm’! The Serbs will not be a push-over like the Iraqis in the Gulf war!” a Slavic gallery owner told me back in the early 1990s as we speculated on the breakdown of Yugoslavia from the safety of the then newly independent state of Slovenia. The point he was making was that the smart bombs of the NATO powers would not police the Balkans as they then appeared to be dictating the ‘New World Order’ in the Middle East.

Since November 1991, *Private Eye* currently lists no less than 22 ‘Slobo’s Last Chances’ recorded in the international press. Yet still Slobodan Milosevic survives, outlasting Thatcher, Major and Bush.

In the last issue of *Freedom* I said that Tony Blair justified the bombing of Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro as an attempt to ‘avert a human catastrophe’. It now looks like the bombings have accelerated a human disaster.

Two weeks ago it was also suggested by Bill Clinton that the action of NATO would help to ‘stabilise the southern Balkans’. Today the region looks, if anything, less stable than it has for a long time, with possible friction in the real power-keg of Macedonia as the refugees build up and threaten to unsettle that small state on which Greece, Bulgaria and Albania could historically have designs. Meanwhile, to the north in Montenegro, there are riots in the streets and fears of a ‘Serbian coup’.

### First round to Milosevic

Last week *The Independent* ran a report from Washington by Andrew Marshall headed: “Pentagon concedes the first round to Milosevic”. Mr Marshall wrote: “The [NATO] alliance has in effect conceded what had become all too clear in the past week: its efforts to stop Serbia from cleansing Kosovo of ethnic Albanians, and crushing the KLA’s [Kosovo Liberation Army] insurgency there, have failed”.

Despite all their bravado and high-sounding phrases, NATO spokesmen and our ethical

foreign minister Robin Cook sound increasingly rattled. The development of events seems largely outside of their control and, owing to the arming of Serb civilians in Kosovo, may even to some extent be outside Milosevic’s control.

What a smelly squabble! Which is worse? The earthy atrocities, ethnic cleansing and human transportation by the Serbs in Kosovo, or the hi-tech bombing of targets in Serbia and Kosovo by NATO.

There is, it strikes me, something cowardly about this hi-tech bombing. War without body-bags on the NATO side. Just ‘collateral damage’ on the Serb and Kosovar side, owing to NATO missiles going off course.

The strategy, as Andrew Marshall explains, is that: “For the past two weeks NATO has relied on aircraft and missiles alone to achieve its goal. This draws on a long standing American military preference for air power, it minimises allied casualties and means that NATO can stand at a distance from the conflict”.

It is a cold and calculated arms-length approach to war. The attitude can be measured in the speeches of Blair and Clinton: Milosevic and the Serbs must take their

punishment like a naughty child being chastised, and not retaliate – as judged by the NATO outrage when the Serbs arrested three US soldiers.

### Gazing into the abyss

The historian and Conservative MP Alan Clark, commenting on the conflict last month suggested “the assertion that human rights within the boundaries of a sovereign nation are best defended by a sustained bombardment of its own civilian population is, to put it most kindly, Orwellian”.

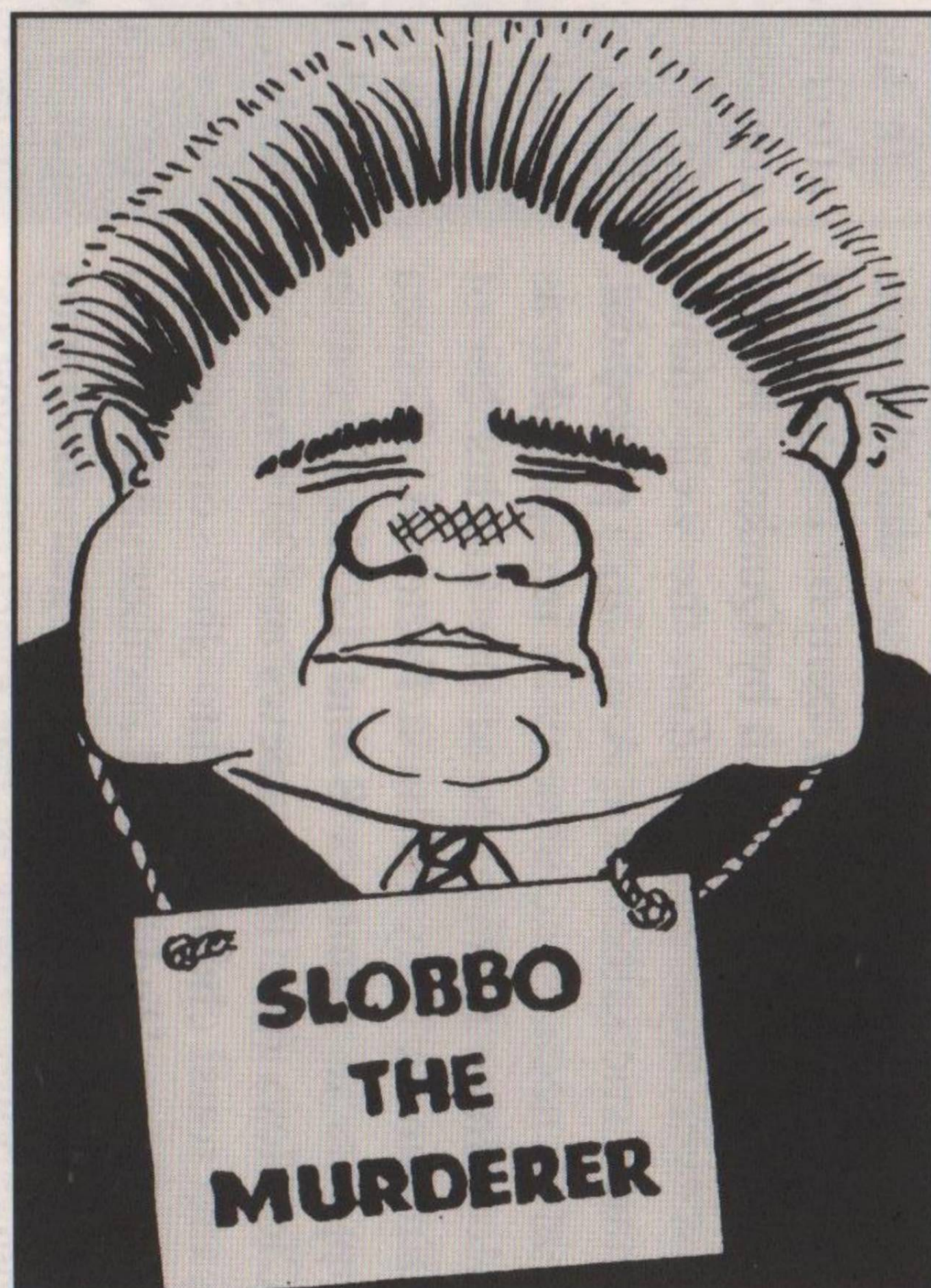
The consequence thus far, according to a critic and opponent of Milosevic inside Serbia, has been to make him stronger, at least temporarily. Serb journalist Radomir Diklic declared last week that “you people, NATO, did a good job for Slobodan Milosevic. It was the best present he could be given. For ordinary people, Milosevic is now a god; when you bombed, he became a symbol of our country – which is awful”.

As I write, the journalist Robert Fisk in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, suggests NATO may now be targeting the houses of Serb civilians in the centre of the city. He ponders, amid the ruins, “could there have been, perhaps, a deliberate attack on a Serb civilian area by NATO in revenge for the punishment the Serbs had meted out to the Albanians?”

Mr Fisk says this is a dirty war and we have dirt on our hands. Or, as Nietzsche said, “He who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself: and if thou gaze too long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze into thee”.

This was without risk for NATO personnel reminds me of Hitler’s Condor Legion sent to bomb cities in republican Spain in the 1930s. It now seems as if the low-tech strategies of Milosevic’s men with guns forcing out Albanian refugees has the edge on NATO’s hi-tech bombing of military targets, so that NATO is turning to terrorising Serb civilians.

BB



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## The Jakes of the World

Behind much discussion of race and religion – or ‘ethnic group’ and ‘faith community’, as they are now called – is the assumption that the multi-racial and multi-credal society which we now have is new, and that in the past this was a united country which was both ‘British’ and ‘Christian’, both decent and democratic. The facts are quite different.

Long before the Christian era, the British Isles were invaded by waves of migrants from mainland Europe, ending with people who spoke one form of Celtic language in Britannia (Britain) and people who spoke another form of Celtic language in Hibernia (Ireland), together with people who spoke a different language and followed a different culture in northern Caledonia (Scotland). There is some doubt whether there was such a thing as a Celtic race, but there is no doubt that people called Celts or Gauls once lived all over Western and Southern Europe, including most of the British Isles.

When Britain was first mentioned by Greek and Roman writers, it was already a divided country. When the Romans first crossed the Channel, in 55 and 54 BCE, there were several tribes here who spoke Celtic languages and followed the Druidic religion, like those in Gaul (France). When the Romans conquered Britain as far as central Scotland, during the first century CE, they learnt not only more about these tribes, but also about different tribes in Ireland and also about even more different people in northern Scotland whom they called Picts (‘painted people’).

It is difficult to guess what ‘racial’ divisions there were. But the second-century Roman historian Tacitus described such physical types as large bony red-headed people in Scotland, small dark curly-haired people in Wales, and tall fair people in England – types which may still be identified 1900 years later.

The Romans ruled Britain, but few settled here, and they left by the fifth century. Then came the most important change in our population – the vast invasion of people from what is now north-western Germany and the adjoining areas of Denmark and the Netherlands, who were called Angles, Saxons and Jutes. During the fifth and sixth centuries they settled in eastern England and south-eastern Scotland, and drove the British westward into Cumbria, which didn’t last long, into Cornwall, which lasted a little longer, and into what they called Wales (from *Welsh*, an English word for *foreigner*), which survived. The replacement of population must have been very thorough, since there are virtually no British elements in English and few British place-names in England.

Under this pressure many British people migrated to the north-west of France, which became Brittany, which also survived. Meanwhile people from Ireland who were called Scots invaded south-western Scotland and spread into the Highlands. The Scottish nation slowly united the English and British and Irish elements, and absorbed the Pictish nation in the ninth century.

As a result of this major process of ethnic

cleansing, the British Isles acquired more or less the map we still have today. But there were further changes. The eighth century English historian Bede noted that five languages were spoken here – Latin, English, British (Welsh), Scottish (Irish), and Pictish – though Pictish soon died out. From the ninth to the eleventh century, much of eastern England and Scotland and parts of Ireland and Wales were invaded by people from Scandinavia, variously called Norsemen or Danes or Vikings, who were only slowly absorbed into the existing populations, and who added yet another recognisable physical type, as well as considerable linguistic influence.

There were also important political changes. The West Saxons eventually dominated the other English tribes, until England was united under their rule. They were temporarily replaced by Danish kings, and then displaced by William the Conqueror, descended from Norse invaders who had settled in northern France, in Normandy. Although few Norman French people settled in England, they provided the nucleus of the hereditary aristocracy which dominated the country for several centuries. They also brought the French language, which permanently affected the English language.

There were no more invasions, but there was much more immigration – Flemings and Dutch, more French (especially Protestant Huguenots fleeing persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), Italians, Germans, Spanish. And Jews, massacred or expelled during the Middle Ages, returned from the seventeenth century, especially refugees from European persecutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Meanwhile England subdued the rest of Britain – Wales was conquered and finally absorbed in 1535; Scotland was defeated and finally united in 1707, the result being called Great Britain; Ireland was invaded and absorbed into the so-called United Kingdom in 1800, but partly separated in 1922. A complication in Ireland was that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the English rulers planted Protestant settlers, mostly from Scotland, in Ulster.

This introduces the element of religion. The British became Christian under Roman rule, and remained so; the English became Christian after Roman missions several centuries later. There were significant differences between their forms of Christianity, followed by other differences ever since. During the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries Episcopalian Protestantism became the established religion in England and Wales and in Ireland, and Presbyterian Protestantism became the established religion in Scotland. But there were many Protestant Dissenters and a few Roman Catholics, while most of the Irish remained Roman Catholic. The later separate Irish state was Catholic, and the Province of Northern Ireland was deeply divided between a Protestant majority and a Catholic minority, mainly deriving from descent, with dire results today. Meanwhile a growing number of people rejected religion altogether.

Europe conquered the world from the fifteenth century, and Britain became the most successful imperialist power on sea. When Europeans invaded America, most of North America was occupied by British settlers. When Europeans scrambled for Africa, Britain seized the largest share and settled in the richest parts of the East and South. Britain conquered the Indian sub-continent and other bits and pieces of Asia, though few British people settled there. Britain conquered Australasia, and many British people settled there. Native Americans and Australasians were the victims first of ethnic cleansing and then of genocide. At the same time Europeans captured or purchased Africans as slaves and deported them to America.

Britannia ruled the waves, but almost all non-white Britons were virtual slaves until the twentieth century, and most white Britons were little more. There has been a Parliament here since the thirteenth century, and the monarchy was reduced a constitutional institution in the seventeenth century; but Parliament didn’t become fairly representative of the male population until the nineteenth century, or of the whole population until 1928. The landed and moneyed ruling class continued to rule until the present day.

When the British Empire collapsed, after the Second World War, white settlers remained in its temperate areas. Then, as with the Roman Empire two thousand years before, members of the former subject peoples gravitated towards the centre. Descendants of African slaves came from the West Indies, descendants of Indian labourers followed from East and South Africa, and others came from Cyprus, the Indian sub-continent, Singapore and Hong Kong, and so on. More recently political and economic refugees have come from all over the world. At the time when English has become the main world language, dozens if not hundreds of other languages are now spoken in England. And at the same time there must be almost as many religious and political beliefs in the British Isles.

Three centuries ago the journalist Daniel Defoe (later the author of *Robinson Crusoe*) reacted to prejudice against foreigners with a satirical poem, *The True-Born Englishman* (1701), ridiculing such a person and reducing the noble idea of pure British race to the ignoble image of Britain as a sort of toilet for the world’s unwanted people:

“We have been Europe’s sink, the jakes where she Voids all her offal outcast progeny.”

Now we have become the world’s sink, the jakes of humanity, but far from being a new departure it is only a natural development of an old process lasting as long as the country has existed. The lesson of the past is that we should learn to accept it, as our ancestors did, and be glad that the eras of ethnic cleansing and genocide are over, at least here. It doesn’t matter which race or religion or language or culture we belong to, so long as we live and let live and make the most of our native or adopted land.



**Herbert Read Reassessed**

edited by David Goodway

published by Liverpool University Press  
(£32, paperback £17.95)

David Goodway, who has edited an anthology of anarchist writings by Herbert Read, *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press* (Freedom Press, 1994), has now edited a symposium of writings about him. The book derives from an academic conference at Leeds University marking the centenary of his birth in 1993, but further contributions have been added to cover all the aspects of his public career. After the editor's introduction, there are sixteen chapters – on poetry, the First World War, literary criticism, psychoanalysis, autobiography, fiction, art, design, politics, education, aesthetics, Englishness, and modernism – followed by a bibliography of publications written or edited or translated by Read. There are dozens of illustrations, including a couple of Vernon Richards's fine photographs. The book is excellently edited, as usual with this editor, and also elegantly designed, being printed in large Perpetua type in roughly quarto format – though it is a pity the paintings couldn't be reproduced in colour.

Readers of *Freedom* will be mainly interested in Read's anarchism. The thorough introduction gives this proper attention, as do some other chapters, and Goodway himself has contributed the chapter on Read's politics, which is a revised version of the authoritative introduction to his earlier anthology. Read's public advocacy of anarchism from when he 'came out' in 1937 to when he accepted a knighthood in 1953 is often said to have been a significant factor in the growing support for anarchism during that period, and Goodway works hard to expound his politics and explain his influence. I remain unimpressed by the former and unconvinced about the latter, but here is the best case for both.

There are problems with other aspects of Read's career, and most of the other chapters are far less satisfactory. The treatments of Read's poetry and literary criticism are as dated as their subjects, the treatments of Read's 'Englishness' and 'Modernism' are as boring as their subjects, the treatments of Read's aesthetics are virtually incomprehensible, and the treatments of Read's autobiographical writings and educational work smother fascinating subjects under the weight of analysis.

A serious difficulty with the appreciation of Read is that, despite repeated claims for the quality of his writing, he actually wrote rather

# Re-reading Read



A BBC studio in 1942. The broadcasters are (clockwise from top left) George Woodcock, Mulk Raj Anand, George Orwell, Edmund Blunden and Herbert Read.

lifeless verse and prose, and that the whole project of cultural 'Modernism', of which he was a leading defender in Britain, became a cultural disaster. To put it crudely, almost all the literary and artistic work produced or praised by Read is dull or null or both, and so is almost all the discussion of it in this book. Over and over again, reading Read or reading about Read, I find myself echoing J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield: 'Strictly phoney!'

This is a pity, because Read was an attractive and interesting person. But like so many intellectuals he was obsessed with words, ideas and concepts, references and quotations, allusions and comparisons, -isms and -ologies, and like so many academics most of the commentators here add yet further layers of vacuous verbiage. Of course a book consists of words, but it is notable that so many of the words here are poly-syllabic, abstract, second-hand, vague, woolly,

detached, remote, distant, pretentious, pompous, generally uncommunicative. Even on such practical subjects as education or industry, or such urgent topics as revolution and war, Read and his admirers always seem to write at several removes from real life. I can't help wondering whether his association with anarchism actually did more harm than good.

Some of the contributors insist on the unity of Read's varied activities, but the unfortunate result is that the few productive things he achieved are devalued by the many unproductive things he was absorbed with. He is sometimes compared with William Morris, but the unfortunate result this time is that a minor critical satellite is outshone by a major creative star; anyway, Morris's work didn't amount to a unity, as may be seen when his propagandist and practical socialism is contrasted with the artificial medievalism of his prose and verse romances or the archaic trivia of so much of his arty-

crafty decoration and design.

The book contains some exceptions to this pattern, apart from Goodway's exemplary contributions. There are two particularly interesting chapters – Hugh Cecil on Read's experience in the First World War, when he served on the Western Front, behaving with courage and winning medals, and Bob Barker on Read's novel *The Green Child*, which is one of the strangest fictional fantasies in our literature – both based on detailed knowledge of the sources and full of fresh insights into their subjects.

There are also two genuinely critical chapters. Paul Street on Read's standard books on modern painting and modern sculpture demonstrates how dismal they are and also how defective Read's artistic writing was, and Robin Kinross does the same service for Read's standard book on art and industrial design. No wonder Read is as neglected as some of the other contributors complain with apparent surprise! George Orwell noted how much criticism is driven by ideological bias, and all too many anarchists have praised Read more because of his politics than for his real merits.

Kinross's chapter is answered by Norman Potter, the anarchist designer, who defends Read and his work. This counter-chapter is more personal than the rest of the book, and indeed is attractive mainly for its personal content, the absence of theory and the presence of practice. But Potter, like Kinross, is not an academic intellectual but a professional craftsman, and even if he is wrong he is readable.

Potter adds in a note what he calls "an aside of possible interest". At the age of 17 he had "the privilege of a brief imprisonment" with Matt Kavanagh, the veteran anarchist. "Shaking hands with him upon release, I couldn't forget that he had (among many distinctions) shaken hands with William Morris." From this he quotes his own remark that "the history of consciousness is a chain of hands".

This point is more stimulating than most put by or about Read, and it prompts a train of thought about the way such chains connect the generations. There are many living people who knew Lilian Wolfe as well as Matt Kavanagh, and a few who knew Tom Keell and Max Nettlau, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, Helen and Olivia Rossetti; all these people know Kropotkin and Malatesta. So there are only two or three links in the chain from us to Bakunin and Reclus, and only three or four from us to Proudhon and Godwin. History has a shorter duration than is generally recognised.

I feel the tug of this chain myself. Both my grandfathers also knew Kropotkin. My aunt told me how, when she sat on Kropotkin's lap as a young girl before the First World War and asked him why he had a big beard, he lifted it up to show that it meant he didn't have to wear the then obligatory uniform of a collar and tie – an unexpected sidelight on such a figure. One of my grandfathers was a disciple of Edward Carpenter, and the other sat on the executive of the Fabian Society with Charlotte Wilson, the founder of *Freedom*.

I myself shook hands with Norman Potter soon before his death in 1995, and I also corresponded with Read before his in 1968. I didn't get much from Read, except his customary courtesy, and after reading these essays about him I don't get much from a reassessment of him. But the job was worth doing, and it won't need to be done again. Anyone – anarchist or otherwise – who wants to study Read will find much relevant material here, and all those responsible deserve gratitude for an unusually conscientious book. **NW**

## Northern Anarchists prepare for 18th June

The 18th June 1999 is the day of the G8 summit in Köln, Germany, when the world's richest nations meet to tackle the snags in global capitalism. On the same day environmentalists, workers, the jobless, indigenous peoples, peasants, women's groups, the landless and others plan to act against the plundering of the planet and its inhabitants for the benefit of the few.

Last month at the Northern Anarchist Network Conference in Manchester, it was decided that the body representing most anarchists in the North of England would back the protests in London and elsewhere on 18th June. Participants from Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford, Tameside, Rochdale, Liverpool and Greater Manchester approved the project put forward by members of Earth First.

According to the Scottish libertarian publication *Counter Information*, "June 18th will see actions world-wide in financial centres,

banking districts and at multinationals' offices – including the City of London."

There was a talk on the concept of 'recuperation' – the ability of capitalism to recover and deal with political challenges and social change – there was not much dispute about the resilience of capitalism, but some present questioned the implied assumption that the general public who suffer under the system do not have the same quality of resilience.

There was a brief discussion on an anti-war leaflet, and some debate on future organisation.

Derek Pattison of the Tameside Careworker's Support Group brought everyone up to date on the struggle of the careworker's dispute. He referred to the recent reports in *Freedom* about the exposure of the Labour Council's involvement in the scandal and the sackings. He justified the decision of the careworkers to stand in the May local

elections and embarrass the Labour Council.

In connection with Manchester Groundswell the issue of a member having his benefit withdrawn after failing to fit in for a job he was sent for with a car park company was raised and referred back to Manchester Groundswell. It is expected that if the withholding of benefits to this member persists then NAN will act in conjunction with Manchester Groundswell.

The case of the death at work of Simon Jones from Brighton was explained to those present (see 20th March 1999 issue of *Freedom*). It was suggested that Manchester Earth First and Manchester Groundswell should decide what action should be taken of this matter.

The next meeting of the NAN will be Saturday 22nd May in Manchester at the same venue, and will discuss the 18th June action among other matters. **B**

# Waging War

“**W**ithin the past fortnight there have been two important and unsung events beyond the tragedy of Kosovo. The Prime Minister committed himself to ending child poverty within a generation. And to back him up the Treasury produced a most unTreasury-like document, mapping the geography of poverty in one of the best official assessments of poverty I have read.” So wrote Will Hutton in *The Observer* on 4th April 1999. “Another war is being fought” we are told, “and the enemy is poverty”. Waging war is becoming Tony Blair’s forte – but a ‘war on poverty’ now that would really be something!

Like most things about New Labour, what’s left after spin is the opposite of what we’ve been told. As the Treasury report notes, over the past twenty years there has been a startling increase in the number of children living in poverty in the UK. In 1995-96 four million lived in households with less than half the average income – three times the rate twenty years ago. To quote Hutton again: “If there is any doubt about the link between family and life chances, read this; any child’s chances of ending up in the top quarter of earners is four times higher if their father was in the top quarter. Educational performance is almost umbilically linked to parental earnings; if one father’s earnings are double the level of another’s, his sons and daughters will have maths test scores on average five percentile points higher ... These inequalities of income for children are then reproduced in adulthood. When you are at the bottom, you tend to stay at the bottom.”

Born poor, die poor. Not everyone in the UK, though, shares this fate. The proportion of poor people in ‘income poverty’ may have jumped by almost 60% since 1979, but the wealthiest fifth in Britain are among the richest in Europe. Those born rich, have increased their wealth, and as well as dying richer, they also live longer. As the Acheson Report into inequalities in health revealed, over the last twenty years death rates have fallen among both men and women across all social groups. However, the difference in rates between those at the top and bottom of the social scale has widened. For example, in the early 1970s the mortality rate among men of working age was almost twice as high for those in class V (unskilled) as for those in class I (professional). By the early 1990s it was almost three times higher. Some of us, then, are born poor, stay poor, and die in poverty. But only some of us. In 1979 the bottom tenth of the population received 4.1% of national income; by 1991 this was down to 2.5%, while over the same period the share taken by the top tenth increased from 20% to 26%. By 1992, the richest tenth of wealth holders held nearly half of all individual wealth. And there, as they say, is the rub. A war on poverty, you’d think, would have to be waged against someone. (As in Iraq, where the UK has waged an undeclared war against Iraqi children through sanctions, leading to the deaths of 6,000 Iraqi children each month.) The richest members of ‘our’ society have benefited from tax cuts and investment incentives and have, in return, provided financial and electoral support to political parties committed to their interests, through ever more stringent testing of welfare benefits and the maintenance of a low-wage economy. Suitable targets for a war against poverty? Seemingly not. In its recent Budget, Labour cut corporation tax by 30% (the third cut since Labour came to office, and, as they’re so keen to tell us, “the lowest rate in the history of British

corporation tax ...the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere”). Further, as David Piachaud, a professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics, observed (*Guardian*, 31st March 1999) “overt redistribution to the poor is apparently taboo ... Yet in the Budget there was overt redistribution to the better-off in the utterly uncalled for cut in standard rate of income tax next – which scarcely conforms with the Chancellor’s radical self-image.” New Labour is committed to “enterprise and wealth creation”. The days of redistribution, as the Department of Trade and Industry say every time one of their spokespersons gets near a public platform, are over. (Some of us are still wondering when they began!)

So, if Labour’s war on poverty isn’t going to target those who fatten themselves on the wealth created by the rest of us, who will the targets be? New Labour’s anti-poverty rhetoric needs to be examined more closely. The New Deal strategy is the key to Labour’s ‘war’. The basis of the New Deal is to force the unemployed into low-paid work, and hence slash the social security budget and at the same time hold down wages. Labour’s ‘solution’ to poverty is low-paid work, “to reward work and ensure working families are better-off”. The minimum wage, the alignment of the starting rate of National Insurance contributions with Income Tax, the working family and child tax credits and the extension of the New Deal to the over 50s are all aimed to this end. The war on poverty is in fact a continuation of the war on the poor. New Labour’s agenda is to coerce the state-dependent poor into accepting their lot as the poor-in-work. In October 1999, every working family with children, with no other means of support, will be guaranteed £200 per week. The new children’s tax credit will make the average family with children £200 a year better off. New Labour doesn’t intend to eliminate poverty, merely to underpin the minimum price of the working poor. There’s nothing ‘new’ in this. The welfare state has always been used as a means of disciplining the unwilling poor. In 1909 William Beveridge noted that welfare “is in essential a problem of business organisation – that of providing a reserve of labour power to meet

— COPY DEADLINE —  
**The next issue of Freedom will be dated 1st May, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 22nd April.**  
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**If possible contributions should be typed using double-spacing between lines, or can be sent as text files on disc (with a print-out please).**

fluctuations in such a way as to not involve distress”. In 1944 he observed that “the gap between income during earning and during interruption of earning should be as large as possible for every man. It cannot be kept large for men with large families, except ... by making their benefit in unemployment and disability inaccurate, or by giving allowances for children in time of earning and not earning alike.”

As the Child Poverty Action Group has observed, governments in the UK have, over the last ten years pursued a ‘strategy of inequality’ involving reductions in higher rates of income tax for the rich (from 60% to 40%), higher thresholds of inheritance tax for the rich, a shift from direct to indirect taxation, etc. New Labour intends to pursue the same goals, and use the same means, while intending to disarm us with a spin about ‘the war on poverty’. Meanwhile, as Jack Straw told journalists in April 1996: “Your picnic with claret by the banks of the Thames will be safe in Labour’s hands”.

Rudolf Rocker once observed that “the problem that is set for our time is that of freeing man from the curse of economic exploitation and political and social enslavement”. Sixty years on, the problem remains. Waging war on the real causes of poverty will move us closer to the freedom we desire, and there’ll be a fair bit of claret we’ll need to spill in the Thames to get there.

Nick S

# McLibel Appeal

**O**n 31st March, the Court of Appeal announced its judgement in the libel case of McDonalds, the international fast-food caterers, versus a pair of penurious anarchists, Helen Steel and Dave Morris.

A couple of points in the *What’s wrong with McDonalds* leaflet, which the trial judge had declared to be libellous, are found by the Appeal Court judges to be fair comment.

It is no longer libellous to say that McDonalds’ employees worldwide “do badly in terms of pay and conditions” (the trial judge had allowed only that McDonalds pay low wages in Britain).

The trial judge had said it was libellous to say “if one eats enough McDonalds food, one’s diet may well become high in fat with a very real risk of heart disease”, but the Appeal Court held this to be fair. The Appeal judges remarked that their decision on this point “must have a serious effect on [McDonalds’] trading reputation”.

The trial judge’s findings, that it was libellous to say McDonalds were responsible for rainforest destruction and third world starvation, and that they poisoned their customers, were upheld, but the damages which Steel and Morris are ordered to pay are reduced from £60,000 to £40,000.

Our comrades now intend to take the case to the House of Lords, where they will ask their Lordships to rule that giant multinational corporations should not be able to sue their critics for libel on issues of public interest.

McDonalds originally issued writs for libel against six members of London Greenpeace, the anarchist group which published the leaflet, offering to drop the cases in return for apology and withdrawal. The objective seems to have been to stop the adverse comments without having the case heard, but Steel and Morris, unemployed and owning nothing, were in a position to call McDonalds’ bluff and had the resilience to keep going throughout all the delays and then the longest trial in English legal history.

Millions of copies of the offending leaflet have now been circulated, there is an anti-McDonalds website reporting actions from round the world, and McDonalds have spent upwards of £5 million on the case. However, McDonalds continues to prosper.



# Food for Thought ... and Action!

Recent arrivals at the Freedom Press bookshop

**The Match!** no. 93. This issue boasts some almost unbelievable tales in the regular 'Who the Police Beat' column, an article on how digital television could be used to snoop on people in their homes, a related article on the census, some severe criticisms of well-known American anarchists, and a letters section second to none in size and content. Several sections of this highly individual and entertaining magazine have a go, not without reason, at the local press in its home town of Tucson, Arizona, and there's a lot more on offer in its 72 pages for £3.00.

**Direct Action** no. 10. The background to under-development in Kenya and Tanzania is discussed in relation to their present-day situation, and we also get an edited reprint of *Libertarian Labor Review's* interview with Nigerian Sam Mbah of the Awareness League. Other features include the banana war, New Labour's racism, biotechnology and reinventing imperialism, plus five pages of reviews. 36 pages, £1.50.

**Fifth Estate** no. 34/1. Thankfully this issue arrived without the production disaster that bedevilled many copies of the previous one, where the text on some pages ran off into the ether, meaning that we ran out of saleable copies very quickly. In this one major consideration is given to the Israeli state's 50th anniversary, with five pages devoted to its white settler colonial roots and its Palestinian refugee victims. Additional pieces include an interview with a Chinese rebel, last summer's week-long gathering of anarchists in Toronto, the way the US National Parks Service has hijacked the monument to the Haymarket martyrs in Chicago by designating it an historic landmark, against the wishes of local anarchists, and an update on Mumia Abu-Jamal, still on death row in a Pennsylvania state prison and facing possible execution as early as May. 28 pages, £1.50.

**Take the Rich off Welfare** by Mark Zepenzauer and Arthur Naiman, Odonian



'The rich on welfare – like pigs with their snouts in the trough'

Press (Real Stories series). Oh yes, yes, yes! This is a book that deserves wide circulation. Only the other day Blair's government announced another handout of nearly £200 million to Rover, caving in to naked blackmail by its owners BMW who threatened to move its car production elsewhere, and continuing the public subsidy of a company that was supposedly privatised many years ago. Likewise the amount of taxpayers' money being ladled out to the private railway companies is far greater, for a worse service, than British Rail used to get. Quite why there is no equivalent book on the British situation we don't know, but we have been unable to find one and it's the sort of information that would provide valuable ammunition to all kinds of opposition groups without the need to trawl through acres of press reports looking for examples of wealthy corporations and individuals sponging off the rest of us. But this book, as a study of the US tax and financial system,

shows how they do it and how much they make – and the US system is not that different from that over here, except in the area of benefits for the less well-off. You may not be conversant with the intricacies of tax-free Muni Bonds, Export Credits or the 1989 Savings and Loans scandal; you may be unaware of the sheer extent of waste and fraud going on in the military, or the cash handouts to media conglomerates, agribusiness and the timber and mining industries, to name but a few; you may be ignorant of Ozone Tax exemptions, nuclear, oil and aviation company subsidies, and insurance loopholes, but the authors explain exactly who benefits most from the 'welfare state' and for those who want to know more they provide a detailed list of sources. There is also an index and, should you want to whisper the word 'amortisation' in your lover's ear one night, you can look up the meaning in the glossary first. 192 pages, £6.95.

**Black Flag** no. 216. Among the contents of this lately improved magazine is a long and detailed article from a Finnish anarchist who spent some time in Indonesia, which includes his eye-witness account of some of the inter-communal violence between Muslims and Christians. Two pieces cover Pinochet and the economics of Pinochet's Chile. You can find out all you need to know about Sweden's RSM (Revolutionary Super Market) and there is a considered examination of the ideas in Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*. An analysis of the government's plans to replace the temporary Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Provisions (Northern Ireland) Act with a single new and permanent UK-wide law points out that not only is there no real terrorist threat in Britain, but the proposed law would greatly extend the definition of 'terrorist' to people who use or merely threaten to use 'violence' against property "to intimidate or coerce a government, the public or any section of the public". With this draconian law would come the inevitable extension of police powers, and its potential use against anyone taking part in or condoning many types of direct action. 36 pages, £1.50.

**Total Liberty** no. 4. In which Josiah Warren's social and economic experiments are compared with the current enthusiasm for Local Exchange Trading Schemes, Noam Chomsky is criticised (again) for opining that parts of the state should be strengthened against capitalism's increasingly rampant globalisation, and is reminded of the anarchist maxim that the end does not justify the means. Is this fertile soil for another split in the anarchist movement? 12 pages, £1.00.

**Anarchy** no. 46, carries a long and sympathetic article on the Brazilian landless peasants' movement, an even longer and very critical article on the EZLN, translated from French, and an enlightening piece on the struggles of the unemployed in France, plus the usual large swathe of reviews and letters. 84 pages, £3.50. **KM**

I have always wanted to get a feel for village life in Chile. This trip, my third to that country, saw us spending about half our time in rural areas rather than the big centres. The most memorable of these is San Pedro de Atacama, a Native American oasis village of 970 people. One of the houses is Inca and others date from the Conquest. It is

## Impressions of Chile

a major centre for eco-tourism and the hostels and hotels were full of European and American backpackers. Much of the oasis is divided into small farms. The water is controlled by the Farmers' Association, everyone in turn having access to irrigation water through a system of aqueducts. Chile has recently de-nationalised its schools, each village taking care of its education. We met a woman in the street who was hurrying to the Parents' Association meeting at the school. The town also has its own radio station.

The Andean villages east of San Pedro use the system of terraces that go back thousands of years. Farmers manufacture their own soil and close crop on these tiny terraces, sometimes less than a metre wide. Llamas, vicunas and guanacos find something to eat, I know not what, from the barren lands. In deep ravines called *quebradas* grow fruit trees. When everywhere else is dry, water can be found there and the trees are protected from the fierce, icy, Andean winds. The villagers are innate Proudhonists. Although the *quebradas* are communal, the trees are owned by individual families. Socaire, a village of 500 people we visited, has its own micro-mini hydro-electric plant from a

stream about two feet wide. When the football matches are on, people from San Pedro go to Socaire to watch, since San Pedro uses a diesel generator and has electricity for only four hours a day.

After a week in the desert we travelled south to a fishing village of about 1,500 people called Dechato. Until 25 years ago the fish boats used sails, but today are powered by outboard. The boats are built by the fishermen, are open and around twenty feet long. Many of the men also dive for abalone. Most families have chickens, a goat or a cow and a garden. The fishermen and divers have their *gremio* (guild) which provides mutual aid. The guilds, (and each fishing port has one) no doubt date back to the Spanish medieval guilds brought over during the conquest. Or older than that – the fishermen are *mestizos* and may be half descended from the aboriginal fishing tribes. Some fishing families have opened restaurants, with the men catching the fish and the women and children cooking and waiting on table. Also saw people gathering sea weed to sell to China. There is an association to aid micro-businesses and one of fish farmers. The vegetable and fruit market is twice a week

with farmers coming in 1958 Ford and Chevy trucks loaded down with produce for sale.

While on the subject of voluntary associations, I did a survey by going through the Yellow Pages. This is a very rough survey, since small groups do not have telephones. However, in Santiago there were: seven mutual aid societies, 125 *gremios* (mostly independent bus and taxi owners) over 100 co-ops, and well over 100 trade unions. In Concepcion, the second largest city, there were 18 co-ops, 34 unions, 10 *gremios* and one mutual aid society. Chillan has fifteen co-ops, eight unions, eleven *gremios* and one mutual. Temuco has 25 co-ops, ten *gremios*, 21 unions. Pisco, the national drink, is now made almost exclusively by co-ops. Everywhere I went, there were also pensioner and neighbourhood associations, professional and ethnic clubs. Chile, like DeToqueville's America, is a land of voluntary associations.

Voluntary association is actively promoted in some newspapers. An editorial in Chillan's *La Discucion*, promoted co-ops as an economic model overcoming both the

(continued on page 5)

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— ANARCHIST NOTEBOOK —

# Nation and Religion: lethal symptoms

The climate of racial intolerance can be found within a few streets of the *Freedom* office in Whitechapel, and was in fact, present with a different immigrant population a century ago. And, of course, before the Bengalis or the Jews, there were Irish and Huguenot immigrants, meeting hostility in the same historic 'zone of transition'.

From the other side of London, Rozina Dewshi produced a pair of Radio Four programmes of *Southall Stories*, now that the Asian community in Southall enters its third generation, explaining how "while its influence on mainstream British culture is growing, there are also signs of a re-emergence of old ethnic and religious identities". Naresh Puri investigated what was described as increasing tension between traditional and modernising forces, particularly as girls grew up and had to struggle against assumptions about the role and status of women.

Now one of the things that used to gratify outside observers of the immigrant scene was that there might be actual warfare between India and Pakistan back home, but there was common cause between immigrants from both countries at a local level in Britain, in the face of hostility from British racialism, which failed to distinguish between Hindus and Moslems, or between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

But what Naresh Puri discovered was that hostility between Moslems and Sikhs, which used to manifest itself among teen-age gangs in Southall, was now evident among primary school children. (Radio Four, 31st March 1999). This is profoundly depressing, even though not surprising in a world awash with hostility between Christians and Moslems, Hindus and Moslems, Christians and other Christians, and so on.

Yet if we anarchists were to tell any of the participants that in our view religion was a conspiracy to exploit the poor and gullible, they would perhaps ask us not to interfere in their affairs or perhaps declare that we were simply British racists, since to everyone's astonishment, it is not ancient but recent Education Acts in England and Wales that demand that schools should include in their curriculum collective worship that is "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character."

Readers who remember how collective worship was quietly dropped when they were at school in the '60s or '70s will be astonished that it is still demanded in the legislation of the 1990s. Blame the sinister influence of the Church of England Board of Education and the Roman Catholic Church. But what happens in Southall where Naresh Puri visited a school with 99% non-Christian pupils?

I learn from the British Humanist Association's leaflet of November 1998 on *Collective Worship and School Assemblies* that: "Schools can apply to the local authority's Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE) for exemption from the 'broadly Christian' requirement for some or all of their pupils. This is called a 'determination' and alternative worship must be provided for these pupils, although parents still have the right to withdraw their children from this worship."

Anarchists, and most other people too, would have imagined that by the end of the century we had managed to exclude religious indoctrination from the schools that everyone has to pay for. But most people would also have assumed that we had seen so much of the horrors of racial and religious conflict, to decide that they were too lethal and productive of misery, to be sustained in a civilised society. We were all wrong about the likelihood of this, but were most certainly right in the aspiration, just as we have failed to convince our fellow-citizens that nationalism is too disastrous to remain as a motivation for human conduct.

I'm one of those people who gets asked to explain anarchism in two minutes on local radio programmes. It happened to me soon after 8am on 22nd March on Radio Leicester. The actual news a few minutes earlier had been about Serbian forces waging a 'scorched earth' war against 90% of the



population of Kosovo, and American F117 bombers attacking Belgrade.

But of course my interviewer assured me

that only the existence of nations and governments prevented us all from killing each other.

Colin Ward

(continued from page 4)

problems of socialism (inefficiency) and capitalism (inequality). The editorial stated that a problem with the lack of innovation existed in many co-ops, but the local electricity and housing co-ops were an exception. According to *La Discucion*, the General Federation of Co-ops has 1,000-plus societies with 800,000 members.

Graffiti is everywhere, most all of it, like back home, stupid and juvenile. Did see some Stalinist and pro-Pinocho stuff. Speaking of Stalinism, dreary little Gladys Mann, the Communist Party presidential candidate was dragging along at 4% in the polls. Bought *El Siglo*, the CP rag, thinking they might have something new to say. No luck, the same stupidity, the same clichés they have been pumping out for generations. The Chilean CP is the coelacanth of politics.

According to *El Mercurio*, out of 8,000,000 registered voters, only 360,000 or 4.5% are party militants. That figure is for all political parties. People are fed up with politics and ideology – is it any wonder? New movements are rising out of this independent anti-political stance. One of these, born at the University of Chile, *La Zorda* is involved in base-community and trade union work. They are promoting non-voting as a tactic. Saw some anarchist graffiti in Chillan, one of

which was Proudhon's epigram about liberty being the mother of order – two blocks from the La Union Mutual Aid Society. The Green Movement is strong here, in terms of votes. General environmental consciousness is not. All public areas are deep in paper, plastic and styrofoam waste. Soft drink and beer cans are not recycled.

The Chilean economy has a number of surprises for anyone still naive enough to believe left or right wing propaganda. In this so-called free market economy the largest industry, copper, is state owned. There is also a state bank and government makes up about 30% of the economy, about where Canada stood in the 1960s. More correct to say that the combination of market reforms plus a strong state is neo-conservative, and not free-market à la Mises, Hayek and Friedman, as I once thought.

True enough, there are more freedoms at the day-to-day level in Chile than we have back home. No sleazy bureau-rat will tell you how to build your house, prevent you from keeping chickens, operating a business from your garage, selling things in the street, turning your car into a taxi, etc., etc. All of what I call the fascism of daily life, a kind of 'death by a thousand cuts' that torments us in North America with our interminable by-laws, regulations, licences and high taxes

does not exist here. Don't get me wrong. Chilean freedoms have nothing to do with *Pinochetismo*. It was always like this, no matter who was in power, and it is generally this way in most of the so-called Third World. Here the state is an excrescence, divorced from daily life. Stay away from the police, don't shout out your subversive opinions and you are generally left alone. The state in the 'underdeveloped world' is, if I can make a Ronnie Reagan-like distinction, more *authoritarian* than totalitarian. In corporatist Canada, on the other hand, government is omnipresent, even though we never have to worry about being dragged away and killed because of some silly belief we hold.

The South East Asian crisis has had a disastrous effect here, with unemployment doubling. Nevertheless, the Chilean economy was developing and one has to wear incredibly opaque ideological blinders not to see it. Unless the crisis wrecks the world economy, Chile should recover quickly. Ultimately, Chile's problem is not *under-development* but *development*. It is time to realise that development is capitalism and capitalism is development. The statist-neo-mercantilist alternatives to corporate capitalism – fascism, economic nationalism and leninism – have not, and cannot, deliver

the developmental goodies. So far, only the *regulated* market with some very large spoonfuls of statism called corporate capitalism seems to do the trick. What we have to question is the very idea of development. Karl Polyani is more to the point than jokers like Mao and Castro.

When capitalism invades a society, the problem it creates is not impoverishment – in fact it does the opposite, as the slightest glance at demographic statistics will show – but the destruction of community, sociality, mutual aid, family and traditions. And with consumer capitalism, local culture is also threatened. One mundane example. Diet products are big sellers here. For the first time Chileans are facing a weight problem. Welcome to the developed world! Chile is fuming into Southern California, not another Haiti. Do we want a MacDo world?

Criticising development does not mean wanting to turn the clock back, or romantic drivel about the Third World. Of course, people should have a decent living standard, health care and education, but are we limited to only three social alternatives? Those of pre-modern misery, state capitalist 'socialist' misery or corporate capitalism, fat-bellied, but neurotic. Must *everyone* in the world make the same mistakes we have made?

Larry Gambone

# Borisland Blunders On



In Russian prisons many inmates suffer depression and mental illness, but qualified psychologists are not tempted by low prison wages.

The financial corruption and national degradation that Russia's leaders have visited on that country since Yeltsin took power in 1991 would seem to be without parallel. According to a research organisation based in Moscow (The Centre of Studies for Living Standards) 53% are now living below the poverty line (the figure is increasing rapidly) whilst 2% own 57% of the country's wealth. This super rich elite have also managed to, illegally, get some 200 to 250 billion dollars out of the country. Meanwhile 11% of GDP was the figure for unpaid salaries back in January 1997 and by last September it had more than doubled to 27%.

On top of the financial debacle of last August 1998's harvest was the worst this side of World War Two leading to imports of 75% of all foodstuffs which cannot be bought, in realistic terms, with roubles. Instead Russians are trading in the Yankee dollar which is now the *de facto* currency. Life expectancy for men (55 years) compares with Bangladesh at 58, Cameroon at 57 and Zaire at 50 rather than Cuba at 74, the USA at 73 and China at 72. Such figures suggest –

as we at *Freedom* have suggested before – that Russians are now living in what is in effect a third world country. Back in 1994 we quoted Andrei Illarionov, the deputy head of the Economic Reform Centre in Moscow, claiming that Russia was on route to becoming 'normal' in the sense of a developing country, dependant on the West for investment, "the so called Romanian or Latin American way" and it is this colonialism, i.e. Western dependency, which points to the causes.

#### The causes

The massive privatisations which have been the hallmark of the Yeltsin era play no small part in all of this. Ex-communist born again reformers are still the same faces as under the *ancien regime* but now have the blessing of Washington and the World Bank. They were the ones who launched the privatisation policies. Again in 1994 we reported on the beginnings of this process.

Then, at the beginning of the programme, big companies were put out to foreign speculation. The world's biggest gas company, Gasprom, was put up for grabs to foreign investors. Likewise Lukoil, the largest oil company in the country, was to offer 25% of shares. Norilsk Nickel, the world's biggest nickel producer, was seeking an undisclosed level of investment from abroad, as was United Energy Systems, again the world's biggest. Local investors – those who now make up the super rich elite – also made a killing.

Now the foreign investors have done a runner. Having leached the economy for all they could, last August they left taking 60% of the Russian stock exchanges share value. Any hope that Primakov can pull this mess back from the brink must face up to predictions like those of the Economist Intelligence Unit that the Russian economy is set to contract by a further 6% this year. And, seemingly, the room he has for manoeuvre within the dictates of the scenario we have painted still depends on his relationship with the West and in particular the IMF.

#### Getting out of the mess?

When dealing with the IMF realpolitik enters the equation. IMF policies are dictated by Washington and pander, therefore, to the needs of American corporatism. Gerald

O'Driscoll of the US Conservative Heritage Foundation spells out what this means: "The US Treasury department exercises influence over the IMF policy far in excess of the explicit percentage vote possessed by the US ... IMF policy does not and will not deviate in any important or fundamental way from the policy of the US Treasury".

For Russia to come to an agreement with the IMF will mean that in some way her foreign debt will need to be restructured and for this to happen the usual austerity programmes will have to be put in place adding to the economic hardship. This is the usual 'tough but sure' solution that is imposed on the world's economies to ensure that they fit in with the US dominated world trade system. Would such a solution work? It seems unlikely. Any restructuring is likely to be perceived in the West as a cover up for debt default. As Adam Elstein of the Moscow branch of Banker's Trust (recently absorbed by Deutsche Bank) has suggested, in such a situation foreign investors, "would prefer to eat nuclear waste rather than buy Russian bonds". Indeed the reality is that capital continues to leave the country at the rate of \$2 billion a month. This is hardly surprising. Even if they were to consider returning where would their capital be 'profitably' invested? The world financial crisis which first hit Asia, then South America and is now no small part of the cause of a slow down in European growth (with some signs that the bullish US economy may be slowing down – and this is the real fear) makes any market for Russian goods hard to imagine becoming a reality. Mr Primakov, as we say, has little room for manoeuvre in a world seemingly suffering from over-investment, over-production and unbridled speculation. An

IMF deal in this financial environment would simply be a sticking plaster on a festering wound.

Within the dictates of the Old American Disorder the future for Russia looks bleak and there is little sign of any light at the end of the tunnel. Even worse is the near impossibility of speaking constructively in such a depressing scenario of any creditable alternative. In liberal economic terms the country is basically bankrupt and, like China, will soon have to face up to the fact by laying off the workforce it no longer can afford to pay, giving rise to massive increases in unemployment such as are now occurring in China (see <http://freedom.tao.ca/FIN/asia2.html>). The only sensible solution to this, even though it does not seem to be on the cards, is for some movement for popular control of production to elbow aside the system. Are there any signs of this?

#### Yasnogorsk

Not many. But perhaps it is worth clutching at straws when there is nothing else to grab a hold of if only in the hope they they may, in the fullness of time, turn out to be more tangible. It has been a year now since workers at a machine building factory in Yasnogorsk in the region of Tula received any wages. In a move that can only be described as heroic last autumn they went on strike and set up a General Assembly which meets every other day to implement workers' control of movement of goods from the factory. The workers are beyond political affiliation. Even though the regional government is controlled by Yeltsin's opposition – the communists – local economic policies mirror the liberal aims of Moscow.

Last month a new administration was installed aiming to force the workforce back to work without pay and declaring the strike and the General Assembly illegal. Still the workers are holding out and it looks as though the authorities will need to send in the police to 'regularise the situation' – something they presumably will not hesitate to do. A veritable David and Goliath scenario where, as always, Goliath looks very settled in his saddle. But let us not lose sight of the fact that the problems being faced by the workers in Yasnogorsk are becoming more and more universal. Their response is courageous and deserves support and, hopefully, emulation. They present us with more light at the end of any tunnel than the IMF with its austerity programmes.

#### Lingvoj

We urge all to send telegrams in solidarity with the workers of Yasnogorsk machine building works and in protest against the actual and planned repression. The address for telegrams is: Yasnogorki Mashinostroitelny Zavod, Profkom Tul'skaya oblast, gorod Yasnogorsk 301030 Russian Federation.

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# Genetically modified

Dear *Freedom*,

From the number of times Donald Room has mentioned FlavrSavr tomatoes (isn't the name enough to put you off?) I was beginning to imagine that he had shares in the company. At any rate, naively I supposed that this was a small, eager company, bent on the good of consumers, probably run by Quakers. Now I discover from *Private Eye*, the well-known anarchistic (albeit not, Anarchist) periodical, that Zeneca is a company as irresponsible as Monsanto. In Friends of the Earth's list of 'England's Fifty Filthiest Factories', Zeneca appears at numbers 8 and 19. In Thornton Cleveleys (no. 19) it spews out 39 tonnes of cancerous chemicals into the surrounding area. Near Huddersfield another plant (no. 8) spreads 276 tonnes of carcinogens among its neighbours. Think of this every time you eat your GE tomato purée. Incidentally, *Private Eye* points out that the supposedly neutral Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the chief government research fund donor, has as chairman Peter Doyle, Zeneca's executive director.

I do not believe – as evidently does Donald Room – either that it is unthinkable to work alongside religious folk nor that it is necessary to worry about God's rights if you are against genetic manipulation. (I leave this to scientists such as the total cripple who believes that one day it will be possible for him, as a scientist, to understand the mind of God.) Nor do I believe that human curiosity should be unlimited, as Room says he does; not when it is financed by some transnational company with a proven record of immorality. The trouble with Mr Room is that like most

scientists (there are well-known exceptions, such as the Pugwash group) he ignores both moral and economic considerations in his enthusiasm for the scientific search for what they love to call The Truth. 'The Truth' contains everything: it is the business of humans to choose morally from out of it. No line of scientific investigation is *per se* acceptable – what is important is its results, and who will exploit it.

In his last letter to *Freedom* Mr Room attributes the resistance of European consumers to eating food whose contents are disingenuously not specified, to 'cultural differences' from the USA. Non-scientists would say simply that European consumers are 'right', or more aware of their 'rights'. On what possible grounds can it be argued that deliberately not labelling (or separating) food to show that it has a new problematic element, is the mere 'overlooking' of a 'cultural difference'? Monsanto calculated that if they could get away with it in the States they could get away with it in Europe. Once again, the basis is economic – Monsanto force-selling its product – and moral.

Finally, Mr Room blandly cites 'selective breeding' and 'hybridisation' as unquestionable benefits' for what he calls 'humanity' (by this term presumably meaning Western over-developed nations in general, and their commercial arms in particular). A long long time ago 'Silent Spring' pointed out the dark side of this wonderful revolution (which was going to feed the world, just as GE is going to, but in fact did not) which also included the bankrupting of millions of small farmers. Since then, others have drawn attention to the robbery of native plants, used medicinally by traditional, ecological human groups, to be chemicalised monopolised and exploited commercially by Western drugs companies.

As usual, Mr Room passes over the moral and economic aspects of such robbery.

A fortnight night ago I read in my paper that a Dutch laboratory has established that genetically modified potatoes destroy flora in the human gut. Although the deleterious results of scientific meddling usually take at least ten years to become apparent (which is why GE enthusiasts are so desperate for their artificial products to be marketed immediately) a few independent laboratories are already picking up the warning signs. Is it already too late for the world to listen?

Jon Roe

◆ ◆ ◆  
*Donald Room writes:*

I am delighted that Jon Roe will be contributing to *The Raven* on GM which I am putting together. I repeat my invitation, to all anarchists with things to say about GM.

Before it was hived off as a separate company, Zeneca was the agriculture division of ICI. No doubt it is everything Jon Roe says it is. The tomato with the softening inhibitor was produced at Nottingham University by scientists investigating the process of ripening. Later its commercial potential was noticed, it was given the name FlavrSavr, and Zeneca took it over.

Opposition to irresponsible companies does not imply opposition to everything they get their hands on. The FlavrSavr tomato has no more potential for harm than any other tomato variety, and some potential for good. There are only two possible reasons for opposing it: the Prince Charles reason that God might get annoyed because we learn too much; and the modish reason that opposition to GM is this year's radical fashion.

(Incidentally I am not, and never have been, a scientist by trade. I boast about my first-class honours degree in biology, but I acquired it as an amateur at the age of 51.)

# Unanswered questions

Dear *Freedom*,

I heard Mr Blair speaking to say that Britain, dutifully following Big Brother, is going in a few hours to teach 'the Serbs' a lesson on behalf of 'the West' (you and me?) with massive bombers and other military equipment, super-expensive no doubt, because Britain has an inexorable duty to stop massacres and the creation of a humanitarian catastrophe in refugees. Will you ask him why when 800,000 Rwandans were massacred and thousands made refugees, why when hundreds of Timorese were massacred and lots more chased from home, and even more, why at this moment hundreds of Sierra Leoneans are being maimed for life deliberately (even the Serbs don't as yet chop hands off) and chased from their homes, Britain has no inexorable obligation to care a damn? And please would you elaborate in your paper a story heard on the BBC World Service a few weeks ago, at the dead of night, about over 40,000 inhabitants of Diego Garcia having been evicted from their homes so as to use the space for a US bomber base – why can Britain do that in virtual secrecy (the 2am or 3am news, so they could 'honestly' say the news was not suppressed) and *not* be faced with being 'taught a lesson'? And finally, can you tell me why Europe is to be 'sanctioned' (a favourite weapon) for refusing to obey the sacred law of free trade by refusing US-grown bananas, while Japan and China have been threatened with sanctions for obeying the sacred law of free trade and creating an import surplus in their US trade?

John de Courcy Ireland

## Thank you! But please!!

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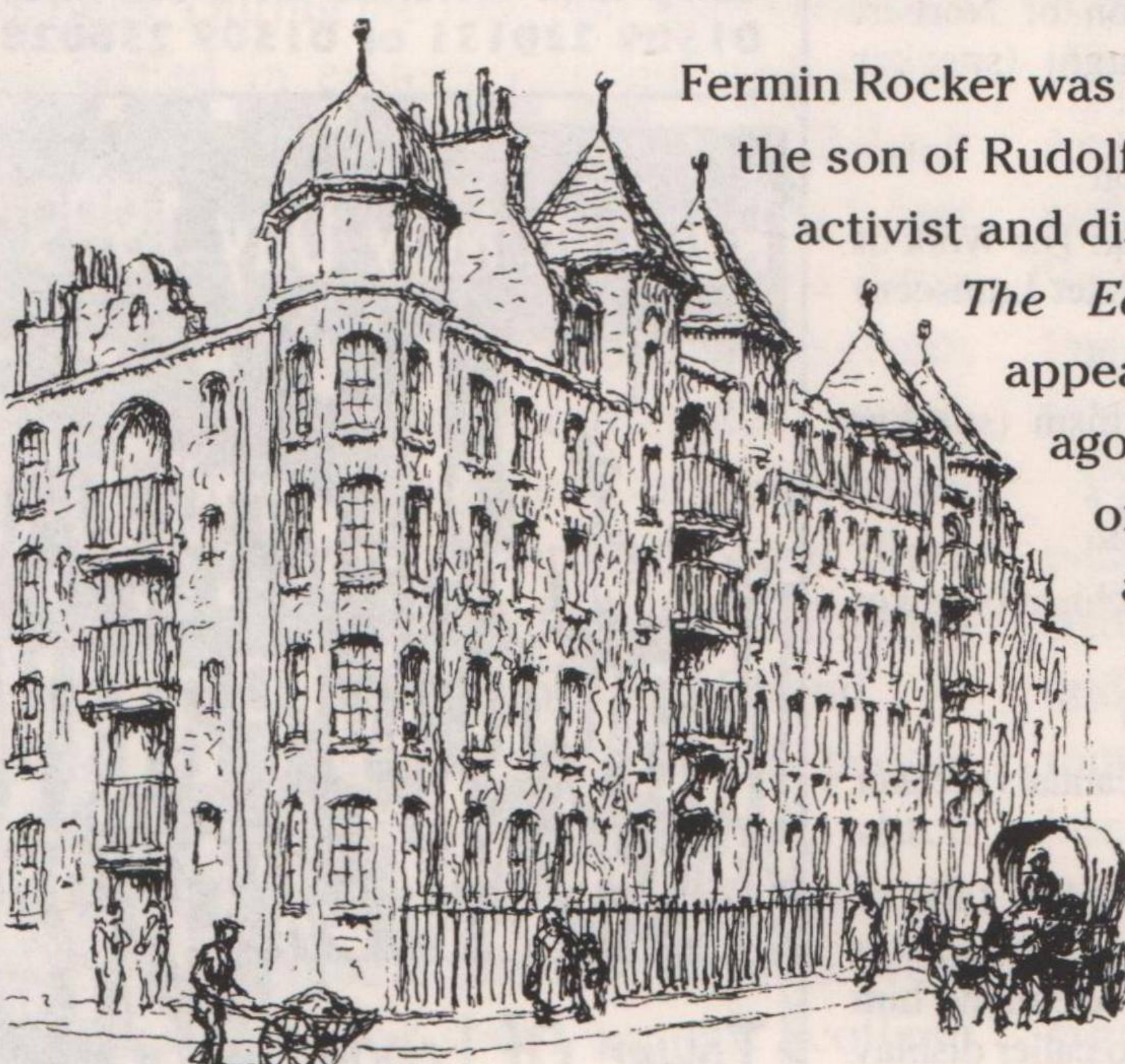
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1968

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## Meetings & Events

### The London Anarchist Forum

Meet Fridays at about 8pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL (nearest tube Holborn). Admission is free but a collection is made to cover the cost of the room.

#### — PROGRAMME 1999 —

- 16th April General discussion
- 23rd April Symposium on Anarchy and Racism
- 9th April Deconstructing the State: Derrida and Bakunin (speaker Steve Ash)
- 16th April General discussion
- 23rd April Symposium on Anarchy and Racism
- 30th April General discussion
- 7th May Symposium on Women in Anarchism
- 14th May General discussion
- 21st May The Contribution of Norbert Elias to Libertarian Thought (speaker Peter Neville)
- 28th May General discussion
- 4th June Revolution in Judea: The Work of Hyman Maccoby (speaker Peter Lumsden)
- 11th June General discussion
- 18th June Cultural Anarchism (speaker Diana Mavroleon)
- 25th June General discussion
- 2nd July Individualist Anarchism (speaker Richard Garner)
- 9th July General discussion
- 16th July The Baby Milk Scandal (speaker Edmund McArthur)

Anyone interested in giving a talk or leading a discussion, please contact Peter Neville at the meetings (or telephone him on 0181-847 0203, subject to caller display and answer phone so people who withhold their numbers or fail to leave a message will be ignored) giving your subject and prospective dates and we will do our best to accommodate.

Peter Neville  
for London Anarchist Forum

### Red Rambles

A programme of guided walks for Libertarians, Socialists, Greens, Anarchists and others. Bring food, drink, suitable footwear and waterproof clothing. A rota of cars will be used - full cars will travel to walks.

#### Sunday 25th April

Derbyshire walk (Hartington and Upper Dove). Meet at Hartington village duck pond at 11am. Walk leader John.

#### Sunday 30th May

Mount St Bernards, Blackbrook. Meet at the John Storer House car park, Wards End, Loughborough, at 10am. Walk leader Ray.

#### Sunday 27th June

Borough on the Hill. Meet at the John Storer House car park, Wards End, Loughborough, at 10am. Walk leader Ray.

#### Sunday 25th July

Derbyshire walk in Shining Cliff woods and Alderwasley. Meet outside Hurt Arms, Ambergate, Derbyshire at 11am. Walk leader John.

Telephone Vivienne for more info:  
01509 230131 or 01509 236028

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