

Out with the old

This month there has been more evidence of a brutal attitude to old people, this time from doctors. Only last week it was discovered that doctors treating a 66-year-old woman secretly decided not to help her if she suffered a heart attack.

Mrs Baker, a retired teacher from Portsmouth, said last week that she had found 'Not for 555' written in her notes, a code meaning 'not for resuscitation' as 555 is the hospital number for the emergency team called in cases of cardiac arrest.

It seems the staff at the hospital wanted to free up some beds. Mrs Baker said "Why should I be killed off just to save NHS money?" This case was highlighted by the charity Age Concern, which is campaigning against age discrimination in the Health Service.

Sally Greengross, the director of Age Concern, claimed that "the evidence points to a disregard of the national guidelines. Once again we hear from older people who believe they are written off by the NHS because of their age".

A spokesperson from Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust declared that "we have admitted to Mrs Baker that her notes were marked inappropriately".

Cruel treatment

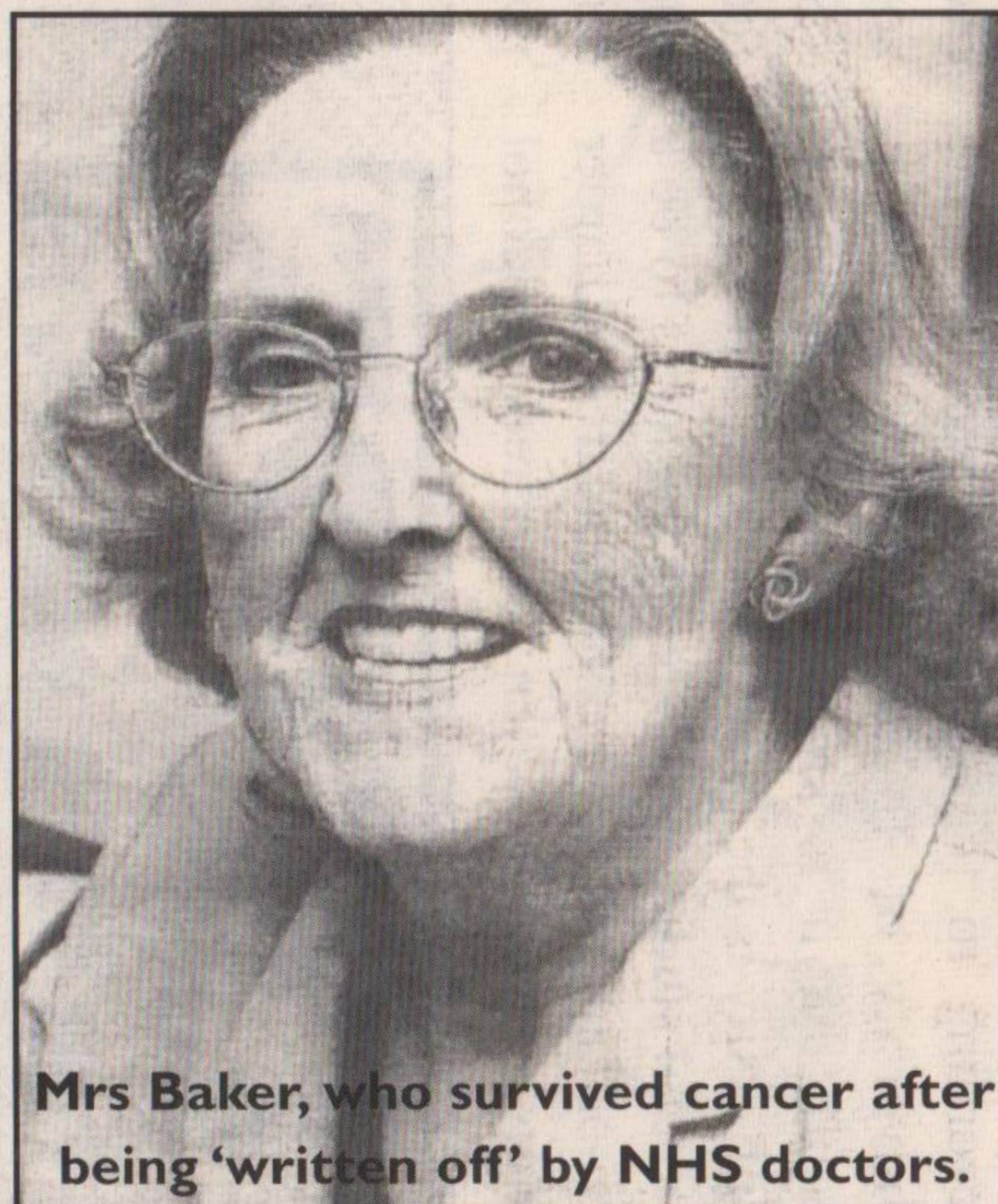
This was not the first time this month that cruel treatment of the old came to the public attention. Earlier in the month *The Sunday Times* reported on a doctor who claims that "patients are denied life-saving treatment, are grossly neglected and are given drugs which hasten death".

Rita Pal, a junior doctor, is so shocked by her experiences that she is leaving the profession. In a dossier she is submitting to the General Medical Council, she says that "I have witnessed doctors who want to keep beds clear by withdrawing treatment or actively assisting in death to the point where it becomes

involuntary euthanasia". The cases Pal witnessed include:

- A doctor who ordered the withdrawal of life-saving medication from a dying patient after stating the hospital needed beds.
- A diabetic patient in her nineties was deprived of basic medical attention after a nurse said 'She will die anyway'.
- Critically ill patients whose lives were cut short after being given 'unnecessary' doses of diamorphine, which is commonly known as heroin.
- A doctor who, when told about a patient dying from a liver complaint, said 'Well, he is over 60' and made no effort to administer medical attention.

At Selly Oak hospital she was disturbed at the free use of diamorphine, which eases pain and is used to treat heart conditions, but can speed up death. On one occasion she was so anxious a dose of diamorphine she had been ordered to give would be fatal that she injected it into the mattress of the patient. When another doctor saw the patient was alive the next day he said 'Oh, she is still alive - didn't you start her on diamorphine?' The patient, who was suffering from pneumonia, later recovered and left the hospital.



Mrs Baker, who survived cancer after being 'written off' by NHS doctors.

Pal reported similar alleged abuse of diamorphine at North Staffordshire. On one occasion a female patient died after being given what Pal considered an unnecessary dose. Pal decided to get out of the NHS after she failed to save the life of a patient prematurely discharged with internal bleeding. She suspected the patient was bleeding to death as he lay on a trolley in the Accident and Emergency area, but no staff around had the necessary expertise to treat him. The patient started to vomit blood, but there was no intensive care bed available.

On speaking to a senior member of the medical team she was told, 'Well, he is over 60'. The patient belatedly got the necessary treatment, but died.

Anarchists and bed sores

The northern anarchists have been heavily involved in the debacle of the sacking of 214 careworkers at twelve Tameside old people's homes, and which led to a decline in care in the area. In Sefton on Merseyside a similar scandal has been going on with residents being left with bed sores that you could put your fist in. In the Tameside case in Greater Manchester, Tameside Care Group were criticised by health inspectors over the conditions in some of their care homes.

Recently *The Sunday Times*, in an undercover investigation, revealed patients at two hospitals were not getting "proper medical attention, were left in soiled clothes for long periods and were routinely neglected". Last December *The Daily Telegraph* reported that "the geriatric ward at Thanet General Hospital in Margate, Kent, was used as a dumping ground for 'forgotten people'." The *Telegraph* suggests there is plenty of proof that in the treatment of cancer, strokes, heart disease and mental health, old people do not get equal treatment.

Albert Shore

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The poor are increasingly facing ...

Financial Exclusion

"Banking establishments are moral and religious institutions" – G.M. Bell, nineteenth century banker

Barclays Bank has moved to close a tenth of its branches – 172 outlets, most of them in rural areas. At the same time, it has been revealed that Barclays CEO Matthew Barrett will collect a £30.5 billion bonus for his efforts at restoring Barclays' profitability. Banking is engaged in what it terms a 'flight to quality' – a withdrawal of banking services from the poor. From the point of view of the financial services industry, this is simply a matter of risk avoidance. Financial exclusion, we should note, takes two forms in that it can be seen in both the wholesale withdrawal of banking facilities from poor areas and in the denial of financial services to the poor as individuals. As Andrew Leyshon and Nigel Thrift have noted: "It is becoming increasingly difficult for many citizens of developed countries to gain access to the financial system. Without access, the conduct of everyday life within a contemporary capitalist society can become extremely problematic. One reason for this has been the growth of non-cash financial transactions, both in Britain and in the United States. Employees may find it more difficult to get paid unless they have a bank account, as

history of personal banking" (quote from 'Geographies of Financial Exclusion' in *MoneySpace*, Routledge, 1997).

Between 1982 and 1992, 17% of bank branches in Britain were closed. A 1992 Euromonitor survey found that 81% of adults in the UK had a bank account. Only 70% of adults had a cheque book, 60% had a cash card and 58% a cheque guarantee card. Broken down by social class, the nature of financial exclusion becomes clearer.

Adults without a current bank account in the UK, mid '80s (figures taken from J. Ford, *Consuming Credit: Debt and Poverty in the UK*, Child Poverty Action Group, 1991):

By social class	%
E	58.7
D	43.7
C2	30.8
C1	18.2
AR	11.8

Save for rhetorical denunciations from New Labour, there has been little constructive

opposition to this process. Writing in *The Observer* of 9th April 2000, Gregory Palast observed that "America's Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) bars closing a



branch unless the bank can prove to the satisfaction of the Federal Reserve or the courts that it will continue to look after the community's banking needs. NatWest executives might provide the Blair government with some experienced advice on this matter. While its new owner, Royal Bank of Scotland, has and will close scores of branches in the UK with impunity, the acquirer

of NatWest's US operations, Fleet Bank, had to pony up several hundred million dollars to fund low income, rural and small business lending programmes to maintain and expand financial services to American customers it hoped to dump". All this is true up to a point. The 1977 Community Reinvestment Act was introduced "to encourage regulated financial institutions to fulfil their continuing and affirmative obligation to meet the credit needs of their communities, including low and moderate income neighbourhoods, consistent with safe and sound operation of such institutions" (Federal Register, 1978: 47, 144). In some states, smaller financial institutions that are state-chartered are covered by additional state-level community reinvestment legislation. The CRA has forced banks to enter into 'negotiated restructuring' with poor communities over closure plans, such that, as Palast points out, "banks seeking merger approvals or branch relocations have" (continued on page 3)

Following the recent Police Foundation report, should there be ...

Changes to the current drug laws?

On Tuesday 28th March the Police Foundation (a charity consisting of ex-cops, lawyers and 'drug experts') issued a report calling for changes in the law on illegal drugs. The report recommended some very conservative changes: the downgrading of ecstasy and LSD to class B drugs, carrying reduced penalties for possession; the reclassification of cannabis as a class C drug, with possession becoming a non-arrestable offence; and as a counterweight, the introduction of a new offence of drug trafficking targeted at dealers. Unsurprisingly, the Government's official 'Drugs Tsar', Keith Hellawell, immediately rejected the report. His condemnation of it was followed by similar responses from the Home Office and Tony Blair. The latter declaring it would 'send out the wrong signals'. The truth is cannabis is already tacitly decriminalised. The cops, most of whom support decriminalisation for cannabis, have declared they have far more important things to be doing than busting people for having a puff. Hellawell claimed the changes to the law, suggested by the two year study, would 'make things worse'. He's right, the cops would have to increase their anti-cannabis activities and waste their time even further. Though this is probably not what he personally had in mind. People like Hellawell, Straw and Blair, and their equivalents in the States, comprise a 'moral minority' pushing an anti-drug hysteria, based on ignorance and irrationality. Unfortunately these are the people who control our lives.

In the real world the 'liberal' response of the police also reflects the views of the general public, the vast majority of whom

would like to see cannabis decriminalised, if not legalised. It is not only the cops who have sussed public opinion and taken stock of reality. Most of the British Establishment is in favour of a change in the law. One hidden reason the new report fell on deaf ears may have been that it was too conservative for many people in the executive!

Even the House of Lords, that bastion of reactionary conservatism, has got in on the act. In 1998 a report from one of its sub-committees recommended that cannabis be legally available in cases where it has a positive health value, such as in multiple sclerosis and pain relief. Again this report was rejected by the 'moralists' in the anti-drugs crusade who regard it (hopefully correctly) as the thin end of the wedge for general cannabis decriminalisation.

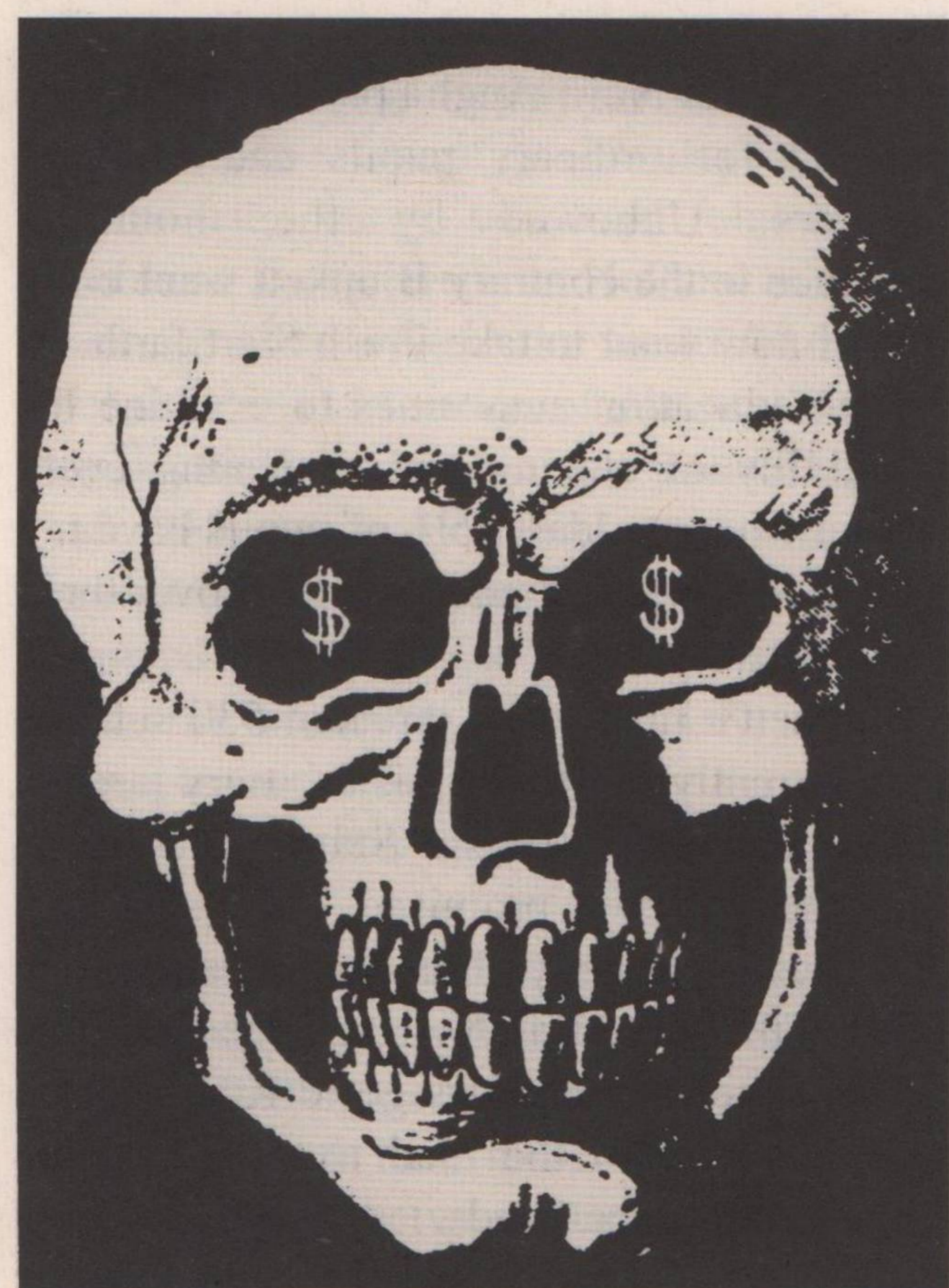
We are in a strange situation here. We have two parallel states operating a twin drugs policy. A 'democratic liberal state' comprising the executive and cops, supported by most of the legal establishment and the general public, and a authoritarian anti-democratic state in the form of Blair and his cronies. It will be interesting to see how this is resolved.

A similar situation exists in the States, where an aggressive Federal anti-drugs program is at war with cannabis growers and users in California and Arizona. Where cannabis was legalised for medical use two years ago following a majority vote by the people of those states. Using remarkably similar language to our own anti-drug fanatics, the Feds have closed down legal operations in both states. Fortunately this fascistic activity has even more alienated the American public from their central govern-

ment, and the tables appear to be turning. Meanwhile in Britain a recent case in which a man was acquitted by a jury for the possession of cannabis plants, when it was discovered he was an MS sufferer, has set a precedent which could force a change in the law.

As usual Europe is further advanced in this process than most of the Anglo-American world and seems relatively free of hysteria. A French government report recently stated that cannabis posed a minuscule threat to public health and social order compared to problem drugs like alcohol, and recommended appropriate changes in the law. Similar attitudes are emerging in Germany and other European countries. Globally, the WHO (World Health Organisation) has released details of a study (after initial attempts to suppress its findings) that came to similar conclusions as the French report. One notable exception to the appalling record of the Anglo-American world is New Zealand, where smoking and the growing of cannabis crops is no longer a criminal offence, even if intended for recreational use. It is also possible that Australia will go the same way.

The argument of the anti-drug campaign is entirely irrational. The official state line is that rigorous clinical and social studies are still necessary to assess the potential threat posed by cannabis, and other soft drugs (a strange attitude in striking contrast with their take on GM research!) The truth is that these studies have already been performed. Scientific research has revealed that cannabis use entails hardly any health risk whatsoever. A recent Harvard study of the effects of the daily use of cannabis revealed slight (continued on page 7)



employers prefer to pay wages and salaries via direct credit transfer for reasons of efficiency and security. For similar reasons governments also attempt to use non-cash financial transmission wherever possible. An increasing number of pensions and benefits are paid by credit transfer or crossed cheque in Britain, despite the fact that as many as 35% of people who receive benefits are not in possession of either a bank or a building society account. It is also far more difficult to pay bills without the intermediation of a financial institutions while it is all but impossible to obtain credit from a bank or building society without evidence of a

Fresh Start for Three Big-Heads

No problem is too difficult for 'Superhead'. If any school anytime, anywhere fails to respond to Blunkett's orders he sends in Superhead to save the educational world from the dark forces of conservatism. The failing school is closed, teachers are sacked, pupils are expelled and lo and behold from the ruins of a failing school a bright new, shiny institution arises. Socially disadvantaged pupils, an unworkable curriculum, gross under-funding are all as nothing to Superhead! Ten schools have been given the 'Fresh Start' treatment since the scheme began eighteen months ago. Already three immodest big-heads have fallen back to earth as their reborn schools proved impervious to their miracle touch. Whether they jumped or were pushed, Torsten Friedag, Carol McAlpine and Tony Garwood all resigned from their elevated positions in the same week leaving their schools in various states of chaos and 'Fresh Start' in tatters.

Freedom Press Bookshop will be closed on Saturday 29th April. We shall be at the Mayday 2000 Bookfair from 10am to 6pm at the Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 (nearest tube Holloway Road)

Torsten Friedag was hired to save the former George Orwell School in North London, his appointment was personally endorsed by David Blunkett in January 1999. Like all 'Fresh Start' schools, George Orwell was first publicly 'named and shamed' for its poor exam results and low attendance. The obvious social problems that dominate the school's catchment area are not considered relevant by New Labour ideologues. Whilst Friedag was feted by ministers and media alike and given a salary of 70K, all the George Orwell teachers were made redundant and then had to reapply for their own jobs. Only six of the original staff were subsequently re-employed at the reborn 'Islington Arts and Media School'. Having been starved of cash for years the school was deluged with money and support in order to provide a success story for Blunkett's strong-arm approach to education. Eight million pounds was spent on transforming the school buildings and an official visit arranged to

place the ministers' personal seal of approval on his pioneering venture.

Unfortunately just two weeks before the great man's visitation a riot broke out in the school. Forty pupils joined in a lunchtime fracas over a bag of chips. The combined talents of Superhead and Superteachers failed to contain the riot and they eventually called the police. Despite the smart new school uniforms, the smart new school staff and the smart new school make-over the school community is now less cohesive and less caring. Last term there were fights between students of different ethnic groups, which resulted in thirteen pupils being expelled or suspended. On 9th March Friedag was finally edged off his, by then, precarious perch by John Leovald, who had originally been brought in as a 'troubleshooter'. Leovald is now acting principal and Friedag has left the school.

At the end of this term Carol McAlpine will cease to be Superhead of Fresh Start Firfield Community School, Newcastle upon Tyne. Having survived eighteen months in post, McAlpine had become Blunkett's longest surviving Superhead. She was appointed in 1998 to transform the former Blakelaw Comprehensive School. She sacked most of the original staff and got rid of persistent truants by persuading their parents to say they would educate them at home. She bribed the other pupils to attend by offering them £80 a term for turning up at school. Despite receiving £2.4 million for refurbishments and further cash to cut class sizes the local education authority claim the quality of lessons at the school is still not satisfactory. Staff morale is low and in January the teachers threatened industrial action over the disruptive behaviour of pupils. McAlpine resigned on Monday 13th March. The vacancy was advertised on 24th March it promises a salary of up to 76K.

Funnily enough Superhead Tony Garwood fell from grace just the day after Carol McAlpine, Tuesday 14th March. He had only been in charge of East Brighton College of Media Arts since September, when it was 'Fresh Started' from the former Marina High School. The now familiar formula was applied; new name, new uniform, new decor, old teachers sacked and replaced with Superteachers and Superhead and once again it's ended in tears. There is as much unrest as before with pupil behaviour still bad and staff turnover high. Garwood's resignation

followed an emergency staff meeting at which teachers complained that he and Frieda Warman-Brown, the chair of governors (who has now also resigned), had suppressed a letter from the local education authority expressing grave concerns about the school. They attempted to defend their action by claiming that they were defending 'staff morale'. In reality staff morale could not sink any lower. According to one senior teacher at the college, an exodus of eighteen staff in less than two terms had forced the school to employ 58 supply teachers. The situation at the school is now claimed to be "a hundred times worse than last year".

It shouldn't be long before more Fresh Start Superheads begin to roll. At Bishopsford Community (the school formerly known as Watermeads), in South London, Fresh Start brought the school £1.2 million that had been denied in its previous incarnation and provided all but two of the staff with the sack! Now eight teachers are pursuing an employment tribunal case against the school. At another London school, Phoenix (previously Hammersmith) High closed because of poor exam results and reopened under Fresh Start, only 4% of pupils got five or more top grade GCSEs last summer, compared to 16% under the previous non-superhead and 'run-of-the-mill' teachers. None of this prevented William Atkinson, the school's Superhead being promoted as the model for Lenny Henry's nauseous super-creep character in last year's BBC series 'Hope and Glory'. Meanwhile Kingswood 'Fresh Start' High, in Kingston-upon-Thames, achieved notoriety by suspending a mixed race teacher who refused to teach a boy who called him a 'black maggot'. At Telegraph Hill School, Lewisham, an exodus of staff is confidently predicted to occur at the end of this term. The local NUT secretary claims: "Problems had been identified [at the school] and were being addressed. Fresh Start demolished that progress. Things have got worse, not better."

Things have got worse, not better since the Labour government took over. Despite Thatcher's elitist rhetoric, between 1989 and 1997 school populations became more socially mixed, with disadvantaged children becoming less concentrated in particular schools. Since 1997 social segregation has rocketed upwards (see graphs opposite). Blunkett's enforcement of the competitive market in education has mobilised middle-class parents to move their children from 'difficult' schools to 'achieving' schools. Poor working class children are left named and shamed and subject to the Fresh Start experience.

Like much New Labour 'thinking', Fresh Start is a second-hand idea that has already been discarded by honest practitioners in America. Cleveland, Chicago, Denver and San Francisco have all responded to seemingly intractable educational problems by closing 'failing' schools and rehiring only a proportion of their teaching staffs. This approach peaked in 1997 and the authorities have since begun to appreciate the error of their former ways. They realise that a failing school is more often a symptom of wider social deprivation than a simple consequence of lazy and inept teaching. As the president of the American Federation of Teachers observed, "no one group is to blame for

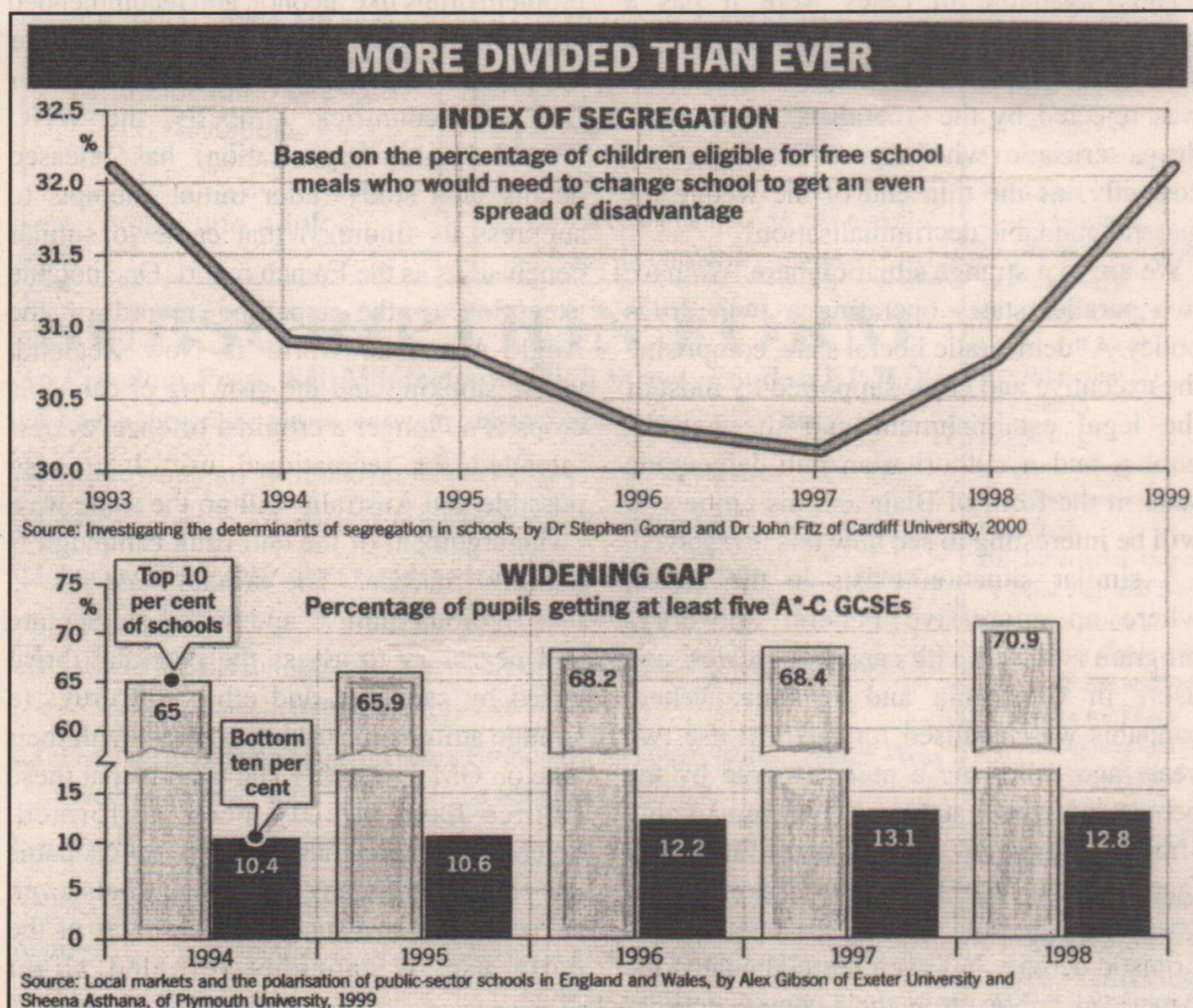


school failure, and no one group can achieve the necessary changes." Schools are, and should be, a part of the community in which they are situated. Profound educational problems can only be solved by tackling the underlying social problems and engaging the energies and creativity of the local community in producing their own unique learning institutions, not by parachuting in superheads to impose simplistic and demonstrably ineffective solutions.

Like the deranged generals of World War One, Blunkett's response to abject defeat is to hurl more victims forward to their deaths. On March 1st Blunkett declared, "I will maintain the firm approach we take towards failing schools. This policy is already paying huge dividends" (*Times*, 1st March 2000). Maybe Blunkett's approach is paying dividends for Nord-Anglia plc and Capita plc but not for ordinary pupils and ordinary teachers. Unbowed by the mounting evidence to the contrary Blunkett went on to say, "I now want to take Fresh Start farther... I want education authorities to examine the possibility of closing and reopening every school where at least 15% of pupils have not gained five A to C grades at GCSE over three consecutive years."

Blunkett's mad ideas threaten 530 schools that currently fall below his arbitrary targets. He plans mass Fresh Starts and more Superheads (now promised 100k salaries). His crazed strategy threatens to close one third of the schools in Nottingham alone. It is surely time that teachers got off their knees and stood up to the mad axeman and his sycophantic Superheads.

Christopher Draper



— COPY DEADLINE —

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 6th May, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 27th April.

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).

(continued from page 1)

been forced to commit over \$4 trillion to not-for-profit loan funds". The CRA was introduced in part as a response to inner city social decay, in part out of fear of urban rebellion if the destruction caused by disinvestment was not addressed. The CRA is effective where community organisation is strongest. The financial services industry has consistently lobbied for the relaxation of the CRA, and the effectiveness of such lobbying, and, indeed, the effectiveness of the CRA as a regulatory device, is determined by the balance of power in practice between the demands of community as against the demands of the financial services industry.

Other voices have called for the building of an alternative financial infrastructure as the only effective response to financial exclusion. The Birmingham Settlement has provided a concrete example of how this might be achieved. Over a decade ago, the Birmingham Settlement helped initiate a campaign with the Birmingham Credit Union Development Agency to establish credit unions across the city. There are now thirty credit unions in Birmingham. Birmingham Settlement has also initiated the formation of the Aston Reinvestment Trust, acting as an investment broker for loans to small businesses and start-up enterprises in the Aston area, with a view further to developing ethical investment projects for housing associations and inner city energy efficiency projects. It is certainly the case that the self-help and community enterprise embodied in the work of the Birmingham's settlement is a better option than reliance on pawnbrokers and money lenders. (Research by the Birmingham Settlement found that low income households pay interest rates ranging from 65% a year for a small secured loan with a pawn broker to 500% for a similar loan with a money lender. The average cost of credit for the poor in Britain is approximately 250%.)

The problem, though, with trying to build alternatives to capitalism without addressing the social relationships inherent to capitalism itself, is that, inevitably, those social relationships manifest themselves somewhere within the utopian project conceived as alternative. Research from the Policy Studies Institute suggests that credit unions may, by default, substitute one type of financial exploitation for another. In the mainstream financial services system, those on low incomes tend to have borrowings in excess of savings, while those on high incomes tend to have savings in excess of borrowings. The savings of those on high incomes are in effect recycled in the form of loans to those on low incomes, at market rates of interest. Within a credit union, this relationship is inverted. Those on low incomes tend to have savings in excess of borrowings, while those on higher incomes tend to have borrowings in excess of savings. Thus, the savings of those on low incomes goes to meet the loan requirements of those on higher incomes, but at levels of interest well below the market rate (R. Berthoud and E. Kempson, *Credit and Debt: The PSI Report*, 1993). Within the context of a system founded on relationships of inequality, those institutions built as part of an attempt to found a 'social economy' are tainted by the inequalities they seek to replace.

The Brazilian sociologist Roberto Unger has remarked that we often seem torn between dreams that seem unrealisable and prospects that hardly seem to matter. Such is the case when it comes to the weakness or opposition to the process of financial exclusion. Missing entirely from the debate is any awareness, or explication, of the role of money within capitalist society *per se*.

Money under capitalism acts as the universal equivalent between commodities, the universal facilitator of exchange. But money, as Marx made clear, is a social creation. "Nature does not produce money any more than it produces a rate of exchange or a banker" (*Grundrisse*, Penguin, 1973). Money exists as universal equivalent and as wage-form, but in both these contexts it serves to disguise the relationship of inequality upon which capitalism is founded. Money, as wage, is the reward for labour which allows the labourer to buy back the commodities produced by his labour, as subsistence or as luxury items. That money acts as means of circulation, and as such allows the realisation of profit for the capitalist as surplus value. Money as capital represents the wealth produced by the worker and stolen from him. To quote Marx again: "The individual carries his social power, as



well as his bond with society, in his pocket". Money then, is the symbolic representation of the alienation of the working class from its own social power. Wealth is produced by labour, but money, as the Italian autonomist Toni Negri puts it, "has only one face, that of the boss". The wealth the likes of Barclays CEO Matthew Barrett seek to protect from us is ours, produced by our labour, our blood, our sweat.

The process of financial exclusion represents the financial services industry's response to the debt crisis of the early 1990s. As such, it is connected directly to the process of deregulation of financial services which took place in the credit boom of the '80s. That credit boom was predicated upon deregulation

of access to credit. In 1982 state control of terms for consumer credit lending was abandoned. Building societies were allowed to provide a wider range of financial services and increase the proportion of funds raised from non-investment sources. Along with this went the implementation of the 'Right to Buy' scheme and access to purportedly low cost mortgages. More people than ever before accessed financial services. The level of outstanding personal debt increased from £9.8 billion in 1980 to £52.5 billion in 1993. Within the industry, deregulation led to intensified competition. The combination of this competition, high operational costs, and the level of bad debt which was the end product of the lending explosion of the '80s has triggered the retreat to the middle class heartland which is the hallmark of the process of financial exclusion. Combined with this is a move away from credit to investment related products (aided, as Leyshon and Thrift make clear, "by the progressive dismantling of what remains of the Keynesian welfare state, which is effectively forcing individuals to make their own provision ... through the purchase of health insurance, investment in a personal pension or ... building up savings for the future"). As the economists Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway make clear, none of this happened by accident. "The monetary decomposition of class relations through the encouragement of private ownership involved, as its presupposition, the equally individualising enforcement of debt in the courts ... The disciplining power of debt ... cannot be over-estimated. The incentive not to endanger the bases of life, such as housing, education, health, clothing, heating and so forth undermined solidarity" (quote from *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*, Macmillan, 1995).

The manufacture of personal debt and the withdrawal of financial services to areas of 'quality' serve the interests of capital by keeping the poor as they should be - poor, and allowing the fear of debt and enforcement to destabilise traditions of solidarity within working class communities. To rebuild that solidarity requires, then, an organised response to the question of debt. In the anti poll tax struggle, local anti poll tax unions showed great imagination and expertise in collecting information on bailiffs (monitoring

offices, checking car registration numbers, physically preventing bailiffs from distraining goods, doorstepping bailiffs at their homes to give them a taste of what life was like for those usually on the receiving end), providing advice and representation as to legal aspects of non-payment and disrupting court enforcement proceedings. There is no practical



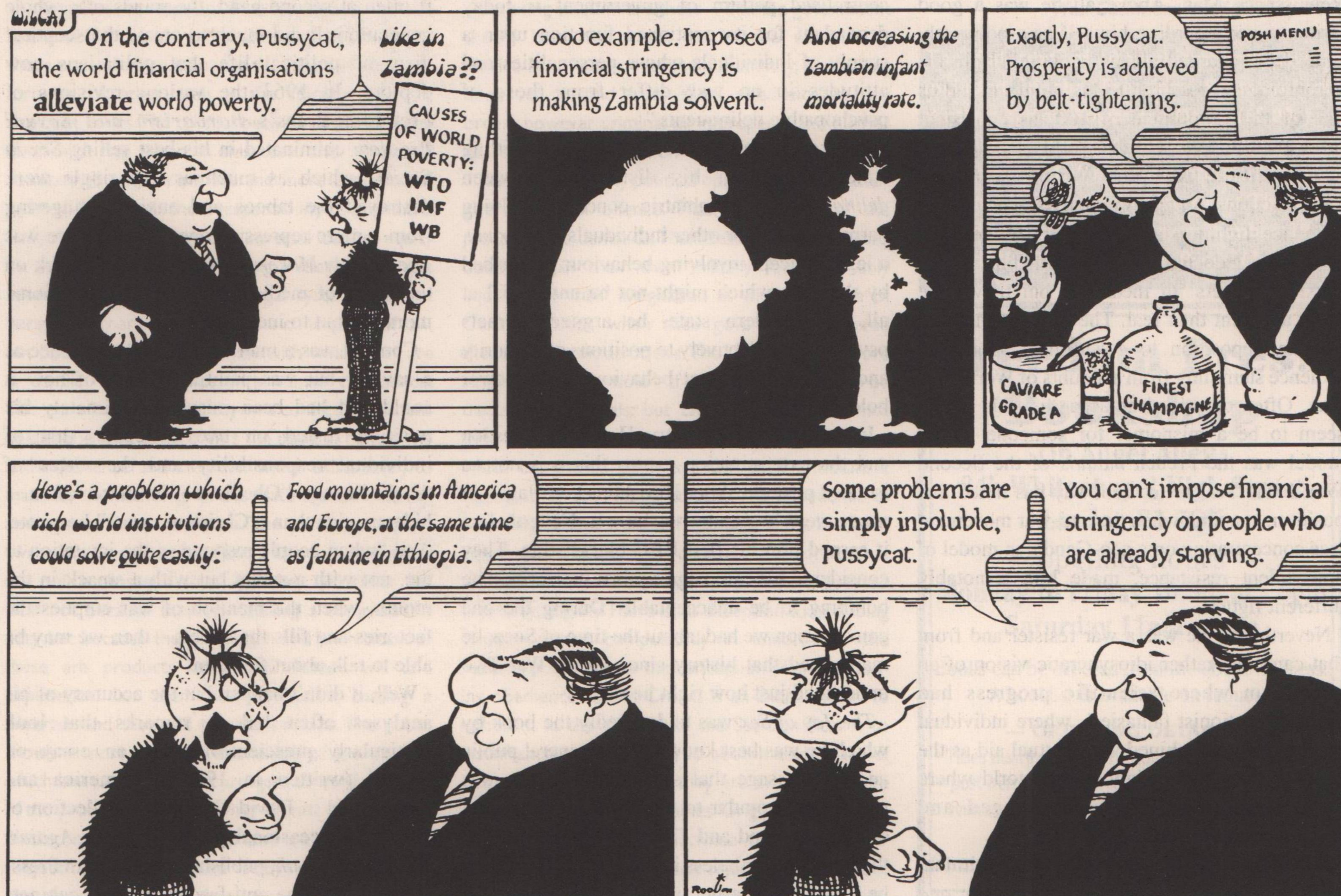
obstacle to rebuilding such structures and methods in relation to the wider issue of working class debt. Gregory Palast refers to the story of Father Jack Kennington who organised an immigrant community to take over a closing bank branch on Lower East Side New York. Similar community organisation needs to be built here, to look to occupy bank property to force withdrawing banks to pay compensation to local communities for relocation, and thus free up funds for community redevelopment. Bakunin once contended that "wealth always has been and still is the indispensable condition for the realisation of everything human". The wealth that dominates every aspect of our lives is produced by our labour. Time, then, that we claimed that wealth as our own.

Nick S.

Speakers' Corner

I have very much enjoyed reading *Freedom* recently, and one of your articles reminded me about speaking in Hyde Park. I have decided to speak at Speakers' Corner on Monday 1st May (a Bank Holiday) and I hope there will be people at the gates selling *Freedom*. All comrades are invited to share the platform with me. In the photograph (*Freedom*, 25th March) I had put my fingers in my ears to demonstrate how to deal with hecklers.

John Rety



Alex Comfort

Alex Comfort's first book, *The Silver River*, the account of a voyage to Argentina and Senegal, was published in 1938 when he was still a schoolboy at Highgate. From then until his early thirties he had an immensely prolific and dazzling literary career: as novelist, poet and critic.

His fictional debut came in 1941 with *No Such Liberty*, written as a Cambridge undergraduate. *The Power House*, a long and impressive third novel appeared in 1944 and was widely acclaimed. V.S. Pritchett described it on BBC Radio as a "powerful, bitter, and Romantic novel", "an immensely exciting narrative ... to be read by all who are interested in the talents of the future". *On This Side Nothing*, probably Comfort's best novel, followed in 1949.

Meanwhile a succession of books of verse was also being published by Herbert Read at Routledge. These peaked with *The Signal to Engage* (1946) and *And All but He Departed* (1951) and the finding of a distinctive personal voice.

For Freedom and Beauty are not fixed stars,
but cut by man only from his own flesh,
but lit by man, only for his sojourn

because our shout into the cup of sky
brings back no echo, brings back no echo ever:
because man's mind lives at his stature's length

because the stars have for us no earnest of winning
because there is no resurrection
because all things are against us, we are ourselves.

[from 'None but My Foe to be My Guide']

Art and Social Responsibility (1946), his first collection of articles was, however, as much political as literary. His lifelong pacifism dated from his schooldays; and during World War Two he was, in his self-description, "an aggressive anti-militarist", coming to head, while still a medical student, the campaign against the indiscriminate bombing of Germany. Pacifism led rapidly to anarchism, for he came to believe that "pacifism rests solely upon the historical theory of anarchism".

Comfort's anarchism is highly individual and original. Its finest single statement is *Peace and Disobedience* (1946), one of the many pamphlets he wrote for *Peace News* and the Peace Pledge Union (and reprinted in 1994 in *Against Power and Death*, Freedom Press). But his classic contribution to anarchist thought is *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State* (1950), a remarkable application of the findings of psychiatry and social psychology to contemporary politics.

The 1950s saw his main effort concentrated on the biology of ageing. After *And All but He Departed* there was not another volume of poetry until *Haste to the Wedding* (1962). After *A Giant's Strength* (1952) no novel appeared until *Come Out to Play* (1961). A second collection of articles, *Darwin and the Naked Lady*, was not published till 1962.

There followed a transitional decade for Comfort. *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom*, his Freedom Press book of 1948, had been the starting-point for *Sexual Behaviour in Society* (1950), which was revised as *Sex in*

Society (1963). Then, in 1962, came a formative experience when he was invited to visit India at the suggestion of his former colleague at University College London, the geneticist J.B.S. Haldane. A translation from the Sanskrit of the mediaeval erotological classic, *The Koka Shastra*, resulted in 1964.

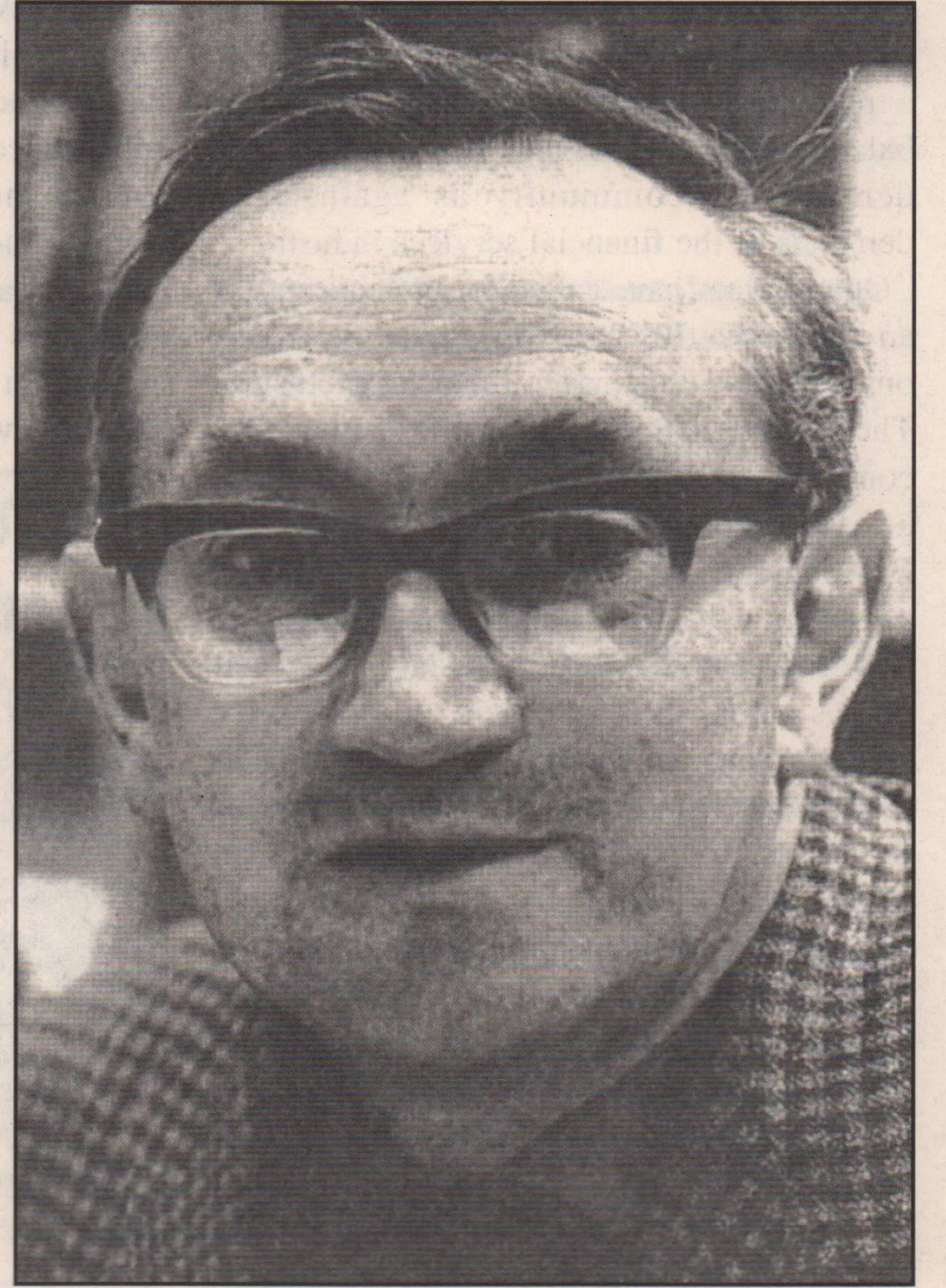
Comfort's own manuals, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking and More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to the Joy of Sex*, which he wrote as a medical biologist, followed in 1972 and 1973 respectively. They have achieved phenomenal sales worldwide – twelve million as of 1993 – and ever since he has been best known as their author.

In 1973 he emigrated to the United States to work at a radical think-tank, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara. The centre folded the following year, but he remained in California holding a series of medical posts. In 1985 he retired and returned to live in England.

Comfort had written several works of scientific popularisation in the 1960s, but later books, such as *I and That: Notes on the Biology of Religion* (1979) and *Reality and Empathy: Physics, Mind and Science in the 21st*

Century (1984), were a good deal more abstruse. After the sixties he published another three novels and only two collections of poetry. His brilliant literary career as a student and young doctor, when he was writing as a militant pacifist and anarchist, was long since over. He was now a household name, but as something he always denied being: a sexologist.

David Goodway



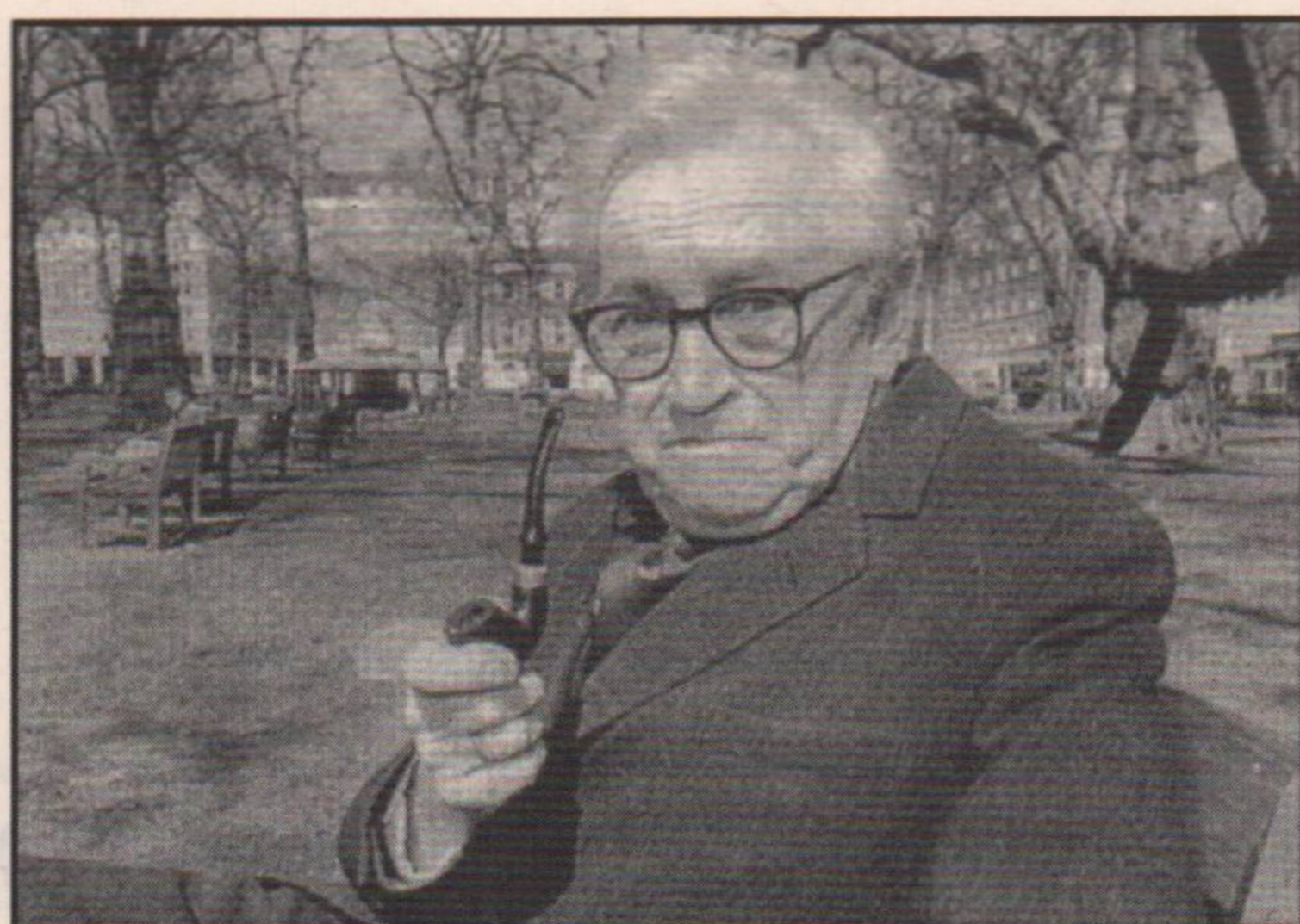
Alex Comfort: the last positivist?

Alex Comfort was what an earlier age would have called a man of parts. A scientist, a poet and a medical doctor, a novelist and political theorist, a gerontologist and art critic. He was also a voracious reader, wrote literary criticism, and was a deadly polemicist with a gift for savage or pithy one liners. "We may eventually come to realise that chastity is no more a virtue than malnutrition" is good example of one of his dryer thrusts. It would have amused him to be vying with the late Ian Dury for the title of The Last Renaissance Man. Above all he was a good writer, never regarding himself as a polymath. Indeed he regarded all his activities, from his gerontological research to his month in jail as one of the Committee of 100, as consistent products of his view of the world.

His attitude was not without apparent contradictions. An anti-war activist who did not renounce fighting, an anarchist who rejected revolution, a doctor who condemned his fellow 'anxiety makers' in medicine, but they were more apparent than real. The basis of them all was an opposition to government sponsored violence stemming from accounts of World War One. Often described as a pacifist this would seem to be a misnomer for someone whose model was the French *maquis* of the Second World War. As David Goodway has noted this position, at a time when the anti-war movement was concentrating on a neo-Gandhian model of non-violent resistance, made him a notably different figure.

Nevertheless he was a war resister and from that came his rather idiosyncratic vision of an anarchism where scientific progress had replaced 'actionist fantasies', where individual responsibility combined with mutual aid as the basis of the good society, and a world where centralised government encouraged and rewarded psychopaths.

"Great as is the nuisance value of the criminal in urban society" he wrote, in *Authority and*



Delinquency in the Modern State (1950) "the centralised pattern of government is today dependent for its continued function upon a supply of individuals whose personalities and attitudes in no way differ from those of psychopathic delinquents."

The key to this (to non anarchists) startling statement lay in his distinction between *delinquency*, a psychiatric concept involving harm to society or other individuals, and *crime*, a legal concept involving behaviour proscribed by the state which might not be anti-social at all. The modern state, he argued, attracts psychopaths selectively to positions of authority and fosters delinquent behaviour in its power holders.

In the wake of Coventry, Hamburg, Dresden and the extermination camps this was not an isolated position. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki many were beginning to share it. Nevertheless it earned him his first BBC blacklisting. They considered his campaign against indiscriminate bombing to be unacceptable. During the one conversation we had, about the time of Suez, he maintained that history since World War Two underlined just how right he was.

The Joy of Sex was undoubtedly the book by which he was best known to the general public and its message that sex should be fun was sufficiently popular to upset the feminist right on the one hand and *Times* correspondents on the other. Nevertheless it was pushing on a door he had opened earlier with *Sex in Society*.

The Biology of Senescence was his first work on ageing and became a standard text in the discipline of gerontology, which he did much to formalise. His novels from *The Power House* onwards were largely well reviewed although his poetry was not, on the whole, fashionable. However the books that changed the way many people thought about the world were three non-fiction works.

In 1950 came the seminal *Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State*. Subtitled "a criminological approach to power" it influenced, if often at second-hand, the minds of a whole generation. It did much to create the sceptical view of political life that politicians now deplore. In 1963 the various revisions of Freedom Press's *Barbarism and Sexual Freedom* culminated in his best selling *Sex in Society* which as much as any single work destroyed the taboos and anxieties lingering from a more repressive age. Finally there was *The Anxiety Makers* (1967), a savage attack on the abuse of medical prestige by professional moralists out to inculcate guilt.

Comfort was a man who looked to science as a saviour but was painfully aware of how it could and had been misused. Ultimately his position rested on two concepts, that of individual responsibility and the virtue of disobedience. "Obedience is more often a hideous vice than a Christian virtue" he wrote. And "when people respond to the invitation to die, not with a salute but with a smack in the mouth, when the mention of war empties the factories and fills the streets – then we may be able to talk about freedom."

Well, it didn't happen but the accuracy of his analyses often led to remarks that look particularly prescient now. In an essay on Orwell (written in 1983 in America and republished in David Goodway's collection of Comfort's occasional pieces *Writings Against Power and Death*, published by Freedom Press) he wrote of "the anti-fascist Western cabinets

who fought Hitler and saw the Holocaust as a deplorable business – which should not be stopped for fear of unleashing a 'flood of undesirable immigrants'."

Returning from America in the mid eighties he wrote of "the strangeness of finding oneself in a colonial country with armed police, lathi-charges, and trumped up charges as appropriate responses to trade unionism and the promise of rubber bullets to come". Mrs Thatcher, he went on, "the archetypal memsahib, and her congeners have run out of natives and are applying themselves to governing English men and women by methods which led to the independence of India".

It was Comfort's anarchism and the parallels he drew with psychology and sociology that took some of us into those disciplines. "I want" he said, in a 1950 Anarchist Summer School lecture, "to see something done that has not been done before – a concerted, unbiased and properly documented attempt to disseminate accurate teaching of the results of modern child psychology, social psychology, and political psychology to the general public on the same scale that we have in the past tried to disseminate revolutionary propaganda." Unfortunately the writing was on the wall for this sort of positivism but it was a brave aim and some did take it seriously.

"It was his scientific conclusions that drove him to anarchism" noted Colin Ward "and if scientific investigation led him elsewhere he would abandon it". Perhaps. But he never did. Nor did he come to terms with the wave of relativism that made all science suspect, at least among those who embraced post modernism. For Alex Comfort science, and he meant the biological, medical and social sciences, always remained a force for progress.

His prescriptions, like those of the rest of us, may have been inadequate but his diagnoses are still among our best guides.

John Pilgrim

Note: Short extracts from the above first appeared in *The Independent* on 30th March 2000.

Alex Comfort on **Anarchism and Law**

The prosecution of the four London anarchists is not an isolated act of political repression, it marks a stage in the social evolution of law in this country, a process of which historians are more aware than jurists. Law is the expression of the common conscience of mankind – laws are the expression of the civilisation that produces them: the history of the constitutional development of law is the history of the forms of society and the conceptions of social order that accompany them in turn. As social institutions produced in succession the legal institutions of the country, as the rise of free cities led to a systemised body of common law, as monarchy and unified government led to the establishment of the King's Peace, so the industrial revolution and the creation of a proletariat led to the rise of a body of statute law defending property, and so the rise of the megalopolitan military state, with its attendant conscription and wars, leads to the gradual supersession of common law and statute by the rule of the order-in-council, the ukase and the political police. Every society creates its new offences – as feudalism created vagrancy, Victorian capitalism created forgery, the enclosures created the Game Laws, so the transition from megapolis to tyrannopolis, the regeneration of barbarism, created as its chief offences dissent, sedition and desertion. Justice consists in the interpretation of laws in the light of law, and European civilisation is rapidly approaching the point at which the conscience of human life and experience, embodied in law, is irreconcilable with the laws enacted by the state. In Germany, the collapse of judicial institutions occurred with suddenness and finality. In this country it has been delayed solely by the independence of the courts which rests and has rested upon the resistance of the public at large, through recalcitrant individuals, to the rise of non-judicial conceptions of law. It is in this struggle that the case of the Freedom Press is an episode, as significant in the context of events as the case of *R. versus Wilkes*, for in it, and in similar cases, the judiciary is facing the issue of its status in future English society.

The courts must decide, in this and in future prosecutions, whether they will maintain the legislature or the law, whether they will maintain the independent status which they have so far maintained – and which in the persons of the judges they continue to maintain – or whether they will submit to become executive in function. No historical process is inevitable. Because we are involved in a continental landslide into barbarism and military dictatorship, we need not resign ourselves. If the public, in the persons of political recalcitrants, will maintain the law if the courts will maintain it, English traditions are strong enough in freedom and law to resist the threat of political police and of licensed printing, of conscription and suppression, but the courts and the people, realising their common danger, must maintain each other.

We have no constitution which the judicature can employ to restrain the legislature. They can restrain

it only by their decisions, based upon the mass of legal tradition and the support of the people at large. The legal fiction whereby the Crown is the repository of justice, the ultimate judge whom the judges represent, has been maintained and protected from abuse by the fact that where the Crown and its judges have been in conflict, and the people have upheld the judges, the political power of the judicature has been sufficient to safeguard its independence. The legislative voice which now speaks in the name of the Crown is no longer a judicial voice – it is the voice of political adventurers controlling a megalopolitan military state. The voice of the Defence Regulations is nominally the voice of the Crown – it is practically the voice of an irresponsible political caucus which has not even undergone the formality of popular election during the last nine years. The judges are constitutionally bound to accept the dictates of the Crown. Today its dictates and ordinances stand in violation of the principles of justice. The decisions of the courts are the last barrier between the autocracy of the legislature and the constitutional bases of law. It is to the Crown that the allegiance of soldiers is due, and it is from the Crown that, in *R. versus Richards and others*, that allegiance is alleged to have been seduced. If the Crown is represented by a clique of military adventurers – if it is represented by fascists or anti-semites, by anti-libertarians or megalomaniacs, if it is represented, as is conceivable, by a dictator in whom power has been vested by a majority vote of Parliament, then the courts alone, pursuing not the laws but the principles of law which they have in the past so courageously asserted to be binding on the Crown itself, have a voice loud enough to prevent the corruption of justice.

If anarchism is the recognition of ultimate personal responsibility, then anarchism is also the origin and quintessence of law, not its opponent. The emphasis of anarchist thought is upon the original principle of all jurisprudence – that the individual human being has, by virtue of his existence and his manhood, rights which are inalienable and responsibilities which cannot be delegated. The conception of natural law, upon which, according to Blackstone, jurisprudence is founded, is in its essence an anarchist conception. The conception of common law, the existence of a body of custom recognised by common consent and common conscience to be in accordance with human rights and human duties, is an anarchist conception. The recognition of the responsibility which a human being bears for all those actions which influence the lives and affect the fortunes of other men is the starting point of anarchist ethics. The conflict between anarchism and law which has arisen in this case, and which will continue to arise in a more and more exacerbated form, is due not to the irresponsibility of anarchists but to the corruption of the universal ideas of equity by irresponsible statute-making. Where anarchists come into conflict with the legal system, it is not because they are opposed to the conception of law, but because the system of law with which they are in conflict is at variance with human conscience. There are in existence today two conflicting systems of law: one which represents the body of human will and experience, and the other which exists solely to maintain the authority of the state against that will and against that experience. The public at large is aware of the discrepancy. Let a London crowd see the police chasing a thief, and they will collar the thief not because they are fulfilling a common-law duty but because the prevention and prohibition of these are products of normal human will and experience. Let them see an escort chasing a deserter, and they will trip the redcaps. The public shows a more accurate awareness of the powers which law can and cannot arrogate to itself than any of the professional jurists. They do not need to read Blackstone to know that "no laws are binding on the subject that assault the body or violate the conscience". Learned judges who point out that the

multiplicity of wartime regulations tend to bring law and justice into contempt do not carry the distinction to its conclusion. They are aware, but often only very dimly aware, that it is to the maintenance of common law rights, or, if you prefer it, of human conscience against the state and its encroachments that they owe their right to give judgement in relative political independence. If there had been no anarchists, they would not be upon the bench where they now sit. English justice owes more to Wilkes and William Penn than to any legislator or body of legislators.

In the submission of anarchist political theory, law is a normal and desirable feature of free societies, but the state and statute law, imposed by a political majority, is not. A court which upheld the absolute validity of statutes would deliver itself into the hands of the legislature as a purely passive and executive instrument. It would bind itself to accept the natural legality of any act of government from the Parliamentary Bill that provided to boil the Bishop of Rochester's cook in oil to a statute legalising cannibalism. In the submission of the defence these courts which have upheld the right of the State to assault the person and violate the conscience of individual subjects by military conscription, by indefinite internment on security grounds, and by the suppression of free political controversy in any section of the community, uniformed or not, have already committed themselves to uphold most of the apparatus of fascism and to deny the elementary principles of legal theory. The courts have no control over the complexion of the government. If they oblige themselves to uphold it, they have no means of controlling any abuse which it may commit, however extreme its complexion. If a fascist government is returned by the electorate, then they will uphold fascism. If a government, duly elected, outlawed all Jews, then they will uphold anti-Semitism. If such a government abolishes law courts and judges, then they will voluntarily wind themselves up. In the submission of the defence, courts which have committed themselves in this way forfeit their right to be treated as legitimate sources of precedent [...]

And what is 'disaffection'? The statutory discussion of duty to His Majesty is as irrelevant as the argument about villeinage which Lord Mansfield rejected – the loyalty of soldiers to His Majesty is not in question. The rights which the prosecution is attempting to claim are these – that the government should have the power to impose compulsory service in any section of the community, and, having done so, demand from them obedience to any orders however criminal or improper – and further to render the discussion of such orders, or the dissemination of any political opinion hostile to their givers, a penal offence. That is the sum of the prosecution's demands. Their zeal for unquestioning obedience in their own military forces is only equalled by their indignation at the obedience of German troops when their government ordered them to commit atrocities. The German people are responsible as a whole – if they obey, they are to be treated as criminals; but English troops must not even discuss their instructions – the government which commands them is above such criticism. It would never commit an atrocity. The impudence of this claim is almost equal to its illegality. It has been ruled that anyone may censure the conduct of servants of the Crown provided that he does so without malignity. There is no exception to excluding civilians placed compulsorily in uniform. In the modern political state the conception of unquestioning obedience to the Crown is an anachronism. To uphold it in the context of the Sedition Acts is to disenfranchise all soldiers, to abolish their state of citizenship for as long as they are in the army. We contest the right of Sir James Grigg to accept the duty of these men to sacrifice their lives, their homes and their liberty, while rejecting their right of free access to all political ideas and all political

activities. We contest an interpretation which will mean that for an historian to describe the execution of King Charles I is tantamount to incitement to treason. The object of this prosecution is to restrict the expression of political opinions unfavourable to the government, and to the Minister of War in person, both by and to something like twenty per cent of the electorate. It can have no other object. The claim that any opinions, however malignant, which the four accused anarchists might circulate among troops, could at this stage influence the course of the war to the detriment of the Allies is too puerile to require a reply.

We did not seek out this conflict, but neither will we shirk it. Let there be no mistake about it – it is not the victims of this prosecution but its sponsors who stand convicted. It is we who are the accusers. If accusations of treason are to be made – and the charges which have been brought by the Attorney-General are in substance accusations of treason – we have our own charges to bring. Charges of disaffection come ill from renegades and placement Charges of corrupting the morale of the army come ill from ministers who have done more than any anarchist could hope to do to shake the faith of the army in the cause for which it accepted service. It is we, through the persecution of our four comrades, who will take the duty of accusation upon our shoulders. We will accuse the accusers: we will accuse them on behalf of the peoples of the entire world, whose confidence they have betrayed and whose lives and liberties they have wantonly destroyed. We will accuse them on behalf of the German Democrats, whose tormentors they entertained as guests. We will accuse them on behalf of the people of Spain, whose cause they calumniated and whose subjection they financed and sponsored. We will accuse them on behalf of the people of India, whose rights they have suppressed by violence and starvation, and whose country they have converted into a prison. We will accuse them on behalf of the citizens of Turin, of Calais, of Hamburg, of Tokyo, of Berlin, whose cities they burned and whose children they massacred: on behalf of the millions whom their fraudulent war has destroyed and the thousands that it will still destroy: by every falsehood they have told, by every liar they have suborned, by every progressive idea that they have stifled and betrayed and every instrument of tyranny that they have supported and advocated: by their fictitious Atlantic Charter, which they now own as a canard: by every drop of blood and sweat, and tears we will indict them as traitors to the very conceptions of human liberty and law which they have the impudence to assume.

War Commentary, 5th May 1945

The full text of 'Anarchism and Law' is included in the Freedom Press volume *Writings Against Power and Death* (£5.00*). The article refers to the trial and jailing of the editors of *War Commentary*, the paper then published by Freedom Press. The story is told in detail in *The Raven* number 29 on World War Two (Freedom Press, £3.00*).

Tony Gibson writes:

I've been going over a mass of old papers – letters from Alex going back years and years and even turning up a controversy I had with him in 1952. I owe a lot to him. Back in 1986 when I thought that I had come to the end of my life and had to be reconciled to becoming a useless old man, I read his book *A Good Age*, which gave me a new view of life which has given me fourteen years of active writing and I've published quite a number of books, mostly about different aspects of ageing – and I'm still at it, though I can't keep up with the modern computer technology, I'm a paper-and-ink man. I lost touch with Alex when they closed down his nursing-home, and I've just seen that he died in a hospital at Banbury. Poor fellow, he had that stroke in 1991 and has had to endure a horribly crippling condition for nine years.

Tony Gibson is the author of *Love, Sex and Power in Later Life* (Freedom Press, £3.50*).

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Web links

It would be hard for anyone to feel they have found all there is to find on the web which relates to anarchism. We recently had this list of links forwarded to us from someone subscribed to the a-infos news service (<http://www.ainfos.ca/>). Thanks to Ian Mayes who originally compiled the list from which this is taken.

Social Anarchism

<http://www.nothingness.org/sociala/>

Collective Action Notes

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379/>

Earth First! Journal

<http://www.earthfirstjournal.org/frontcover.cfm>

Industrial Worker

<http://parsons.iww.org/~iw>

Perspectives On Anarchist Theory

<http://ftp.rmci.net/ias/newsletter.htm>

Practical Anarchy

<http://www.infoshop.org/PA/>

Libertarian Labor Review / Anarcho-Syndicalist Review

<http://flag.blackened.net/llr/>

Black Flag

<http://flag.blackened.net/blackflag/>

Ahimsa

<http://members.xoom.com/AhimsaZine/>

Anarchist Age

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~anarchist/frame.html>

Workers Solidarity and Red & Black Revolution

<http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98.html>

Anarchist Studies

<http://www.ericademon.co.uk/AS.html>

Eat The State

<http://EatTheState.org/>

Black Star Review

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3721/>

(Dis)Connection

<http://messmedia.rootmedia.org/disconnecton/>

Ecommunard

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/4544/>

Left Green Perspectives

<http://ise.rootmedia.org/lgp/>

Meander Quarterly - Newsletter of Evolutionary Anarchists

<http://www.spunk.org/texts/pubs/meander/sp000630.txt>

Sandpaper

<http://members.tripod.com/~Sandpaper/>

The Shadow

<http://mediafilter.org/mf/shadow/>

Slingshot

<http://www.tao.ca/~slingshot/>

Total Liberty

<http://freedom.tao.ca/totlib/index.html>

Kaspahraister

<http://www1.teleport.com/~jaheriot/kr/index.htm>

Organise

<http://burn.ucsd.edu/~acf/org/index.html>

Resistance

<http://burn.ucsd.edu/~acf/res/index.html>

Slavery

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/8827/slavindex.html>

Anarchist Barbie Doll

<http://www.anarchistbarbiedoll.com/>

Arm The Spirit

<http://burn.ucsd.edu/~ats/>

The Burning Blimp Manifesto

<http://members.xoom.com/theblimp/blimp.html>

Flaming Flag

<http://thor.prohosting.com/~fflag/>

Satired

<http://www3.cybercities.com/s/satired/>

The Catholic Worker

<http://www.awadagin.com/cw/cwtoc.htm>

Any Time Now

<http://sites.netscape.net/anytimenow/>

Atlantic Anarchist Circle

<http://www.infoshop.org/aac/index.html>

The Crooked Mile

<http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Lounge/2541/>

Desperate Measures

<http://members.aol.com/desperatem/MAINx.html>

Youth Revolution

<http://msnhomepages.talkcity.com/lyricln/xpunx/index2.html>

We Dare Be Free

<http://www.tao.ca/~wdbf/>

Utopian Anarchist Party

<http://www.overthrow.com>

Social Ecology News

<http://www.tao.ca/~ise/newsletter/>

Democracy and Nature

<http://www.aigis.com/dn/>

AWOL

<http://www.objector.org/awol.html>

Direct Action

<http://www.directa.force9.co.uk>

Wildcat

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/5728/>

Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library

<http://members.aol.com/wellslake/ksldirectory.htm#Bulletin>

Spawn of Croatan / Ambi

http://www.geocities.com/xs_ambi/

Angry People

<http://www.anarki.net/angry/index.html>

Class War

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/9482/>

Fragments

<http://www.mindspring.com/~fragments/>

Subversion

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195/subindex.htm>

The Anarcho Syndicalist

<http://www.anarki.net/~asg-m/a-s.htm>

The Voluntaryist

<http://users.aol.com/vlntryst/>

The Anti-Statist

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1584/>

The Anarchives

<http://www.tao.ca/thunder/anarchives.html>

Anarchy Is Entertainment

<http://www.angelfire.com/nj/AnarchyEntertainment/>

Communist Anarchy

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/7086/>

The Mess

<http://www.rootmedia.org/~messmedia/messhome.htm>

Kick It Over

<http://www.cmpa.ca/no17.html>

SchNEWS

<http://www.schnews.org.uk/>

The international anarchist movement: a focus for repression

The international anarchist movement has, these last few weeks, been a particular focus for state and police repression around the world.

In the USA eighteen of our comrades are facing the threat of having to pay dearly for their participation in the humiliation suffered by international capitalism in Seattle on 30th November last year.

In Quebec three anarchists (one being a minor) are undergoing a legal process for having demonstrated against a governmental propaganda exercise entitled 'The Quebec summit for Youth' and held on 22nd February.

In the Czech Republic our two comrades Milan Naplava and Jindrich Lumbach from the Czech anarchist organisation Solidarita are in prison for two years for having decorated the American Secretary of State Madeline Albright's dress with two fresh eggs.

In Poland our friend Adam Mucha from the Polish Anarchist Federation risks ten years imprisonment after the brutal repression of a protest against a 'charity' day organised by

business in Cracovitz.

And we must not forget the heavy sentence which has just been handed out in Paris to our comrade Marie-Athée found guilty of helping immigrants without the state required documentation.

Unfortunately we could make the list a much longer one.

Apart from the fact that they all target anarchists, these cases have as a common thread the disproportionate level of repression with regard to the alleged misdemeanours. In fact, the acts of 'violence' which our comrades are accused of (at very worst a broken shop window or a refusal to retreat in the face of armed police) would seem trivial if compared with any demonstration of French farmers. Another striking feature is that all these trials have occurred after demonstrations denouncing the daily violence and degradation that the capitalist system inflicts upon us ...

It is clear that the capitalist system and its state militias have decided to come down hard on a movement which is calling its

legitimacy into question all around the world and which is seeking to promote the idea of an alternative based on individual freedom and a social economy. It is also clear that this willingness to resort to repression is caused by the birth, rebirth and the development of the international anarchist movement and its status as a significant actor in the social struggle.

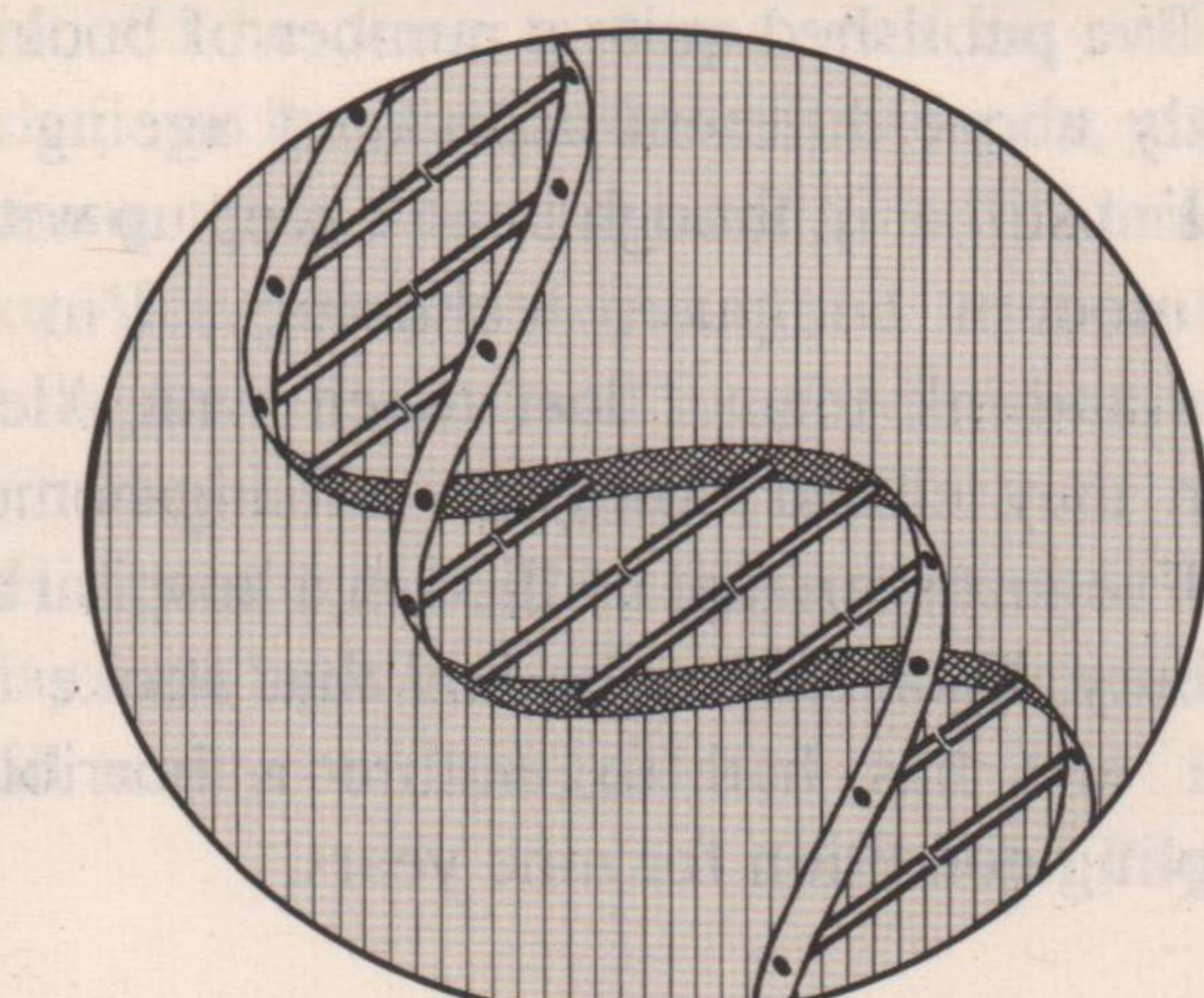
The French speaking Anarchist Federation thus reaffirms its unquestioning solidarity with all of our comrades who are facing state repression.

In order to assure the international development of anarchism and in particular a more effective resistance to repression we call on anarchists to organise together throughout the world on a local, regional and international level. We denounce all attempts to criminalise the social movement which has brought to light the means that the capitalist system is willing to employ to ensure its survival.

The FAF
29th March 2000

Number 40 of the anarchist quarterly

The Raven on Genetic Modification



96 pages for £3.00 post free worldwide

(continued from page 1)

impairment in the user's ability to adapt to changing rules in certain procedures, but no other significant effects. Maybe the research subjects were just unimpressed with the arbitrary regulations they were given? It is only in the case of chronic usage (ten or more spliffs per day for thirty years!) that recordable impairment to memory, attention and reaction time has been noticed. But according to the latest research from the University of Texas while this effect is significant it is small. Sounds like Texas University is the place to be a researcher!

Social studies have shown cannabis to be a minor cause of problems compared to harder drugs, especially when compared to alcohol

convenient scapegoat for capitalists, a way of confusing the symptoms of a sick system with a disease in itself. As such they have an interest in maintaining it. An even more cynical view has been put forward regarding the revenues the legal system obtains from drug fines, which they will naturally want to preserve, or even in a few cases, the funding allegedly received by some political parties from big time drug dealers profiting from the prohibition. This agenda is likely to make some very strange bedfellows.

So what should the anarchist response to the issue be? Some may consider it to be another reformist single issue campaign that fails to address the larger problem of the politico-economic system. However many of

overnight, but certainly relaxing them, opening them up and creating a more libertarian mode of consciousness in most. With frequent use its effects also tend to be longer lasting than alcohol and many other drugs. Some comrades have claimed that pot has been known to make anarchists give up politics and is therefore a negative influence. But I suspect any such defectors were anarchists for the wrong reasons, and might later return in a more enlightened mode. There often seems to me to be a moralistic streak in some contemporary anarchists that is effectively counter revolutionary.

Supporting such a campaign does not entail co-option to some liberal reformist campaign either. A grass roots radical movement has existed in this country for decades, one with a more revolutionary vision than any reformist liberal could even begin to imagine.

An interesting feature of the grass roots pro-cannabis campaign is that its current organisational structure is basically an anarchist one. With the fragmentation of the original campaign movement in the 1970s a diverse range of small campaigning groups emerged. Today these groups have realigned in an informal, decentred network that is basically anarchist in its structure.

A development that has proved to be superior in its effectiveness to the original unified structure. Like many other campaigns this has clearly demonstrated the pre-eminence of anarchist organisation and deserves to be hailed as a success story for anarchism.

Today this network has grown to global proportions with an international movement backing the annual, worldwide cannabis parades and festivals held each Mayday. The British manifestation of which (on 6th May) being organised by the ICC (International Cannabis Coalition), which campaigns on a platform of 'ending the prohibition of cannabis' (rather than direct calls for legalisation or decriminalisation). The ICC (which encompasses a wide range of political views) plans to coordinate demonstrations, marches, conferences and festivals until a 'new deal' for cannabis is achieved. On attending one of their recent meetings I found them to be an open and democratic group with a genuinely radical agenda. One that has already found the support of many anarchists.

Large scale solidarity of this kind is crucially important. Lone campaigners and courageous law breakers are known to be constantly harassed and intimidated by elements of the police who, despite the 'liberal' turn described earlier, still act like fascists to those who refuse to play their game.

Perhaps one good reason to support the campaign would be that it is undoubtedly going to be a successful one and success is always good to be involved with. Even as I write I hear that three national newspapers have called for the legalisation of cannabis and a research project into the medical uses of cannabis, and its pharmaceutical suitability, has been launched. Even Straw has now said he believes that there is 'a coherent argument for the

legalisation of cannabis' (as an aside it is rumoured that 'jack' has become a popular slang term for cannabis, Jack Straw being rhyming slang for 'draw' - if the current Home Secretary becomes the eventual decriminaliser of said draw this serendipitous term may stick).

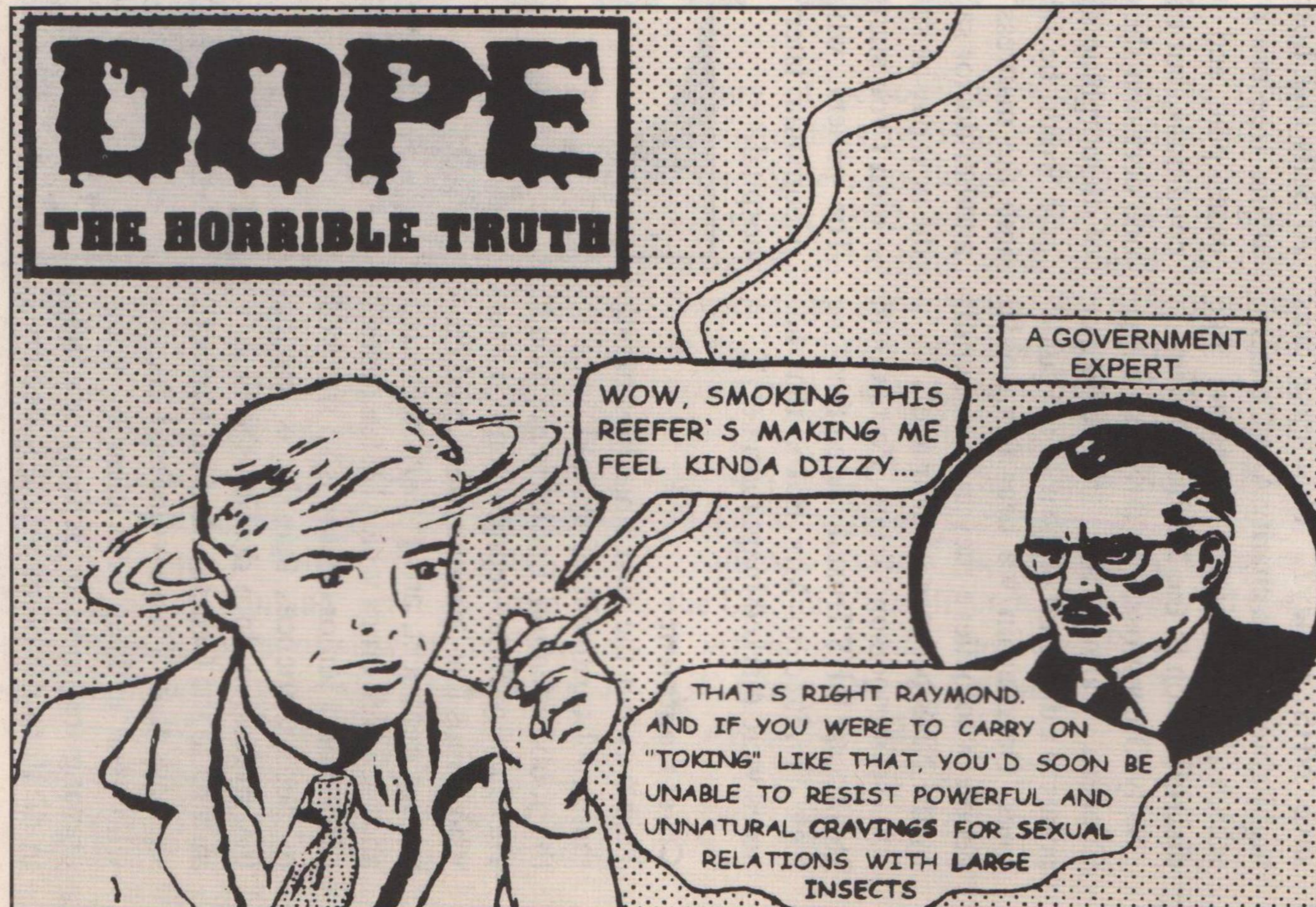
There are of course important issues to consider regarding decriminalisation of this kind.

One serious question is, if things went as far as legalisation and the capitalists got in on the act (as no doubt many want to) would the agricultural, economic, medical, and psychological benefits of the hemp plant most serve a free society or capital? Looking at Amsterdam both appears to be the case. The system does have incredible powers of recuperation. But at least wider availability might have positive effects. So even the worse case scenario isn't that bad.

Another potentially serious problem, that has been mooted by some, is the possibility of social pacification due to such wider availability, under either legalisation or decriminalisation. A real life Soma. Both in terms of the effect of the drug and the avowed aim of the cops in taking smokers out of confrontation with authority. I don't think the latter case is too much of a problem however, youth rebellion is a permanent feature of our society, and, given the nature of authority, rebels will never lack grievances bringing them into conflict with it. As for the effects of the drug itself, while the isolated pot-head might withdraw to mellow valley, most people live richer lives full of the aggravations and stimulations of everyday life. And if anything while hash is generally a pacifier, the sensitising effects of habitual use of the drug can heighten our reactions in certain situations. This worry then should not really concern us.

Ultimately of course, despite the positive or negative effects of any drug, anarchism has to come out in favour of free choice. While all members of society have a duty to social responsibility that tempers their inherent right to freedom, no one has the right to interfere with whatever free choices they make.

Steve Ash



abuse, a major cause of social dysfunction. Connections have been made between cannabis use and 'delinquency', and sometimes psychiatric problems like schizophrenia, but studies indicate causality is being reversed in these arguments, the dope use comes second. A recent study even suggests that cannabis may have a positive medicinal effect on schizophrenics, and is instinctively sought by them.

Much is made by anti-druggies of the 'problems of Amsterdam'. But in fact the Amsterdam experiment has been a major success. Despite some local pooling of problems in a few of the cosmopolitan parts of the city, drug abuse and related social problems are far lower in Holland as a whole than anywhere else in the world. Those who 'feared the proliferation of drug use' with the legalisation of cannabis have been disappointed. Drug use in Holland is now one of the lowest in Europe, even cannabis is only enjoyed by 3% of the population. While in anti-drug countries, like the UK, far more take pleasure in the herb, and the recorded use of heroin has risen by 2000% in the past twenty years!

Such statistics are often used in another stupid argument from the anti-drug lobby. It is said that high cannabis use leads to hard drug use and that there is an inherently slippery slope between the two. But this is about as sensible as saying drinking beer will eventually lead to the consumption of meths! While any intoxicant can be used self destructively (particularly those now legal) there is little evidence that many cannabis users follow this path.

The real motivation behind most anti-drugs crusaders is of course a 'moralistic', puritanical and political one. For them life is not about desire, pleasure and freedom, it is about rules, discipline, hard work and self sacrifice. The zombie creed of post industrial capitalism. Deeper still is the fear that drugs like cannabis may undermine this and bring about an anarchic society. If only things were that simple! Of course, 'drug abuse' is also a

us regard this twentieth century totalised approach to politics as impossible today. The struggle against the system can now only take the form of a series of interlocked 'single issues' and general protests, that not only unite the fragmented revolutionary movement but also, from our perspective, recuperate the reformist elements of society. Creating a powerful political force while turning the various currents in the system against each other, thus exploiting and magnifying its internal contradictions. This seems to be the only revolutionary move open to us in the post Marxian 21st century. A spontaneous, popular insurrection might still be our ultimate aim, but the necessary conditions for this are not yet in place.

Of course these issues must be carefully chosen and we must take care not to be recuperated ourselves by larger reformist movements. But a simple criteria can be applied here, in the form of the questions, 'will the result of a successful campaign bring an anarchist future closer?' and 'will it strengthen or weaken the system?'

The cannabis issue, and drugs in general, is one that is perfect for anarchism. Obviously anarchists would have to support decriminalisation rather than legalisation but the boundaries between these two are often vague. And decriminalisation is a more likely option than legalisation in conservative countries like Britain. Despite rumours of tobacco companies with stockpiles of cannabis cigarettes waiting for a market!

Hemp is a multipurpose plant, capable of producing not only one of the finest intoxicants known, but fibre, fuel and food as well. It is ideal for self sufficient agriculture and its products are most rewarding. The effects of its best known natural product has unique medicinal value (for MS, chronic pain, AIDS wasting, psychiatric problems, depression and nausea), superior to many synthetic products. More universally it is generally regarded to have a beneficial effect on the minds of its users. Perhaps not as beneficial as turning them into anarchists

No victim - No Crime - 65 cities taking action

Cannabis Action
in London and Worldwide
Saturday 6th May 2000

1 pm - End the Prohibition of Cannabis March: Assemble in Kennington Park - Oval Tube. Departs 1.30pm sharp via Stockwell, Brixton to Brockwell Park. Bring humour, banners, drums etc
2 pm - Cannabis Carnival: stalls, hemp beer, clothes, food, speakers, comedy, performers, information, etc.

The annual march to 'End the Prohibition of Cannabis' aims to unite all who seek a New Deal for Cannabis whether for medication or recreation, for food, fuel or fibre. A musical, non-confrontational carnival-style march and festival will celebrate this useful, beneficial herb and dance upon the grave of Cannabis Prohibition.

Infonines: 0171 637 7467. 0171 267 8320
E Mail: may2000 @ schmoo.co.uk
Website: <http://www.schmoo.co.uk/may2000.htm>
International Cannabis Coalition, PO Box 2243, W1A

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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 2000 —

- 21st April Bank holiday (no meeting)
 - 28th April General discussion
 - 5th May The Lessons of Mayday (discussion)
 - 12th May General discussion
 - 19th May Some Thoughts on Political Correctness (speaker Peter Neville)
 - 26th May General discussion
 - 2nd June Can Anarchism Transform Your Life? (symposium)
 - 9th June General discussion
 - 16th June The Millennium Dome (speaker Donald Room)
- 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

Mayday 2000

A festival of anarchist ideas and action from
28th April to 1st May

Mayday 2000 will be a four-day gathering of revolutionaries to be held across London.

We would like to hear from groups and individuals interested in joining us in co-ordinating the activities.

Mayday 2000, BM Mayday, London WC1N 3XX
www.freespeech.org/mayday2k
mayday2000 - subscribe@egroups.com

**North West
Unemployed Network**

regional meeting to be held on
Thursday 27th April at 1pm
at the Bury Unemployed Centre,
12 Tithebarn Street (off The Rock),
Bury, Lancashire

**Libertarian Socialist
Discussion Group**

(forming now)
will meet on the second Wednesday of the month
for action and discussion
at 8pm in The Vine, Kennedy Street
(off Fountain Street), near Manchester Town Hall

Mayday 2000

Conference

29th and 30th April
Bookfair (Saturday 29th only),
film workshops and discussions

Speakers include:

McLibel Two, Robert Newman,
ex-Black Panther Lorenzo Ervin,
former miner Dave Douglass,
Chumbawumba, Bertell Ollman and
activists from around the world.

**Freedom Press will have a stall at
the bookfair on Saturday 29th
April from 10am to 6pm**
at

London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre,
356 Holloway Road, London N7
(nearest tube Holloway Road)

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