

SHORT CHANGED: the National Minimum Wage

Last month the government introduced the national minimum wage (NMW). Workers aged over 22 were entitled to a minimum £3.60 an hour and those aged 18-21 to £3.00 an hour. Stephen Byers, the trade and industry minister, described the NMW as 'historic', while TUC boss John Monks said it represented "a landmark day for Britain's low paid workers". In theory some 1.9 million workers should see an increase in their pay packets this month. The reality, however, is very much different from the government's rhetoric.

Trade unions are angry and disappointed at the abysmally low rate the NMW has been set at. £3.60 an hour represents an annual wage of just over £6,500 a year for someone working 35 hours a week. As Rodney Bickerstaffe, general secretary of the public sector trade union Unison said: "I defy anyone to live on £3.60 an hour and be happy and content".

Young workers employed by Pizza Hut are certainly not happy and content with the NMW. They actually saw their wages cut on 1st April to bring them in line with the NMW. The restaurant industry is the lowest paid in Britain, closely followed by security services, cleaning and the clothing sector.

Unions are already reporting workers telephoning them saying that employers are paying less than the NMW even though their wage slips will show £3.60 an hour. Other employers are cutting their wage bill by reducing hours of work but expecting staff to produce the same level of work. One GMB organiser said "we have been inundated with calls from people telling us their hours are being cut but they are expected to do the same amount of work". Some manufacturers are paying the NMW but deducting wages for the cost of worker's overalls. The

Financial Times reported the senior tax partner at Grant Thornton as saying "what will happen is that minimum wage fiddles will be added to fiddles for avoiding VAT and income tax".

In one survey a massive one in five of employers questioned said they would not pay the NMW. Avoidance is likely to be so high because it will be up to workers to report rogue employers. The Inland Revenue has just a handful of inspectors to police the new system (in contrast to the number pursuing benefit fraud). Even when caught employers just face a fine of £5,000.

Next year the NMW is expected to rise to just £3.70 an hour. Many unions are calling for a rate of £4.79 an hour and the Campaign For a Living Wage has set a target for collective agreements of £5.00 an hour. There is though a real danger that £3.60 will become a ceiling – the level of poverty pay the government approves of and which it becomes hard for unions to negotiate above.

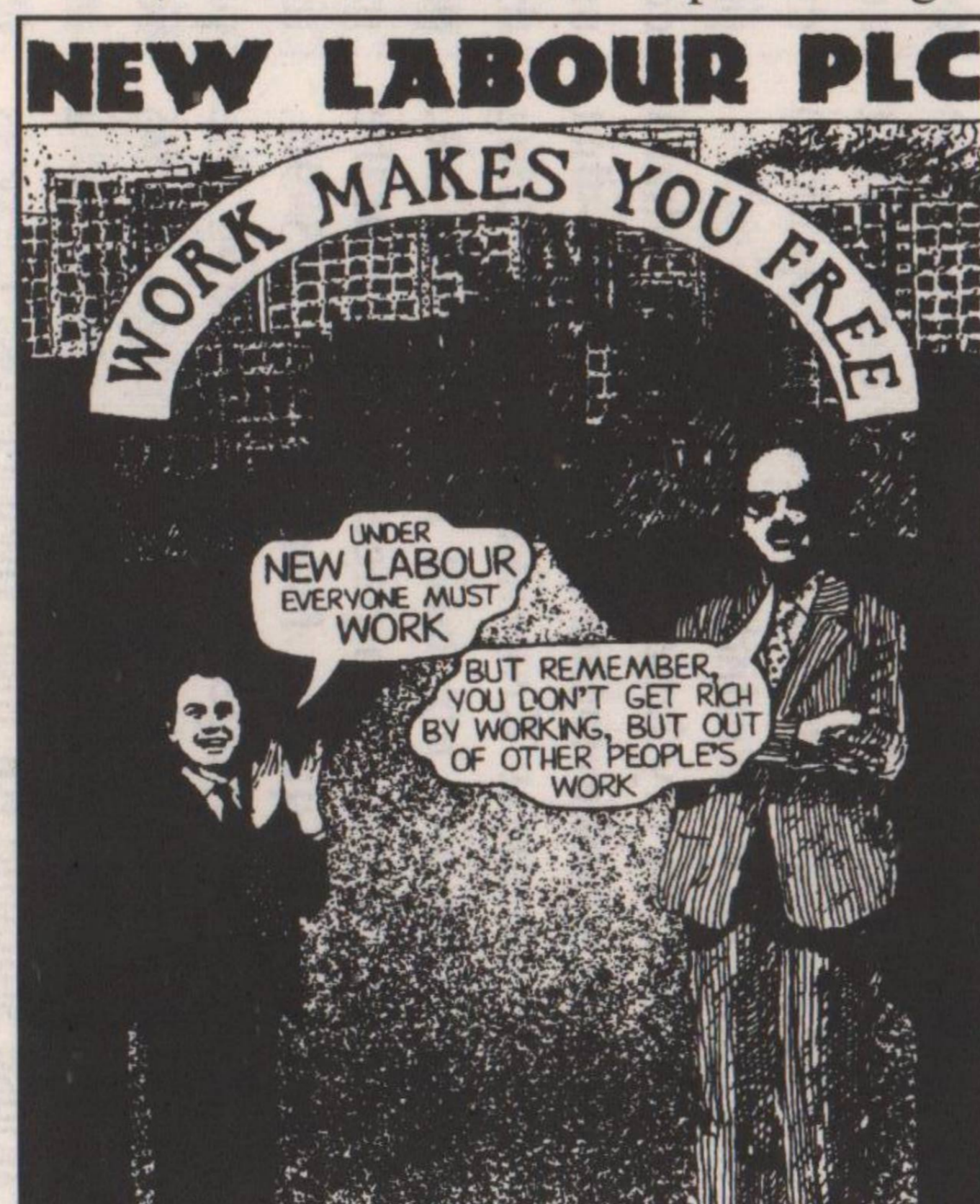
The NMW shows that government intervention can make things worse not better, as those workers experiencing a

cut in the wages have found. All governments try to get away with as little as they possibly can. If New Labour was serious about tackling wage poverty the NMW would have been set well above £3.60 and it would have been properly enforced. The NMW will actually save the government money in lower in-work benefit payments.

As anarchists know, the best defence workers have against low wages is not the government but to organise together in trade unions. Those industries with the lowest wage rates are generally the least unionised. Many unions had already negotiated wage rates for their lowest paid members above £3.60 by the time the NMW was introduced.

Anarchists abhor poverty pay (as well as the even lower amounts paid to those on benefit). The Independent Labour Research Department reports of a firm in Hampshire who were paying a 53 year old employee who joined them on leaving school £62 a week for a full-time job, and of a security guard in Manchester paid £1.87 an hour and of a woman in London paid just 92p an hour. Anarchists campaign against poverty incomes.

The reality is that the pockets of the low paid are emptied to line those of the bosses. The NMW will not change this. If anything it may institutionalise low pay as has happened in America. Can you imagine the sort of rates a future Tory government would set? At present almost a quarter of employers will ignore it totally. More will fiddle their way around it. Others will find legal loop-holes. As one officer for the clothing workers' union said: "there is no doubt that employers will be trying every trick in the book" to get around the NMW. So much for the historic day. **Richard Griffin**



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Two Europes?

According to Robin Cook, "there are now two Europes competing for the soul of our continent. One still follows the race ideology that blighted our continent under the fascists. The other emerged fifty years ago out from behind the shadow of the Second World War" (*Guardian*, 5th May 1999). Cook wishes us to believe that the ethnic cleansing practiced with vigorous efficiency by Serbian paramilitaries under Milosevic is a world away from the caring, sharing fairytale of Blair's Britain. Taken at face value, this seems to be correct. Ethnic cleansing, after all, is not routinely seen to be part of the mainstream of political practice in Britain. Families are not removed at gunpoint from their homes simply because of their ethnic identity. According to Cook, "the Europe Milosevic clings to" is a Europe "founded upon the same standards of racial purity and ethnic intolerance that the fascists used to define their ideology". The Blairite alternative, though, is a 'modern Europe' founded on the promise 'we vowed never again', a Europe asserting "values of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law".

There are, really, two issues here. Has post-war Europe ever really represented a haven for "human rights, democracy and the rule of law"?

If the answer is found in the negative, does Blairite practice offer a liberal, humane alternative? An examination of the extent to which freedom of movement has been restricted under successive governments in the UK and, further, the extent to which such restrictions have been accompanied by manipulation of racism to divide potential oppositional forces, should tell us that, for all the violence of Serbian politics today, "the burning villages ... forced deportations and

... mass graves" of which Robin Cook provides elegant warning, the fundamental issue – the use of racism as a tool of government – is suggestive of not two Europes but a barbarism common to all governments under capital, that starts with immigration controls and ends in the extermination camps of World War Two.

In the eighty years between 1825 and 1905, Britain passed no legislation affecting the free movement of people in or out of the country. Since then legislation against freedom of movement has become commonplace, with five Acts of Parliament passed between 1961 and 1972 alone. In her book *Whitewashing Britain*, the historian Kathleen Paul contends that "the official picture ... shows a liberal elite forced by an illiberal public to change the formal nationality policy". Racial ideology is portrayed as the property of the poor, and racism as the preserve of the liberal *status quo*. The Macpherson Report, and recent comments by Michael Mansfield QC, buy into this with their focus on education as the solution to racial polarisation. Mansfield would have it that "racism begins at home". Paul tells us otherwise. "The 1948 British Nationality Act, with its generous grant of the rights of citizenship to all members of the British Empire, was designed to maintain Britain's unique position as a metropolitan motherland and to demonstrate to the world that the United Kingdom was still the centre of a great commonwealth".

By 1945 Britain had a black community between 10,000 and 30,000 strong. In 1947 and 1948, on the Ormonde and the Empire Windrush, Jamaican workers sailed to Britain, travelling as independent British subjects to the heartland of an empire they had been told was 'theirs'. As Paul explains,

"at a time when you couldn't get an armless or legless man, never mind an able-bodied one, the colonial workers provided a necessary stop-gap. So necessary, in fact, that some employers, most famously the British Hotels and Restaurants Association and London Transport, actively recruited colonials for specific jobs in Britain. Other industries proved willing to absorb the migrant flow passively. As the UK economy boomed in the 1950s, indigenous workers vacated menial labour and repetitive assembly-line work for the plusher offering of the white-collar sector or high-paying factory employment. As a result West Indians, and later Indians and Pakistanis, found jobs in the labour-hungry textile industry in the north, metal manufacturing in the south-east and Midlands, and transport and catering". The post-war Labour government under Attlee did not welcome the first wave of Jamaican workers. The Cabinet Economic Policy Committee considered whether the Windrush passengers could not be sent on to East Africa. The Committee requested a report from the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Creech Jones, on proposals for preventing the repetition of such an influx again. By redefining British citizens as 'Jamaican unemployed', the Labour government prepared the ideological ground for the absorption of skilled and semi-skilled workers from the Caribbean, but only as suitable for the most menial poorly-paid work. With the docking of the Empire Windrush, the Attlee government began the process of breaking the 'children of the Empire' into first and second class citizens on the basis of skin colour. During the period of 1945 to 1950 the government brought to the UK some 200,000 Eastern Europeans to further help cope with the post-war labour shortage, under the auspices of the Polish Resettlement Act or the European Voluntary Worker Scheme. The European workers were the first choice of Attlee's government, not because they were white but because they were aliens and could be regulated without reference to constitutional procedures. Black workers from the Commonwealth and colonies were British subjects, entitled to automatic entry into Britain. Under capitalism, freedom of movement is no freedom at all. Labour is expected to go where it is required, not where it can extract the best price for the sale of its creative capacity. Race is just the gloss capital puts on its designs.

From 1948 to 1952, between 1,000 and 2,000 people entered the UK each year. By 1954 the net intake of colonial migrant had climbed to 10,000. By 1960 the net intake was 58,000. Kathleen Paul details clearly the way "post-war governments went on to construct immigration itself as a problem". As she explains: "First both Labour and Tory Cabinets chose not to pre-empt the negative attitudes a white population bred on imperialist mythology might have been expected to produce in response to the

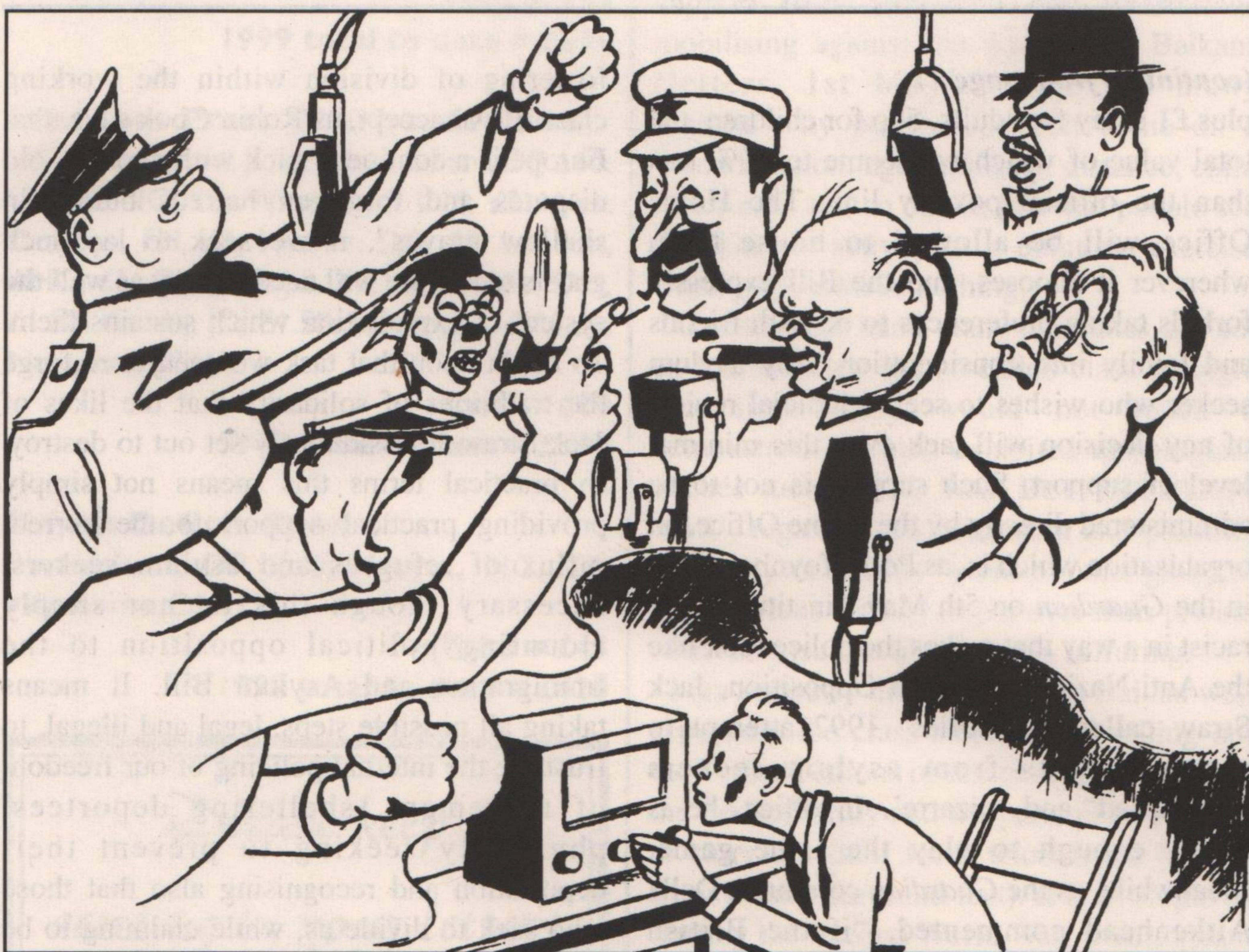
introduction of a black population. Second, neither party invested sufficient infrastructural capital to enable migrants to settle without apparently stretching existing resources. Third, government spokespeople referred to colonial migration in terms suggestive of disapproval and likely to excite popular concern. The combined result of the activity and inactivity was the construction of 'race and immigration' as a problem in need of a solution."

Outside Parliament things weren't quite so clear-cut. The first major opinion polls were taken only after the Notting Hill 'riots' and, therefore, only after ten years of government discouragement of colonial migration. In 1955 Michael Benton, a sociologist, estimated that less than 10% of those surveyed believed that 'race mixing' should be avoided. Equally, of eighteen letters concerning colonial migrants sent by branch officers to the Trades Union Congress headquarters between 1954 and 1957, eight supported colonial rights, six called for control, and four asked for more information. As Paul notes, "in general the letters portray a workforce worried by visible difference, surrounded by an imperial tradition of racial hierarchies, yet aware that discrimination and injustice were wrong". In 1962, following a decade of agitation on its own behalf, Parliament introduced the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act. Writing in 1975, the noted journalist Barry Cox said "what happened after 1961 in immigration law and practice has been the worst disaster civil liberty has suffered in modern Britain, not just because it has been a major factor in institutionalising racism, but because a powerful government department has been given licence to dispense with normal judicial procedures and exercise a wide-scale discretionary power. And so far, at least, it has been used with a marked lack of compassion, humanity and justice".

So, Robin Cook's notion that the 'race ideology' of pre-1945 Europe was abandoned by the West is, clearly, far from accurate. Post-war economic prosperity was secured partly through the exploitation of immigrant labour, and the subsequent economic slow-down was managed through the manipulation of racial division, with capital seeking to replace the class war with what the post-war Italian fascist Gianfranco Fini called "the war of the poor against the poor".

But surely it must be true that Blair's 'modern Europe' is free of such poison? After all, according to Blair's pet philosopher Anthony Giddens, "we are now in a world where there are many others, but also where there are no others" (*Beyond Left and Right*).

Currently at the Committee stage in Parliament is Jack Straw's Immigration and Asylum Bill. The Bill denies asylum seekers access to all state benefits. Asylum seekers will be expected to survive on food vouchers (continued on page 2)



LIES HAVE MANY TONGUES

Drawing taken from *The March to Death*, a book featuring the anti-war cartoons of John Olday (Freedom Press, 84 pages, £3 post free inland)

Interview with a Cuban anarchist

Frank Fernandez is a long-time Cuban anarchist militant and a member of the Movimiento Libertario Cubano – the Cuban anarchist movement in exile. He was a member of the collective of Guangara Libertaria and is the author of *Cuba, the Anarchists and Liberty*, and *La Sangre De Santa Agueda*, a book about the early years of Cuban anarchism. A longer work on the Cuban Revolution is in progress, to be published in Spain and by See Sharp Press in Tucson, Arizona. Comrade Fernandez is interviewed by Larry Gambone. To contact Cuban anarchists write to MLC, Box 1525, Jose Marti Station, Miami, FL 33125-1525 USA.

Larry Gambone: Given the fact that at any one time during the past 25 years there have been at least several thousand people calling themselves anarchists in North America, have we done enough to educate people about Cuban anarchism?

Frank Fernandez: No, of course not, the information about Castro's dictatorship is most of the time one-sided. There are several reasons for this, the efficient Cuban propaganda machine among intellectuals, the apathetic attitude of most anarchist media and general ignorance of the nature of the Castro regime. In some way we have to accept responsibility for failing to communicate with our North American comrades, due to problems with the English language.

LG: What would you like anarchists to do to help your movement?

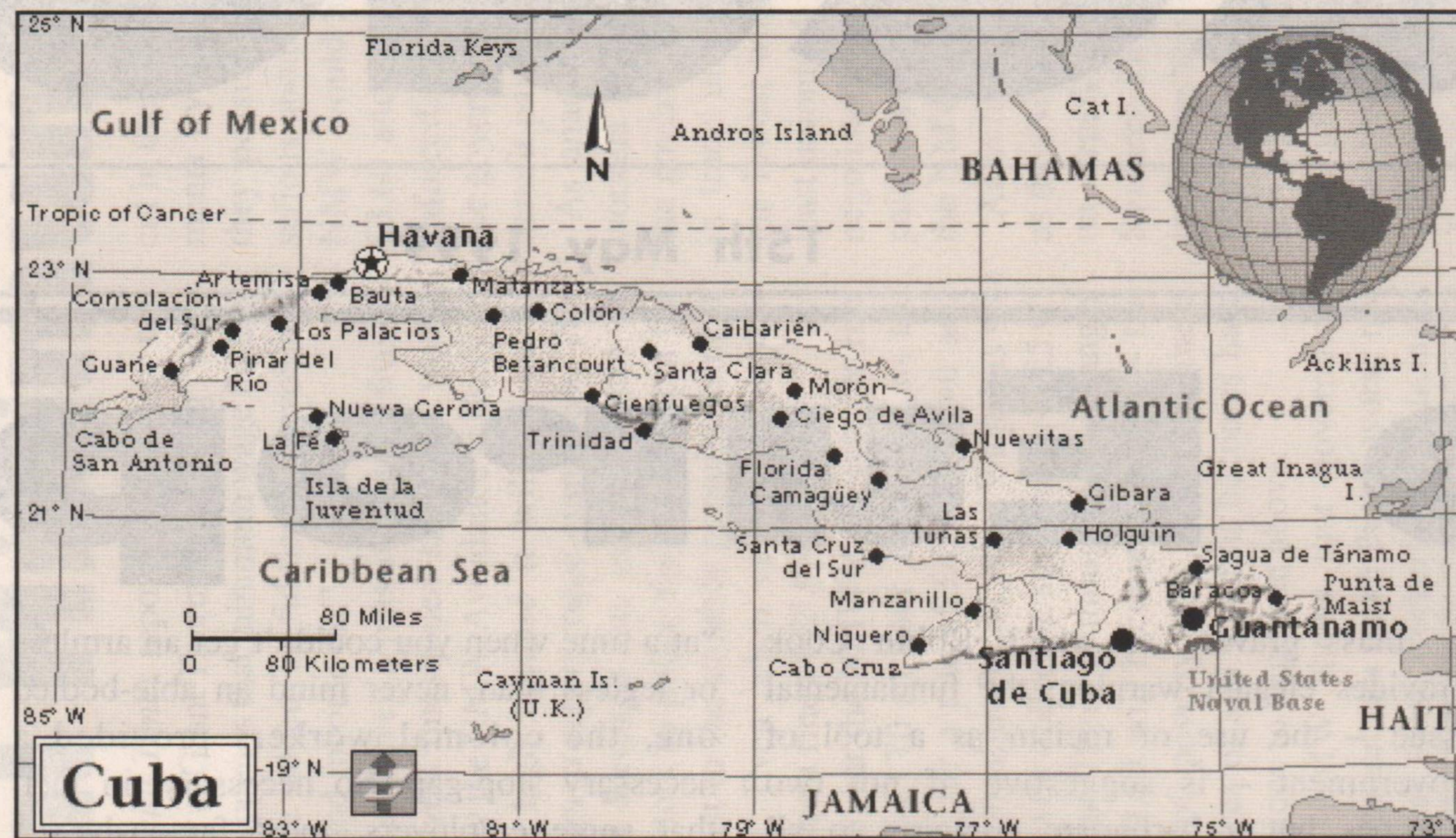
FF: First, and more important is international solidarity with our cause, the cause of freedom. Second, direct communication with the Cuban people. At this point, I think we should avoid becoming sectarians. There is a unique opportunity to gain some social space inside Cuba. A sympathiser is the first step to becoming a militant. Any act of solidarity with the oppressed, no matter what his political or social persuasion, will benefit our ideals, since this aid represents the anarchist movement outside of Cuba. For us, [MLC] this task is almost impossible, due to the fact that we cannot have direct communication with anyone in Cuba.

LG: Should we boycott Cuba, since in Canada, Cuba is a major vacation spot?

FF: Yes, we have been doing this for the last 35 years and ask that our comrades in the anarchist world to do the same. Tourism represents the main source of income of the Castro regime, superior even to the sugar cane industry. It is important to explain to travellers and tourists, the exploitation and discrimination of Cuban workers in hotels, resorts, restaurants, beaches, etc., and to remind them of what kind of government the Cuban people have suffered under for the last forty years.

LG: What is your opinion of the US embargo of trade with Cuba?

FF: In the past, nobody asked the Cuban anarchists what was our opinion about this matter, called a "blockade" in Cuba. I realise the embargo gives Castro an excuse to create worse social conditions in Cuba and that the people at the bottom will suffer as he makes them pay the bill of the American policy. However, if the excuse of the embargo is lifted, Castro will find another and the oppression will continue. I don't think the embargo will overthrow the government, nor does it represent a 'criminal enterprise'. Nobody thinks about the blockade Castro



imposes upon the Cuban people, nor how the Cuban exiles send \$800 million every year, breaking the embargo. It is hard to take a position pro or con, because nobody can give you an honest answer. Any way you try to answer this question, you are going to sound either like the Potomac's parrot or a Marxist-Leninist or worse. The question makes you take either the humanitarian side, asking for the abolition of the blockade, thereby helping Castro's propaganda machine or a more political opinion taking the side of the Miami Cubans and the Washington Reactionaries. In both cases you lose. It is a difficult and somewhat 'Kafka-like' matter.

LG: Both your pamphlet and Dolgoff's book indicate that the Cuban anarchist movement was large and influential. It would be nice to get a rough idea of just how large the movement was.

FF: The anarcho-syndicalist movement in Cuba was not only the largest and most influential organisation in Cuba since 1880, but also the forerunner of social progress among the proletariat until 1927. Government persecution, deportation, incarceration and even murder for two decades, plus the backstabbing from the Communist Party ended that era. Numerically, you must make a distinction between an anarchist militant and a sympathiser. Any union could be organised and influenced by a minority of anarchist militants. This does not mean all the workers in a particular union are anarchists. However, if the workers respond to the anarchists's agenda, then you can consider the union or federation anarchist. The first Cuban Confederation of Labor was founded in 1925, and was composed of all kinds of trade unions, reformist, communist, etc.,. The anarchists were not in a majority, but the organisation, ideas, projects and manifestos, were from an anarcho-syndicalist point of view. Before the government persecution and communist treason, from 80,000 to 100,000 workers followed the anarcho-syndicalist agenda. In the first and second decades of the '40s, the Cuban Libertarian Association was reduced in numbers to several hundreds. Before Castro became a dictator, the same Association reported more than 2,000 militants. Most of them worked and had a decisive influence among several important unions like Transportation, Electrical Plants, Gastronomy, Construction, etc.,.

LG: Have any younger Cubans in the US taken an interest in anarchism or the Cuban movement?

FF: No, I don't think this new generation of Cubans (so-called Cuban-Americans) have taken any interest in anarchist ideals. There are several reasons: the indifference for social problems, Americanisation, Cuban

cultural and historical characteristics, etc.,. This is, however, nothing new in the country, which happens to be very nationalistic and with a powerful 'kultur' capable of changing to the American Way of Life different immigrants and exiles from stronger cultures than what Cubans have, like Germans, Jews, Italians etc.

LG: Are there, in your opinion any anarchists surviving in Cuba? Are there anarchist prisoners in Castro's gulags?

FF: As far as I can tell, I don't think so. Old comrades die or disperse, so we don't really know if there are any survivors, but I like to think that ideas do not die like humans do, and Cuba is not different in this matter to other parts of the world where anarchist ideals were an important part of working class society. I don't know of any anarchist political prisoners at the moment, however there is always the possibility that some in jail without our knowledge.

LG: I note that some Cuban anarchists were former CNT-FAI. Did they flee Franco only to end up in Castro's prisons or firing squads?

FF: At the beginning of the Revolution, 1959-60, some were detained and let go. Augustin Souchy was in Havana in those days and in a conversation with Abelardo Iglesias, Manuel de la Mata and Salvador Garcia, all members of the CNT-FAI during the Spanish Revolution, told his comrades of the recent visit to Cuba by 'old friends' from the Spanish and Italian Communist Party,

(continued from page 1)

plus £1 a day for adults, 50p for children, the total value of which will come to 30% less than the official poverty line. The Home Office will be allowed to house them wherever it chooses, and the Bill expressly forbids taking preferences to be with friends and family into consideration. Any asylum seeker who wishes to seek a judicial review of any decision will lack even this minimal level of support. Such support is not to be administered directly by the Home Office, an organisation which is, as Polly Toynbee put it in the *Guardian* on 5th May, "institutionally racist in a way that makes the police look like the Anti-Nazi League". In Opposition, Jack Straw called the Tories' 1992 attempt to remove rights from asylum seekers 'unjustified' and 'bizarre'. In office, he is happy enough to play the same game. Meanwhile, as the *Guardian* columnist Della Aitkenhead commented, "if the British believe there is a 'refugee' problem, it is largely because the government keep telling them there is" (3rd May).

Capitalism survives through the deliberate

Enrique Lister and the infamous Vittorio Vidale, invited by the Castro regime. Souchy warned them of the inevitable persecution from the new secret police in which Lister and Vidale were involved. The CNT comrades were involved in certain 'counter-revolutionary' activities and with the experience of Spain behind them, they knew how to escape on time with the protection of a Latin American embassy.

LG: The Canadian and European media are very soft on Castro and Cuba generally (our former Prime Minister Trudeau even considers Castro 'a friend'). Why is this the case? This friendliness existed long before the Cuba-as-capitalist-investment paradise phase of Castroism. Might this not show that the dispute between corporate capitalism and state capitalist 'socialism' to be somewhat of a game?

FF: The friendship among thieves, authoritarians, 'socialists' and neo-liberals is not a contradiction. Au contraire, this is typical political cynicism. History teaches the anarchist that in the past there was never a difference between Ford, Hitler, Stalin, Rockefeller or Franco. They all have a common desire, that of having the power of exploitation. Criminals, politicians or parasites, they all followed the same path; rule or dominate. The methods were different, but the purpose was constant oppression. Today is the same. Corporations, Castro, Clinton, the Pope or Blair, represent the same hunger for power and control and domination by fear or State terror. Therefore, I think they represent the eternal enemies of anarchism. The media respond in favour of the interests of government and capital since they pay the bills. The relation between globalisation and Castroism or even 'friendship before' is not a 'game' but is a serious and dangerous partnership of those who exploit and discriminate against a large portion of the Cuban people. In reality, I never saw any difference between dictators or presidents, popes or prime ministers, from 'right' or 'left', for me they all represent the same. There could be different tactics against the state or corporate capitalism, depending upon objective or subjective conditions in regard to the government or economic situations, but in the final analysis, they are all our most distinctly and deadly enemies.

fostering of division within the working class. If we accept, as Robin Cook says, that Europe is a continent thick with ghosts – old disputes and forgotten hatreds buried in shallow graves", if we seek to lay such ghosts to rest we will need to bury as well the system of exploitation which sustains them. To begin upon that task we need to re-forge the traditions of solidarity that the likes of Jack Straw so assiduously set out to destroy. In practical terms this means not simply providing practical support to the current influx of refugees and asylum seekers, necessary though this is, nor simply mounting political opposition to the Immigration and Asylum Bill. It means taking all possible steps, legal and illegal, to frustrate the internal policing of our freedom of movement, sheltering deportees, physically seeking to prevent their deportation and recognising also that those who seek to divide us, while claiming to be representatives of universalism, the 'party of the poor', are in fact our enemies and should be treated as such at all times.

Nick S

Tameside virgins read filth report

Last month, filth was on the menu at a public hearing into the state of old folk's homes on Tameside. These homes, which have been condemned in a report by social service inspectors, are at the root of a strike over pay cuts for staff that started over a year ago. Instead of negotiating with the strikers, their bosses (Tameside Care Group) sacked 200-odd of them last year.

The hearing heard accounts of the inspection report from sacked careworker Hazel O'Neill. She said: "At Yew Trees Care Home in Dukinfield old people's beds were made up with wet sheets covered in faeces. And that, according to the reports, the inspectors found that that floors were so wet with urine and filth that one's feet stuck to the floor". At the same time the *Manchester Evening News* ran a story on the reports which claimed that the Yew Trees Care Home "was found to have excrement on the toilet floor, soap and wash basin". It added that: "Residents were left waiting for meals and for help to the toilet".

The hearing was told that the inspectors found "stocks of food were low" and that "inmates were left sitting at the dining room table for one hour before dinner and for an hour after". Mrs O'Neill claimed that "residents were not getting tea all morning. She called for an independent inquiry into all the homes now.

Reporting in the *Manchester Evening News* it was stated: "An inspection of another of the group's (TCG) homes, Holme Lea in Stalybridge, found one resident was ignored by a senior staff member when she asked to be helped to the toilet, and the registered manager was unaware that fourteen residents had had sickness and diarrhoea".

There is evidence in the reports of short staffing on the night shift which could fall foul of the fire regulations. Mike Farmer for TCG has said that even if the homes were fully staffed "we wouldn't get them out in time" in event of a fire. The hearing was told that there is evidence that the night staff are using drugs, though this was not in the inspection reports.

For the employers Tameside Care Group operations director, Michael Farmer said: "Of course there were problems. The staff had to be replaced and new ones needed a period of time to get used to the ways and needs of the residents".

It was also claimed that there are dirty homes in other towns not just in Tameside. Councillor John Taylor, Chair of Social Services, argued that the problems had been rectified since the inspectors had been last year.

Care home crisis

Things are not likely to get much better and William Laing, a leading authority on care, was quoted in *The Economist* in March as saying: "1999 to 2000 could be an *annus horribilis* for care-home owners". The *Economist* reports: "The number of people aged 85 or more in Britain will treble by the middle of the next century". Thus, *The Economist* claims, "best estimates are that, even with more community care, that will mean doubling the number in care homes to around one million".

The reason people's feet are sticking to the floor and our old people are sleeping in soiled bedlinen is that cuts are being made, as at Tameside, and standards are falling. *The*

Economist notes with alarm that "providers' profits are shrinking: at typical occupancy rates, the margin is down to 50p per bed per night". With further shock it notes that "share

profits and taking "account of the providers' investment needs".

Reading this, I think I can see more Tameside-type solutions to the problems of old people being enacted around the country soon.

Playing the organ in a brothel

The problem is people feel like inmates in most old folk's homes. As a relative whose father was in a care home in Tameside told the hearing, "it's hard to know what service I should expect". She said: "We are not contacted when problems crop up, and I have to fight all the time to get support for him".

Is the person in an old folk's home 'inmate' or a 'consumer'? The middle classes tell us we are all consumers now, but in those kind of institutions they look more like inmates. I once asked my mother how it felt to live in one of those old folk's homes and she said "it does feel a bit like being a prisoner".

There was an uneasy feeling at the hearing that it was better to die before ending-up in one of those places. When you hear all this lot it makes you think there is something to be said for dying young. It is because some of these careworkers are enraged by the gross conduct of the Council and its cronies on the Tameside Care Group, they decided to put up for election against the Labour establishment in what is a local one-party-state. They are, as they admit, political virgins.

They are standing on a platform of Defend Public Service. Tameside was the first Council to privatise all its old folk's homes under an arms-length trust. Now Tameside Council is planning to sell off all its 17,000 council houses. The plan, which is termed a

'Large Scale Voluntary Transfer', involves transferring the properties to what is called a 'Registered Social Landlord' - and what Derek Pattison, the libertarian leftist leader of Tameside Trades Council, calls: "Yet another arms-length trust".

Thirty thousand leaflets have been issued across Tameside explaining how the Labour Council plans to hit the locals with sell-offs, rag-bag Trusts and dodgy land deals. The leaflet asks: "How can anyone have illusions about the efficiency of trusts and privatisation after the experience of Tameside Care Group? It was originally set up through the Labour Council in 1990 to run its twelve elderly person's homes. Since then, we have seen: a company crippled through debt and mismanagement, a deterioration in standards of care for the elderly in these homes, and two separate cuts in wages and conditions. This, despite Council promises that pay and conditions would be protected and the homes taken back under Council control if the transfer failed."

Good stuff! And there are anarchists locally supporting the election campaign. But we'll have to wait and see if these women, these political virgins, can in fact play the the organ in the brothel that is Ashton Town Hall. As I write, I understand the actor and left-winger Tony Booth, father of Cherie Blair, has been to see careworker candidates. Local press are excited to know if he pledged his support.

Mack the Knife

Stop Press:

The authorities in charge of Tameside Care Group may be falling foul of local election laws. It seems at least one of the political virgins - careworker Sheila Carpenter - has been denied access to voters in her ward living in one of the TCG old people's homes, Daisy Nook.

Old residents in the home are registered voters, and Sheila has been refused access because, as a former striking care workers, she was sacked. Sacked careworkers are not allowed on the premises of the care homes where they once worked.

Please note that the next Northern Anarchist Conference will be held in Manchester (same venue as the last one) on 22nd May, starting at 11am.

DEFEND PUBLIC SERVICES

What we stand for:

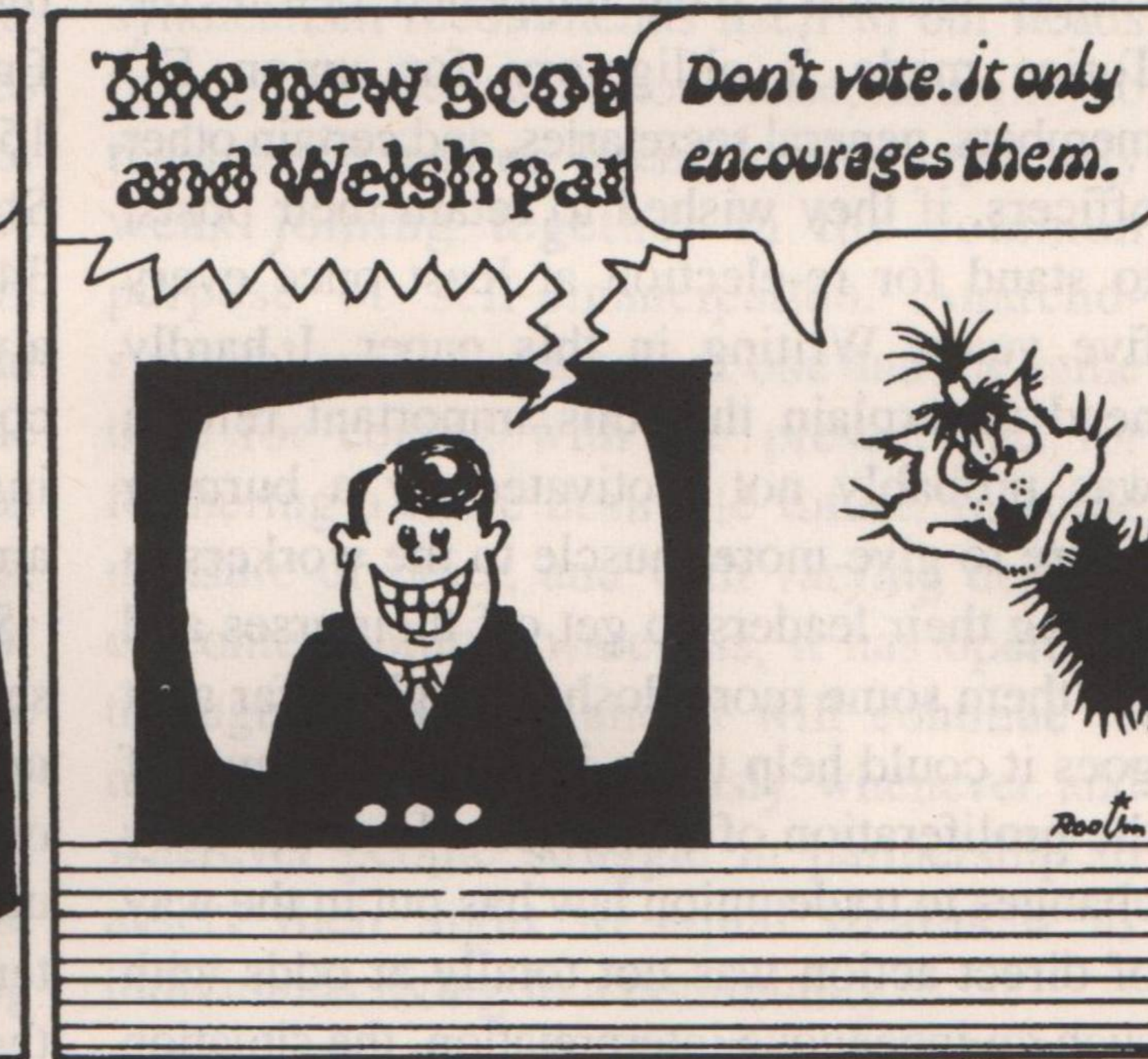
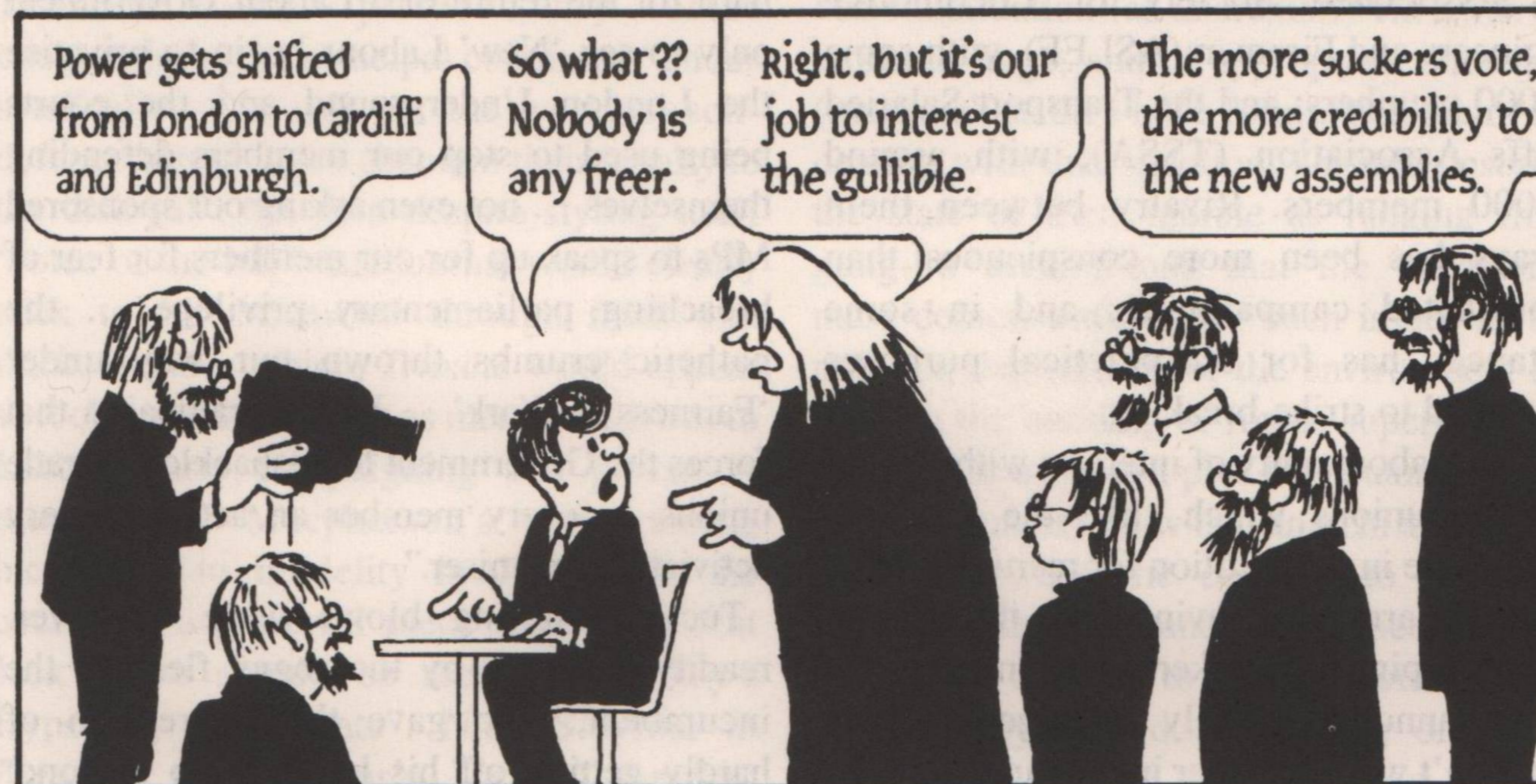
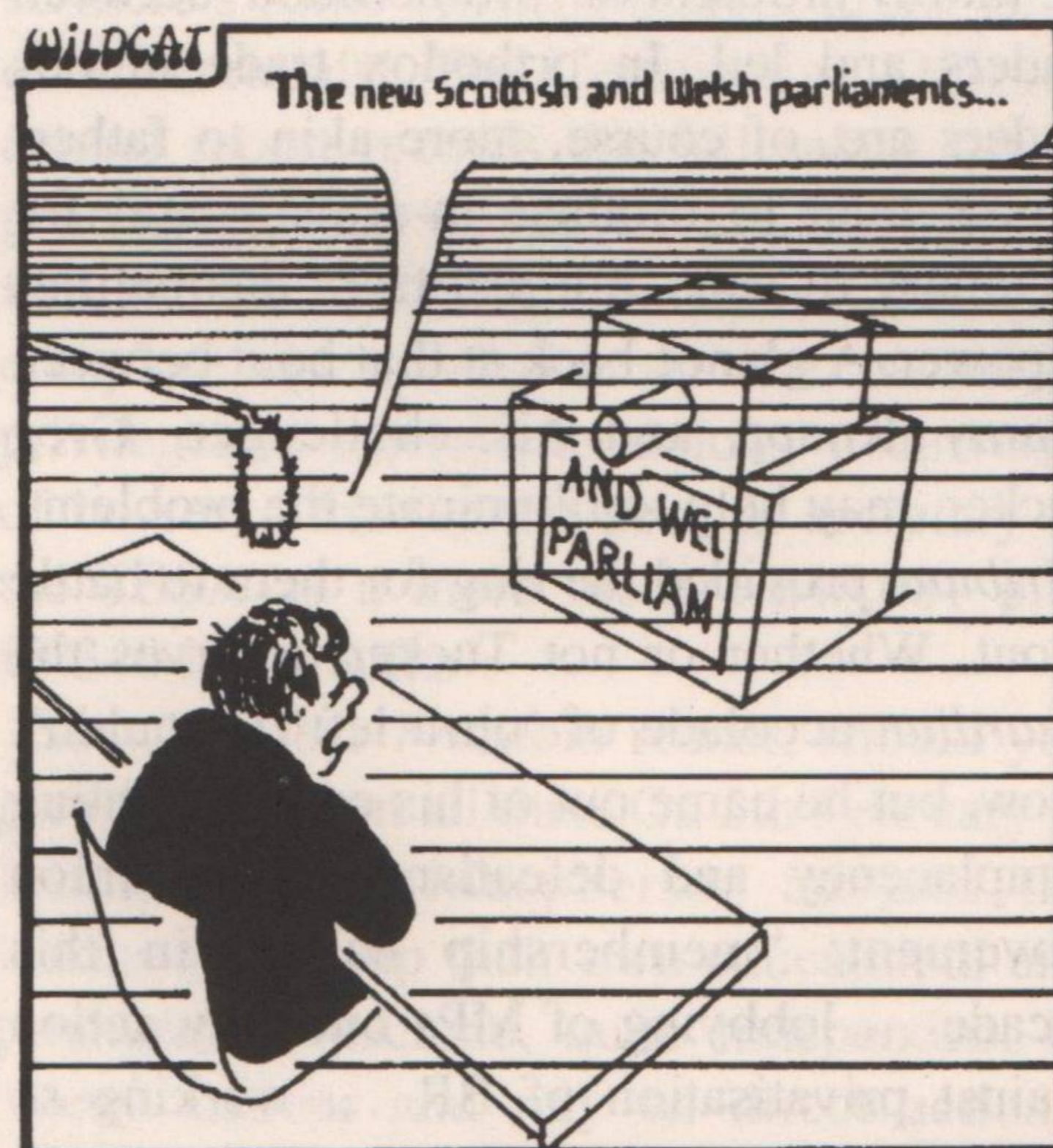
- We want public services maintained under the control of the authority, properly funded locally and nationally.
- We are against all forms of privatisation.
- We are opposed to cheap labour and casualisation.
- We are against jobs for the boys, sleaze and corruption.
- We are against all forms of prejudice and racism.

On Thursday 6 May: Vote for Defend Public Services

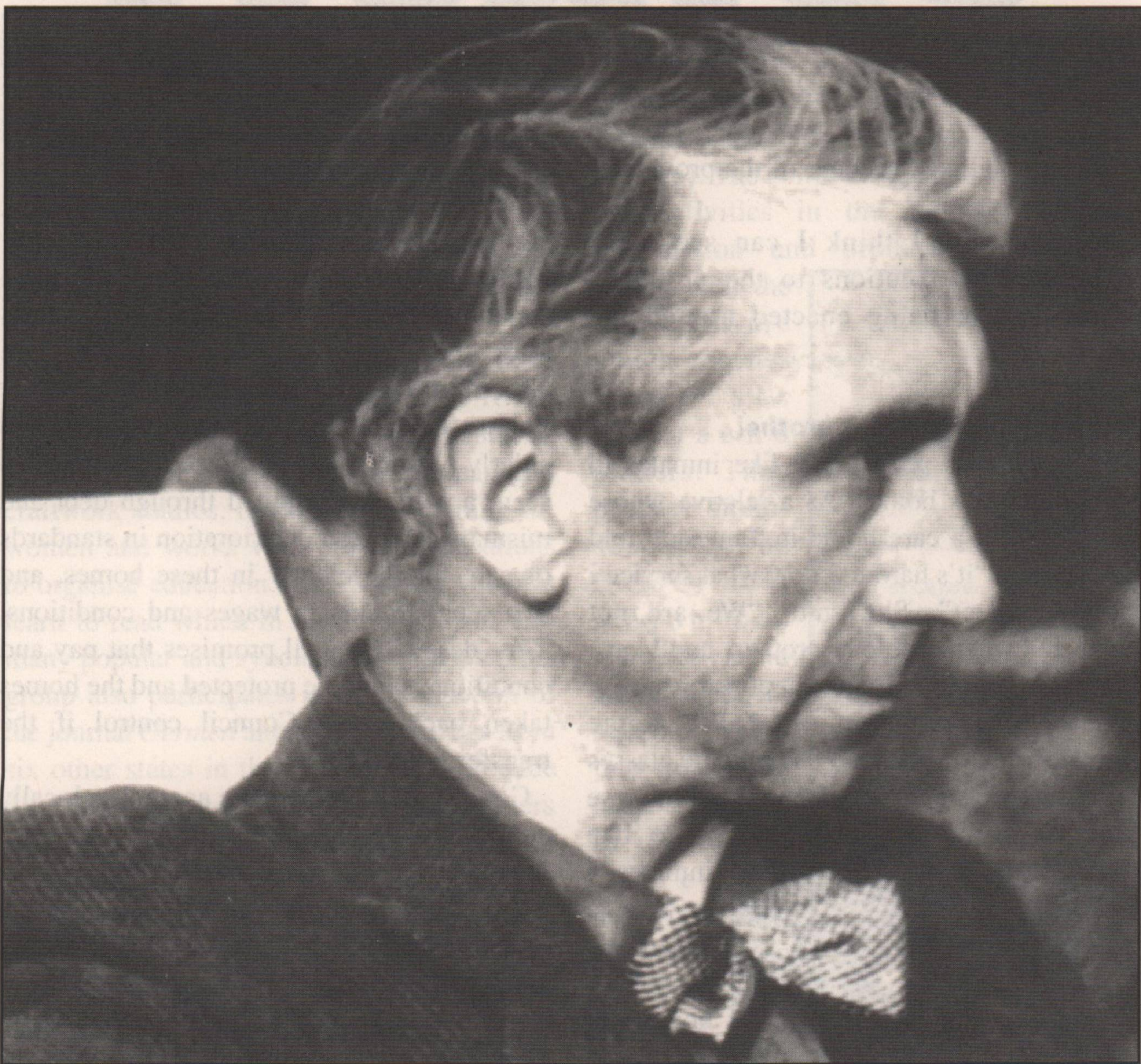
Right: March 1999, careworkers demonstration. Above: Tameside's 'political virgins' - the careworkers up for election.

prices are tumbling: for four of five quoted care companies, the average fall is 30% over the past three years while the FTSE all-share index rose by 48%".

Private care standards, claims *The Economist*, will likely fall in future. It writes that "some observers predict that Britain will become like the United States, where many homes do no more than keep old people alive by providing liquid feeding rather than meals". Oddly, *The Economist's* answer seems to be to get the local authorities to close down their own old folks homes because at £366 a week per resident, compared with £238 a week for those in private homes, they are more expensive. Then with the money saved they could help fund care in the private homes creating fatter



Herbert Read reassessed



Herbert Read believed that the creative arts are an essential part of the human evolutionary process of expanding consciousness, and so do I. Read wrote about many literary figures. Among them are Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Swift, Sterne, Cervantes, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Henry James, D.H. Lawrence, all of whom still have something to say to us as individuals (anarchists included) and as a society. This is also true of Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore, and Eric Gill who are among the painters and sculptors Read wrote about.

One of the basic tenets of Read's critical approach to literature was that it is necessary

to take into account the emotional and social conditions of the writer as a means to an understanding and evaluation of his work. This separated him off from what was becoming the prevailing moralistic criticism of his day and ours. For Read, it was the criticism of T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards primarily. In my chapter on Read as literary critic in *Herbert Read Reassessed*, edited by David Goodway, I agree with his approach but not always with his understanding and his evaluation. For example, I demonstrate why I think that Read's *Wordsworth* is his best extended literary criticism and remains unsurpassed to this day and why his 'In Defense of Shelley' is also first rate, but I

disagree in detail with his understanding and evaluation of Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode'.

Read also wrote about Romanticism as opposed to Classicism in both the creative arts and in criticism. In my view, his best work on the subject is 'Surrealism and the Romantic Principle' where he argues that "Classicism is the intellectual counterpart of political tyranny" while Romanticism is, at least implicitly, related to Anarchism. Alex Comfort made that relationship explicit in *Art and Social Responsibility*, and he dedicated the book to Herbert Read.

Read's emphasis on social and emotional conditions in his literary criticism led him naturally to the other basic tenet of his approach: psychoanalytic insight. He sought support for his position in the work of Freud, Jung, Adler, Trigant Burrow, Melanie Klein, and E.G. Schachtel. Though he was not an uncritical follower of Jung, he was always more comfortable with Jung's ideas than any of the others. Even when he borrowed terms from Freud, he usually understood them in Jungian terms. In my chapter on Read's use of Sigmund Freud, I demonstrate this distortion and conclude that Read saw his psychoanalytical sources through a lens of his own making and to some extent created an impasse for himself as a man and a critic.

I believe that in my two chapters I have taken some steps toward a fuller understanding of Read as a person and of his work. So do others in the book. However, more needs to be done. One of the hopes for this book is that it will help to reverse the trend allowing Read and his work to slip into obscurity and out of history just as Godwin slipped into obscurity during the nineteenth century and most of this one. My own hope, and, I believe, the hope of the other contributors, is that this book will help to establish Read's rightfully important position in recent intellectual history. In spite of his limitations, I believe that he does have one as

— COPY DEADLINE —

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 29th May, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 20th May.

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).

man, critic, creative artist, and anarchist.

Though his behaviour was not always consistent with his ideas (not an unusual situation), he thought and wrote as an anarchist explicitly from 1937 for the rest of his life. As evidenced by his work and reports about him as a person, Read was not a vicious or nasty man. I only met him once (in the late 1950s). In those four or five hours I spent in his company I found him to be patient, engaging, and informative. Read often claimed Kropotkin as one of his important early influences, and if he were alive today, I'm sure he would agree with the following comment by Kropotkin: "Man is appealed to, to be guided in his acts, not merely by love, which is always personal, or at best tribal, but by the perception of his oneness with each human being. In the practice of mutual aid, which we can trace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support, not mutual struggle, has had the leading part."

John R. Doheny

Herbert Read Reassessed, edited by David Goodway, is published by Liverpool University Press at £32 hardback, £17.95 paperback.

Colin Ward is moving house, but will be back next issue.

The common sense of syndicalism

I'm not sure who the fools are in this case, but April Fools' Day brought the news that Jimmy Knapp, general secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), had beaten off a challenge for his post by 8,776 votes to 4,535. A couple of decades back, when I was still a union man myself, the contest would have created more of a stir and its outcome rated a deal more than the *Guardian's* 'News in Brief' item headed 'Knapp beats off ultra left'. But who cares now? Not many RMT members for a start, since less than one in four bothered to vote. And not many *Freedom* readers give a toss either, I'll be bound.

But before I tell you why you should, let us pause for a moment's reflection on the ironic fact that we are talking about an event that simply wouldn't have happened before the Tories made it obligatory for union EC members, general secretaries, and certain other officers, if they wished to retain their posts, to stand for re-election at least once every five years. Writing in this paper, I hardly need to explain that this important reform was probably not motivated by a burning desire to give more muscle to the workers in urging their leaders to get off their arses and get them some more dosh, though as far as it goes it could help to do just that. But even if the proliferation of obstacles which the Tory changes to trade union law has put in the way of direct action was not totally at odds with such an ingenuous interpretation, the situation

in the case we are considering, labour organisation on (principally) the railways, would make it plain ridiculous.

Fragmentation of the whole railway system has done more than give a parasitic plague of 'wealth-creators' some nice 'little' earners. It has shattered the strength of law-abiding workers, since strikes in solidarity with workers employed by other companies are outlawed. And here we are talking about no less than a hundred different companies! Whenever they cannot secure a monopoly on their own terms, it may suit capitalists to compete, especially in the exploitation of a flexible labour force. For workers in general it is daft. Yet we still have the old three-union situation: the RMT, with a little short of 50,000 members working on the railways; the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), with some 15,000 members; and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA), with around 34,000 members. Rivalry between them always has been more conspicuous than coordinated campaigning, and in some instances has for all practical purposes amounted to strike-breaking.

So how about unity of interests within these separate unions which (like the teachers' unions) are in competition for recruits to their own little armies? Leaving aside the issue of unions roping in workers who in everyday terms cannot effectively act together since they don't work together in the same industry

(the RMT, for example, has a tiny tail of seamen and workers on the buses), there's the thorny problem of 'brotherhood' between leaders and led. In orthodox trade unions leaders are, of course, more akin to father-figures than to brothers-in-arms – and for pecuniary reasons, not just from inequalities of power. A glance back at that bout between Jimmy Knapp and his challenger, Greg Tucker, may help to illuminate the problem.

Tribune provided the ring for them to battle it out. Whether or not Tucker deserves the *Guardian* accolade of 'ultra left' I wouldn't know, but he came out of his corner fighting complacency and defeatism in the union movement: "membership halved in this decade ... lobbying of MPs our only action against privatisation of BR ... working so hard for the return of a Labour Government only to see 'New' Labour begin to privatise the London Underground and the courts being used to stop our members defending themselves ... not even asking our sponsored MPs to speak up for our members for fear of breaching parliamentary privilege ... the pathetic crumbs thrown our way under 'Fairness at Work' ... build a campaign that forces the Government to unshackle the trade unions ... every member an activist, every activist an organiser."

Tucker's telling blows were, however, readily absorbed by the soggy flesh of the incumbent, who gave the impression of hardly getting off his backside to respond:

"Tucker's hysterical attack on me and our union ... RMT will go into the new millennium as an independent industrial union – the one objective that has united all our members through the past two most difficult decades ... we are campaigning to win support for our alternative policies and have presented ideas to Government ... we have also proposed detailed plans ... and are devising policies ... we were very disappointed by the Queen's Speech ... but will now be working for legislation to be introduced ... we will look at how ... and will provide the resources to support ... we have adapted our structures ... and will continue to look at what is most effective ... to build on the work already done to advance the interests of members ... and strive to improve terms and conditions ... a sound basis on which to build ... we need the stability of continuity of leadership to further strengthen our union."

Tucker talked of mobilising the membership and giving them "the confidence that their actions will not be squandered by a leadership looking for an easy life". And there's the rub. 'Jaw jaw is better than war war', and negotiation is better than strike action provided the outcome is acceptable to those seeking a better life. But the interests of union officers (especially those in the higher ranks, whom realists should normally classify as part of the establishment) are simply not the same as the interests of the rank and file they purport to represent. Pecuniary privilege is only one element in the differential advantages generally enjoyed

(continued on page 5)

Cultural Battles: the meaning of the Vietnam-US war

essays by Peter McGregor

available from Visions of Freedom (POB 15, Enmore 2042, Australia, no price)

'Is politics the continuation of war by other means?'

Let us begin with a series of apposite quotations. The leaflet accompanying this interesting compilation of essays, which centre around the continuing debate on the meaning of the Vietnam-US War, has emblazoned across it the slogan "The Struggle of man against power is the struggle

of memory against forgetting". This matches quite closely a sentence which appears on the first page of Hobsbawm's magisterial 600-page work *The Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century* wherein he observes, in passing, "historians whose business it is to remember what others forget". Finally, that

postmaster of the art of realpolitik, Napoleon Bonaparte, says somewhere that all human history consists of the myths of the victors (but then he would, wouldn't he?)

It seems to me that these quotations provide the philosophical underpinnings of the book, which deals with the 'cultural battles' between the erstwhile protagonists in the military ones. From the outset we should be constantly aware of the seminal events of this tumultuous century, including the Vietnam-US War, however distasteful these may be. Furthermore, the victors should not invariably be allowed to win the peace. Yes I know the US failed militarily in Vietnam, but because of the stimulus provided by the war to its defence industries ended up even richer than before while the economy of their opponents lay in ruins. Common sense tells us that the only worthwhile definition of victory is being better off at a conflict's end than at the beginning. During this brief critique I shall therefore regard the Americans and their allies as the victors in the war who continue to make strenuous efforts to win the subsequent 'cultural battles'.

The author, Peter McGregor, sees the legacy of the war as consisting of two components: the failure of the aggressors to make amends and the inability of a unified Vietnam to 'reconstruct itself', perhaps an in-built failing in all centrally directed regimes which, as McGregor remarks, "reveal themselves [as] unable to deliver economic development, equality or justice, let alone freedom". Thus, the author tries to be impartial, although when push comes to shove he, like all most right-minded people, views the Americans and their cohorts as the bad guys – after all, the Vietcong didn't bomb Seattle or San Francisco.

Lack of space precludes discussion of the

book chapter by chapter, but nonetheless there are one or two general points worth exploring. In his conclusion the author refers to "the acceptance [by the military] of regular massacres of civilian as commonplace [which] surely constitutes moral self-incrimination". But this kind of behaviour – i.e. the massacre of civilians at My Lai – is an integral part of warfare and always has been. Contrast "We has to destroy the village in order to save it" (US PR officer, 1967) with "They make a wilderness and they call it peace (Tacitus, AD56-120). What happened in Vietnam was atrocious but not aberrant.

I do have one or two minor reservations regarding this otherwise well-presented and interesting work. The photographs which appear at the beginning of each chapter break up the text without being particularly striking in themselves, and the typeface employed is less easy on the eye than it might have been. Also a 'conclusion' of eight pages out of a total of 214 could have been expanded to draw together the threads of what has gone before.

This book should be a useful tool for change. The Vietnamese acting alone have little chance of winning the war of words which has followed the war of bullets. In an era dominated by electronic communications, a smallish industrialised nation has little or no chance against the most powerful state in the world. Nevertheless, this volume, drawing together as it does material which might have otherwise been irretrievably lost, could stimulate activists everywhere into helping to win the peace just as their predecessors helped to win the war on the streets and campuses of the Western World a generation and more ago. "God is invariably on the side of the big battalions".

Adrian Walker

Exciting new booklist hits the streets!

With this issue of *Freedom* all our subscribers will also receive our brand new Spring '99 Booklist, put together at incalculable cost in blood, sweat and tears. As usual it lists all Freedom Press books, pamphlets and periodicals, and a wide selection of as much of our other stock as we've got room for. It's always much more exciting to browse through a booklist at your leisure and discover things as you go, we know, but there are some things worth pointing out to newcomers or those who might be tempted by other more glitzy mail-order catalogues.

Firstly, there are no fictitious titles on our list, meaning that we do not put items we haven't got just to fill up space. We also endeavour to keep in stock at any one time as many titles as possible – a bit of a financial and administrative balancing act sometimes, and we are of course always at the mercy of our suppliers, as they say in the trade.

Secondly, this edition contains more items than ever before, a record number of which are now *post free*. Where we do have to charge postage we keep it to a minimum (do read the booklist information carefully before ordering to

save us all unnecessary headaches).

Lastly, we try to keep our prices as low as we possibly can (compare our list with the same titles on other people's lists, for example), and this edition of the booklist contains more reduced price items than ever before, most of them down to half price or even less. Some titles we have even been able to reduce further, such as Brian Morris's fine hardback *Ecology and Anarchism*, thanks to the generosity of the author.

Incidentally, we have noticed one mistake in the list: Colin Ward's excellent *Influences*, which you will notice has now been transferred to the post free section saving you 80p, is still listed at £7.95, but we are in fact now selling it for £3.95, saving you half the price.

Those who subscribe to *The Raven* but not to *Freedom* will also get the new booklist, but those who subscribe to neither will get nothing unless they ring or write to us requesting a booklist, in which case we will be only too happy to oblige. Bookshops and groups that normally order from us should also get one, but if yours doesn't arrive let us know.

KM

(continued from page 4)

by the leaders over the led, but is important enough on its own for early unions to have stipulated in their rule books that no officer should be paid more than the average wage of their members. Now there's an incentive for fighting for higher wages all round!

I thought it would be interesting to find out how closely the pay of the general secretaries of the railway unions measured up to this admirable rule. "I don't think that's something for general knowledge" the RMTs press officer told me and he could not be coaxed into revealing his boss's salary by my argument that surely RMT members had a right to know this. Never mind.

Once again we are in debt to the Tories, who (acting one presumes on their strange notion that, if they were given more leverage over them, rank-and-file unionists would put a stop to their leaders' supposed 'irresponsible militancy') have conferred on us all the right to know. So we can congratulate Jimmy Knapp in holding on to his £51,123 plus sundry pecuniary 'benefits', valued at £15,891.

Establishing a differential between those enjoying the fruits of office and the average wage of the ordinary members who philanthropically pay for them, however, proved next to impossible, as since the disintegration of the nationalised railway system no one attempts to keep a record of such unimportant figures. With ASLEF, however, I was more successful than with the RMT. The average take-home pay of loco drivers and assistants is between £25,000 and

£26,000. ASLEF's press officer was also coy about his boss's pay, but made a point of telling me that the new boss, David 'Mick' Rix, who ousted Llew Adams in an election last year, took less than he was entitled to – so there's some sensitivity there to the issue of differentials! The Certification Officer's annual report records the full salary of the general secretary of ASLEF as £52,980, with £13,305 in additional 'benefits', and – to complete the lowdown on the pecuniary privileges of our railway unions' triumvirate of bosses – that of the general secretary of the TSSA as a more modest £40,681 plus £8,340 in 'benefits'.

So why, dear *Freedom* reader, should you give a toss about all this? On 5th February in *Tribune*, Hugh Macpherson advised the unions to "set up their own educational and propaganda machine, quite independent of 'New' Labour and rely on direct action". *Tribune* didn't publish my letter congratulating its principal columnist "on his syndicalist-style call on 'the workers' self-defence battalions to abandon their loyalty to the disloyal", but then despite styling itself 'voice of the left', that journal would clearly stick to Mr Micawber through thick and thin. Besides which, *Tribune* would appear to look upon the unions as mere auxiliaries to Labour Party campaigning and power. A month after Macpherson's embarrassing incitement to infidelity in *Tribune* in the course of a powerful piece suggesting that Jack Straw should be seen as "Shelley's Hypocrisy reincarnate", Nick S wrote in *Freedom* that Labour's 'Zero Tolerance'

threats and laws were designed as a pre-emptive strike against the resistance it knew would arise to its policies "either through organised opposition or individual dissent". There may or may not be a touch of unrealism in this parenthetical remark about potential sources of resistance, but there is none in the assertion of the potentiality (as distinct from the likelihood!) of significant resistance to unacceptable decrees, to subjection and exploitation whatever form it takes, through collective opposition by such organised bodies as the unions. And if those three railway unions, for instance, were to restructure themselves on syndicalist lines and at least act together (if not, as logic dictates, merge) their situation would be transformed, notwithstanding the predominance of road transport today.

As far as I can gauge (or should I say 'guess at'?) perceptions among anarchists of their current situation (as anarchists) *vis a vis* the world at large, and of appropriate strategies (inasmuch as they have formulated them) for dealing with that situation, I would describe the state of their morale as ranging from gung-ho assumptions that the occasional mass demonstration over such issues as the poll tax, degradation of the environment (as through the building of roads, supermarkets, airports, or whatever, plus the squandering of finite resources) show that anarchist ideas are about to sweep the country, to a stoical Candide-like acceptance that since there is little they can do to reshape our 'global village' they should concentrate on doing their own thing and on living (and talking)

the good (i.e. anarchist) life. In between these two poles of feeling, I see a few scatterings of battling-on realists who have surrendered neither to despair nor to euphoric fixes.

These are not good times for anarchists. For myself, I confess that whatever I once hoped, I would now be utterly astonished were I to live to see much tangible progress towards 'the world of my dreams'. Until such progress is at all likely, whatever variation on the essence of the anarchist theme we favour, we are all dealing largely in theories while waiting (okay – and working too) for a 'revolutionary situation' to evolve. If 'syndicalism' means little or nothing to most people, neither does 'anarchism', which they are even more prone to misconstruing. And if anarchism commends itself to our hearts by its non-negotiable commitment to freedom and its indissoluble partner equality, syndicalism recommends itself to our heads through its sheer common sense, its ability to release the power latent in the separately weak joining together in the common purpose of self-emancipation. Anarcho-syndicalism is a strategy, at one and the same time for coping with the present and for furthering a more desirable future. In some measure or other, and with varying degrees of contemporary awareness, it has operated throughout history, and it will continue to manifest itself spontaneously whenever and wherever people struggle in partnership to assert their right to equal treatment as individuals living in a community.

Donovan Pedelty

Mexico

The rise, in the 1980s, of the punk movement, which was much more active and coherent in Mexico than in Europe, and the uprising of the Zapatistas in the mid 1990s contributed to the reawakening of some libertarian ideas which, although they had always been present, were somewhat dormant at the time.

In the sprawling capital of Mexico city there are today numerous groups: the CAL (Colectivo de Accion Libertaria) includes a savings co-operative, has set up self-managed craftwork studios, has organised training for women and works with other organisations to organise education centres where workers learn to read which in turn draws them into many popular and syndicalist struggles. This group also participates in the production of the journal *Germen* along with comrades from six other states in the country who produce the journal in rotation. Some of its members are involved in the Biblioteca Social Reconstruir which was set up and managed by the exiled Catalan Ricardo Mestre and constitutes a rich resource of documents and biographical material for the libertarian movement. Somehow succeeding in overcoming the ever present financial difficulties the Library organises conferences, courses and exhibitions without failing to participate in more general activities such as the celebrations of the 'Flores Magon Year'. Amor y Rabia was, until recently, another of the more active groups in the capital. After a process of internal debate, it would seem that they have entered into a new period where they have dropped their old name and have launched the publication of *Letra Negra*. Previously they were a part of the North American Love and Rage network and amongst its activities it was involved in the 'Chicago Martyrs' project which provided electricity and a Women's Centre for the Zapatistas in Santa Rosa in Chiapas along with the publication of the journal *Amor y Rabia*. The JAR (Juventudes Antiautarias Revolucionarias) was largely made up of young punks. They produced fanzines such as *Desde Abajo* and *Comunidad Punk*, both having a circulation of about a thousand, and they were involved in numerous struggles relating to counter-culture and resistance. Integrated into this group was the Comité Librado Rivera which in turn is part of the FZLN (Frente Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional) and was related to other anarchist groups in the country by the co-ordinating group RIVAL (Red Independiente de Voces Autonomas Libertarias) which brought together collectives from at least twenty different states, carrying out joint campaigns in those areas where it is represented. The Centro Cultural Libertario Flores Magon has its own library and organises debates, a cinema club and so on

and participates in the Autogestion group which is part of the student movement in UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico). The collective La Guillotina carries out activities in the field of counter-information and produces an excellent journal with the same name which reaches some six thousand readers. They profess themselves to be followers of Magon and libertarians although, surprisingly, they reject the name anarchist. In the capital there are numerous other groups (Resistencia Estudiantil, Trapo Negro, Juventudes Revolucionarios Flores Magon, Desahogo Personal) who in turn produce a fair number of journals (*Renegados*, *Contra lo Establecido*, *Resistencia*, *Zyntoma*, *Sociedad en Decadencia*, *Esperanza viva*). In the area of publications we would single out the work behind *Ediciones Antorcha* which for several years has dedicated itself to diffusing the ideas of Flores Magon.

In Guadalajara the main group we would mention is La Comuna Libertaria, which has evolved from the synthesis of three collectives: Apoyo Mutuo Flores Magon, Rabia and Accion Subterranea. In the main this is a punk group, its members run a centre for libertarian studies and publish the journal *La Hoja Libertaria* and are involved in campaigns of a wide variety (animal liberation, 1st May, Magon Days, etc.). Then there is also the Comité La Social a part of the FZLN which has launched struggles such as that of the Huichole Indians in defence of their land from the invasions which landowners have carried out with the unhidden support of the government. They are also part of RIVAL. In the capital of Jalisco there is the group Bandera Negra, some of whose members produce *Margen*. To the South in Oaxaca, there are several groups, among which is Sin Autoridad, a punk group which produces a street publication of the same name which aims to disseminate the ideas of anarchism and recuperate the figure of Flores Magon who was from Oaxaca. There is a libertarian presence in many other cities and states such as Queretano, Sinaloa, Monterrey, etc., which are to a great extent co-ordinated by the aforementioned group RIVAL.

Syndicalism

Lacking a specifically anarcho-syndicalist organisation some of the Mexican libertarians work within the FAT (Frente Autentico del Trabajo) a union with some thirty years of history behind it and which has some 50,000 members and is represented in about fifteen different states. The FAT organises itself in an assemblyist fashion and works towards a



resulted in a fair number of libertarians (both Mexican and internationally) being attracted by an open and pluralistic movement which in a fair measure has been rejuvenating. In the words of Subcomandante Marcos: "the guerilla in Chiapas will have to answer to the indigenous community".

self-managed socialism carrying out its work in four basic areas: workers issues, urban issues, peasant issues and co-operatives. At times it participates in struggles organised by anarchist collectives. Within the union libertarian ideas have influence and are valued.

Magon, the Zapatistas and the indigenous peoples

1998 saw the celebration of Flores Magon Year, which turned out to be an event which brought together the majority of comrades in the country with the aim of paying homage to the name of the tireless libertarian and to reinstate it as a reference point which is still relevant today. The land struggle, in Mexico, today has the same urgency that it had in the 'mad years' when Magon was alive. His ideas still find an echo among young Mexican anarchists and also a fair number of indigenous people in the South. In the state of Oaxaca more than four hundred villages run their affairs today according to the system of 'use and custom' rejecting political parties and electing its own representatives at an assembly. Those elected, who receive no salary, far from exercising power over the people, are obliged to give a continuous account of what they are doing and can be recalled at any time. Similar experiments are being put into effect in the Zapatista controlled part of Chiapas and, to a lesser extent, in other states. Many of the indigenous organisations are members of CNI (Congreso Nacional Indigena) which sprung up along with the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and which is seeing a lively debate about the forms of self-management the communities should adopt. Members of the Desde Abajo group are involved in the Oaxaca organisations UCIZONI (Union de Campesinos Independiente de la Zona de Itsmo) and CAMPO (Centro de Apoyo al Movimiento Popular Oaxaqueño). Both groups work for Communitarian Socialism and strongly support self-determination for the Indian peoples and its members have suffered numerous attacks and threats from the landowners and paramilitaries in one zone, that of Itsmo, which is of great economic and strategic importance.

With regards to Chiapas, libertarians have been involved right from the start in 1994. The evolution that has been undergone by those who began from Marxist-Leninist positions has reached the level of 'rule obediently' which in turn sums up the indigenous attitude to authority and has

Many Mexican collectives are participating in the FZLN, as we have seen, through their own committees and the FZLN having rejected the notion of taking power also will not participate in elections. It is quite common to find anarchists in Chiapas acting as observers in the Zapatista communities carrying out journalistic work or bringing together civil organisations which support the Zapatista cause and the indigenous communities.

Mexico, from what we have just seen, can count on the most lively and promising movement on the continent. Dispersion and the lack of co-ordination between the various struggles which have been subjected to heavy repression figure among the main obstacles to be overcome. But Mexicans can also count on one major advantage: the indigenous communalism has shown for years how viable anarchist ideas really are. The appearance of the Zapatistas on the political landscape has also gone hand in hand with the awakening on the Indian consciousness, which had been dormant for some time, and which is now reclaiming its just rights. There is a nightmare taking place in the dreams of the neo-liberal Mexican government and its powerful neighbour to the north a nightmare which began in January 1994: the twelve million Indians who live in the country (who have shown themselves less manipulable by the usual means: the press, television, etc.) have risen up in arms and with a new sense of dignity. The government will do all it can, let us not delude ourselves, to squash them. It is wise therefore that we keep an eye on the future and that we learn how to support not only the libertarian Mexican movement but also those involved in other struggles who, although they do not declare themselves to be anarchists, show themselves, in their daily activities, to be very close to our own ideas.

Translated from CNT, March 1999

— Mexican contacts —

Biblioteca Social Reconstruir
Morelos, 45. Despacho 206, Col. Centro
06002 Mexico DF, Mexico
libertad@mail.internet.com.mx

La Comuna Libertaria
Apdo. Postal 1-1444, CP 44-101 Guadalajara,
Jalisco (Mexico)

JAR
Apdo. Postal 137-030, CP 09291 Mexico DF,
Mexico

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Anarchism and Communism

Dear *Freedom*,

Richard Garner (letters, 3rd April) states that Kropotkin contradicts himself when he (Kropotkin) argued that "Who, then, can appropriate for himself the tiniest plot of ground in such a city, without committing a flagrant injustice?" while allowing individuals to hold land for personal use. He asks me what I "believe 'for himself' means, if not personal use?" and asks me (and Kropotkin) to "make up your mind".

However, in my letter I did explain what I thought Kropotkin meant by 'for himself' – that from the context Kropotkin was discussing landlordism and not land for personal use. This can be seen from page 90 and from the comments I quote from pages 95-96. Kropotkin on page 90 is discussing the abolition of landlordism and on pages 95-96 Kropotkin is discussing those who have a house suitable for their own needs. There is no contradiction, other than that generated by quoting rhetoric out of context. Indeed, in the chapter on expropriation in *The Conquest of Bread* he states that expropriation would be limited to those forms of 'property' that allow the exploitation of other people's labour, thus suggesting the possession of land (and other resources) for personal use Kropotkin defends on pages 95-96 of the same work.

It is interesting to note that Mr Garner does not address the fact I pointed out that Proudhon also argued that "Land cannot be appropriated" (Chapter 3, part I of *What is Property?*). Proudhon, it is well known, supported the use of land (and other resources) for personal use. How, then, can he argue that the "land cannot be appropriated"? Is Proudhon subject to the same contradiction as Kropotkin? Of course not. As I explained in my initial reply, we must take into account the difference between private property and possession, between appropriation and use. The former leads to

usury and domination while the latter promotes liberty. That Mr Garner ignores my basic argument (and a large chunk of my letter) suggests an unwillingness on his part to address it and the implications it has for his own arguments.

On a related matter, Mr Garner suggests that the "second logical failing" of anarchist-communists is that we have "still asserted that we don't have a right to own private property" while 'voluntary' (why the inverted commas? Perhaps Mr Garner does not believe us?) communism "implies that people have the right to choose not to own property privately". This, he claims, "necessarily implies the right to own property, which is the same as a right to privately own property". All I can say is that Mr Garner seems intent in ignoring the bulk of my letter in order to create a straw man. I argued in my letter that there was a difference between private property and possession. The former is a means to exclude people from resources you own but do not use (landlordism, for example, is based on this). This basic point was explained by Proudhon in 1840. I would have imagined that an anarchist would be familiar with this basic libertarian position and analysis. Kropotkin was aware of it. In *The Conquest of Bread* he mentions "the form of possession of the instruments of labour" and of economists' "thesis in favour of private property against all other forms of possession" (pages 145-146). Which, to state the obvious, means that there are many different ways to possess an item, private property being but one.

The aim of anarchist-communism is, to quote another of Kropotkin's work, to place "the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home" (*The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thoughts*, page 7). In other words, to give individuals possession of the goods they need (in their own home!) and for them to use them to maximise their pleasure. This, of course, implies individual possession of the products a person decides

to consume (including homes). However, this does not imply property in the capitalist sense. And, of course, this basic principle of possession applies to those who do not desire to join the communist-anarchist commune. They would have the same rights to possess the resources they need to live (i.e. to produce the consumption goods they need). This does not imply the "right to own property privately" as it currently means. It implies the same rights of possession ('use-rights') as those who live in the communist-anarchist commune. As I argued in my original letter.

Mr Garner seems to want to call two different things the same name. He desires to call the use-rights based possession of anarchism the same name as the property-rights of capitalism. This just produces confusion. For example, the right-wing icons (and decidedly non-anarchist) Murray Rothbard, Frederick von Hayek and Mrs Thatcher all supported 'property' and 'private property'. Does this mean that Mr Garner (and anarchists like Tucker) mean the same thing when he talks about 'private property'? I doubt it. As John Stuart Mill pointed out over a hundred years ago, the "powers of exclusive use and control are very various, and differ greatly in different countries and in different states of society". To use the term 'private property' to describe many different social customs is simply silly (and produces silly comments, such as the Tory MPs – in *Saturn's Children* – who argued that 'primitive communism' did not exist as tribal people 'own' their own clothes and weapons! Talk about missing the point). It also seems to ensure that communist-anarchism is subjected to straw men arguments.

Mr Garner states that "housing co-operatives own houses as corporate property". The same can be said for the communist-anarchist commune. The members of the commune possess the resources of the commune in common (and consume many of its products individually just as the housing co-op members control their own home). Those who do not wish to pool their resources are free to live outside (as happened in the collectives in Spain, for example). However, they have no means to

appropriate land and resources and, so, just possess what they actually use. For individuals to appropriate resources implies that they are physically stopping people from using any excess they own, or hiring people to do so, and only allowing others access when they agree to submit to the property owners' authority – both of which are the germs of the state. This is an aspect of 'property' which Mr Garner continually fails to highlight, I must add, when he defends it as the paradigm of liberty.

Thus, I would suggest, that Mr Garner seems intent in attacking straw men. Kropotkin does not (nor communist-anarchists in general) show a contradiction in his argument as communist-anarchism does not mean the end of individual possession (how could it? Individuals would obviously possess their clothes, for example, the food they take from communal stores and so on). What it does mean is the socialisation of the resources of those who wish to live in a communist society, while leaving those who do not the necessary resources to live ("the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same" – *The Conquest of Bread*, page 81). It is, as I argued in my initial letter, the end of *private property* in the means of life (i.e. the ability to exclude others from resources you are not currently using) and their transformation into a combination of communal and individual *possession* (as would be implied by the term 'free communism').

If Mr Garner desires to use the term 'private property' to describe all forms of possession, then he is free to do so. However to do so cannot help but breed confusion as well as helping to ignore important differences between two essentially different concepts. One concept is capitalist, and so generates exploitation ('property is theft') and authority ('property is despotism') and which no anarchist can support and remain an anarchist. The other is libertarian, the idea of individual possession in Proudhon's sense of the term, and one which communist-anarchism is based on. As I tried to make clear in my last letter. Sadly Mr Garner decided to ignore that aspect of my argument.

Iain Mckay

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Please keep
sending in your letters
and donations... 

Mobilising against the war

Dear *Freedom*,

Ron Allen (ACF) is critical about the lack of support from anarchists and libertarians mobilising against the war in the Balkans (letters, 1st May). There are many reasons why people may not come on a demonstration: age, infirmity, distance, child care needs and so on. Or just that people see this kind of activity as a pointless exercise which will achieve nothing.

On the other hand many comrades are not ex-Marxists nor the so-called class struggle anarchists. They would not touch a demonstration which exhibited meaningless clichés such as 'NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR', regarding such banners and placards as simply an attempt by one or other group to use a serious activity to put over their private aims, an insult to the people's suffering.

I am seriously disturbed by the Balkan war, especially the crass stupidity of pulling out the United Nations observers and so enabling the Serbian army and the paramilitary police to carry out their work unobserved (except from twenty thousand feet). It is as stupid as starting the Second World War, which meant the international press left Germany and enabled the nazis to exterminate the Jews, the gypsies, socialists, homosexuals and others unobserved in what became The

Holocaust. If the Second World War had been avoided, Hitler's Germany might have collapsed within a decade.

The main function of a demonstration is to either signify to those in power that there is an opposition to the state's activity and to get ideas over to people. I do not, however, see it as an excuse to put over ideas which have nothing to do with the situation and might seriously confuse the watcher or just enable them to say 'Oh, it's just the silly lefties again, ignore them'. What is happening in the Balkans is too serious for that.

Peter Neville

Who are we?

Dear *Freedom*,

We are a group of people squatting the building in 73B Church Street in Stoke Newington. We entered this place in December and since then we have been creating possibilities to use this existing potential in the sense of a community centre. And in the course of focusing on an interactive life with our community, we are offering space with the aim of diffusing cultural, political or any other currently important nature information, also about any projects coming up in the future. We've got facilities to provide a welcoming atmosphere for these purposes.

So if you are a collective, a group or an individual (maybe looking forward to meeting more people getting involved in one way or another) and want to share your knowledge and interest with others coming along, please feel free to contact to us as soon as possible.

For May we've planned a whole week of compensated information of all sorts, and we are thinking of establishing regular informative afternoons or evenings after that.

Any reaction to this letter from your side will be very much appreciated by us, so get in touch.

Anon

Correction

Dear *Freedom*,

Here is a contribution to your Overheads Fund – with this evil, stupid war in the Balkans we need *Freedom's* voice of sanity more than ever (and Donald Rooum's cartoons).

The Gremlins have been messing up your typesetting. Gladys Marin, not Gladys Mann, is the name of the Chilean CP leader ('Impressions of Chile', 17th April).

Larry Gambone

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**The London
Anarchist Forum**

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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 —

- 14th May** General discussion
- 21st May** The Contribution of Norbert
Elias to Libertarian Thought (speaker
Peter Neville)
- 28th May** General discussion
- 4th June** Is Anarchism a Religion?
(symposium)
- 11th June** General discussion
- 18th June** Cultural Anarchism (speaker
Diana Mavroleon)
- 25th June** General discussion
- 2nd July** Anarchism and Genetic
Modification (speaker Donald Room)
- 9th July** General discussion
- 16th July** The Baby Milk Scandal (speaker
Edmund McArthur)
- 23rd July** General discussion
- 30th July** Authority and Credentials
(speaker Adrian Williams)
- 6th August** General discussion

Anyone interested in giving a talk or
leading a discussion, please contact Peter
Neville at the meetings giving your subject
and prospective dates and we will do
our best to accommodate.

Peter Neville
for London Anarchist Forum

**Two-day Socialist Conference organised
by the Revolutionary Socialist Network
to be held on**

5-6th June 1999 in Bristol

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Sunday 30th May

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Sunday 27th June

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Telephone Vivienne for more info:
01509 230131 or 01509 236028

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