

# FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

Vol. 61 No. 10

20th May 2000

50p

## Meltdown

The May election results showed that New Labour's electoral meltdown continues apace. As the Romsey election made clear, the coalition built on the back of Blair's promises to Middle England that nothing would change has begun to rupture, with the *Guardian*-reading liberals defecting to the Liberal Democrats and the 'new supporters' drifting back to the Tories. In the supposed Labour heartlands – working class communities taken for granted by Labour for years – voters just stayed at home, recognising that there was nothing on offer for them.

Having fought hard to get Blair into office, the Trotskyist left has belatedly realised that replacing a right wing government with no real majority with a right wing government with an unassailable majority represents no progress at all. Roy Hattersley once summed up Labour's attitude to its working class support as "The ugliest dog in the world ... she would vote for me whether or not I fed her ... so I could afford to neglect her". The ugliest dog in the world looks as if it's ceased to show affection for its self-appointed master, and might be about to bite back. The left's solution – drag out the rags of Old Labour and parade around in them as the London Socialist Alliance – another electoral dead-end dressed up as revolution. As the LSA conceded though, there was one problem. According to LSA supporters at *The Weekly Worker*, "we must be brutally frank and state that you could probably count on two hands all the housing estates in Britain where the left has any kind of base". Come polling day, the LSA polled a total of 39,910 votes across London (including 7% of the vote in London North East) and – for once – slightly more than the total votes accrued to the BNP mayoral candidate Michael Newman, who took 33,569

votes (a direct reading-off of one against the other slightly distorts the picture, though, as the LSA stood for assembly seats while Newman stood for mayor). Doubtless the London left will now see themselves as having a mandate for continuing its new electoral strategy. In doing so, it will only compound the problems that currently beset it, and do nothing to improve the lives of the rest of us.

A more useful test to apply than votes cast might be to ask whether the left could today successfully prevent an eviction on any London estate. The honest conclusion would be that it could not because it doesn't have sufficient community base to know any such eviction would be likely to take place, and, secondly, its orientation has been entirely ideological for so long it wouldn't know where to start in organising any effective resistance. The 'Leninism' of the left is precisely not

about the self emancipation of ordinary people. Because of this it is entirely unable to recognise why the battle for 'hearts and minds' – the ideological battle to win people to the struggle against capitalism – almost entirely misses the point. If you think people need to be led to freedom, it's easy to assume that people fail to resist the degradations of their everyday lives because they have the 'wrong' ideas – or 'false consciousness' as the left has it. But capitalism doesn't sustain itself because people are unable to recognise that unemployment, overcrowding, rent rises, benefit cuts, etc., aren't in their interests, but because capitalism has a monopoly on violence – both real and symbolic.

The threat of real violence is obvious enough. Police helicopters overhead, CCTV on every corner. The symbolic violence which holds us in place,

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## Nicolas Walter

A memorial meeting  
will be held on  
**Sunday 4th June**  
at 2pm

in the  
**Conway Hall**  
**Red Lion Square**  
**London WCI**

(nearest tube Holborn)

For information  
contact 020 8348 9955



# anarchist fortnightly

# Freedom

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Moneyed militants posture while car workers are ...

## out of fashion



Churchill's mohican

What was the difference between Mayday 2000 in London and the street protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organisation? Or, say, Mayday in the UK and in Ecuador? Not willing to hazard a guess? Let's make it easy then – the anti-WTO protests were orchestrated by a wide coalition of groups which included trade unionists, left groups, non-governmental organisations, community groups and local environmental justice groups; the representative organisations of those exploited and oppressed by capital, and the very forces most obviously absent from Mayday 2000 in the UK. In the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, twenty thousand workers took to the streets to protest the government's plan to adopt the US dollar as Ecuador's official currency (an estimated seven million Ecuadorians already live below the poverty line). In South Africa, a rally of 10,000 trade unionists was used to prepare the ground for a general strike on 10th May against the government's privatisation drive (which has eliminated half a million jobs since 1994).

May Day 2000 was marked across the world by militant demonstrations against capitalism and globalisation. In Kreuzberg, Berlin, tens of thousands engaged in street battles with the police. In London, we gave Churchill's statue a grass mohican and trashed a McDonalds! May Day is, as seems to have

been forgotten, Labour Day, and, in London the forces of labour were almost entirely absent.

None of this is intended to dismiss the bravery of the protesters who fought with the police, and are now being dragged through the courts. The clashes, though, were engineered to suit a different agenda, and it says little for the tactical nous of Reclaim the Streets that they didn't recognise this. At present, New Labour still faces substantial liberal opposition to its attempts to extend the Prevention of Terrorism Act. What it needed was a photo-opportunity in central London to justify the new Bill. When the McDonalds was trashed, did anyone stop to think why it was only 'defended' by police in shirt-sleeves, who withdrew immediately and left the place to be ripped apart, or why the thousands of riot police parked up all around Whitehall were introduced only after the initial damage was done? Let's play 'spot the set-up'. A few dramatic shots of 'mayhem' for the front pages and Blair descends from the heavens to declare (with the Prevention of Terrorism changes in mind) 'this must never happen again'.

Perhaps our anti-capitalist 'movement' is so hapless because its main movers are ex-public school boys like Mark Brown and Zac Goldsmith? As John Vidal (an ex-public school boy) helpfully points out in *The Guardian* (5th May 2000): "The tradition of public school social reform is long, and the thread of money and privilege runs through almost every radical social movement Britain has known ... Today's environment movement is in this respect no different, attracting numerous representatives of the financially or socially privileged classes". According to Teddy Goldsmith "all movements are started by the middle classes, the ones who have time to read the newspapers and who have time to take part" (you know, in his heart of hearts, that Goldsmith thinks the 'lower orders' aren't really able to read the newspapers, but it's not, even now, politic to go quite that far).

According to Vidal: "No one is more qualified than a public schoolboy to recognise dictatorship, fascism, human rights abuse and inequality". All of this must be incredibly reassuring to all those misguided



McDonalds provided many photo opportunities for Mayday ...

souls who thought that perhaps the relatives of the Bloody Sunday victims or jailed miners, or the victims of police frame-ups might have something to say about such issues, and feared the oiks might end up spoiling the party. And, as we all (apparently)

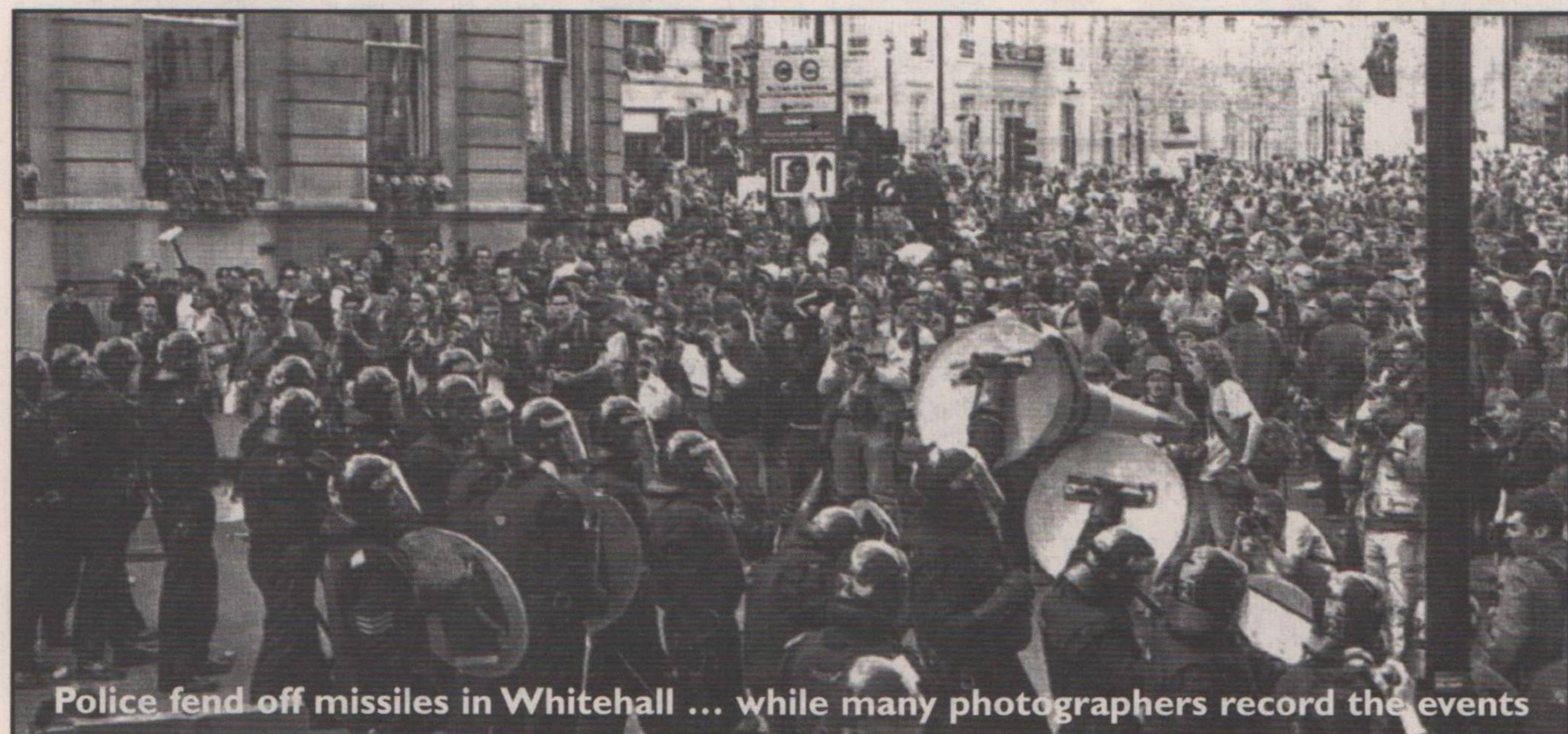
know, the 'borstal-type conditions' of the British public school are infinitely more brutal and crushing of pride and aspiration than any under-funded comprehensive!

The posturings of the moneyed militants would be harmlessly absurd were it not for the fact that their belief in their "sense of stewardship, of noblesse oblige, of wanting to use your position for the general good" (quote from Charles Secrett (Cranleigh), executive director of Friends of the Earth, in *The Guardian*, 5th May 2000) slips over into outright contempt for those they purport to support. Secrett talks of the landed aristocracy having a "feeling of stewardship towards the land" and it is certain that many of Mayday's Guerrilla Gardeners shared his sentiments. For the rest of us, though, 'land' and 'nature' are not arenas for contemplation

but sites of exploitation. Not everyone has the same relationship to the 'environment' – some own it, for instance. Moreover, the concern to disrupt the conversion of 'nature'

into a resource for capital too often fails to extend such concern to the human resources upon which capital primarily depends. The subtle alteration of the Situationists' slogan 'Under the pavement, the beach' (a celebration of the refusal of work) into the eco-moralism of 'Under the tarmac, the garden' is one indicator of this. Some, though, are prepared to go much further. Writing in *The Guardian* on 29th April 2000 George Monbiot declared that: "The workers of the West Midlands are the victims of decades of kindness". Monbiot notes that British car plants are slow and inefficient and that the European car market is "close to saturation". He observes that New Labour has refused to invest in the global solar energy market or wind technology, and

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Police fend off missiles in Whitehall ... while many photographers record the events

## Strictly for the birds

The cowardly and disgraceful – although hardly surprising – campaign of verbal and legal attacks on political refugees and asylum seekers currently being waged by politicians of all the major parties, not to mention the usual suspects on the far right, only goes to show how low such creatures are on the evolutionary scale. They are being egged on and supported by a number of journalists on the national and local press, despite a recent government study showing that in the last year 200,000 people left the UK to live elsewhere, making nonsense of the claims of overcrowding. The Liberal Democrat

Party has reported both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party to the Commission for Racial Equality for racism over the issue, but the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has condemned all three British parties for both racism and breaching the UN Charter on the right of refugees.

In the same week as the UNHCR's condemnation it was reported in Parliament that politicians are now so unpopular that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has more members than all three main national parties in Britain put together! Is it any wonder that people are taking to the streets?



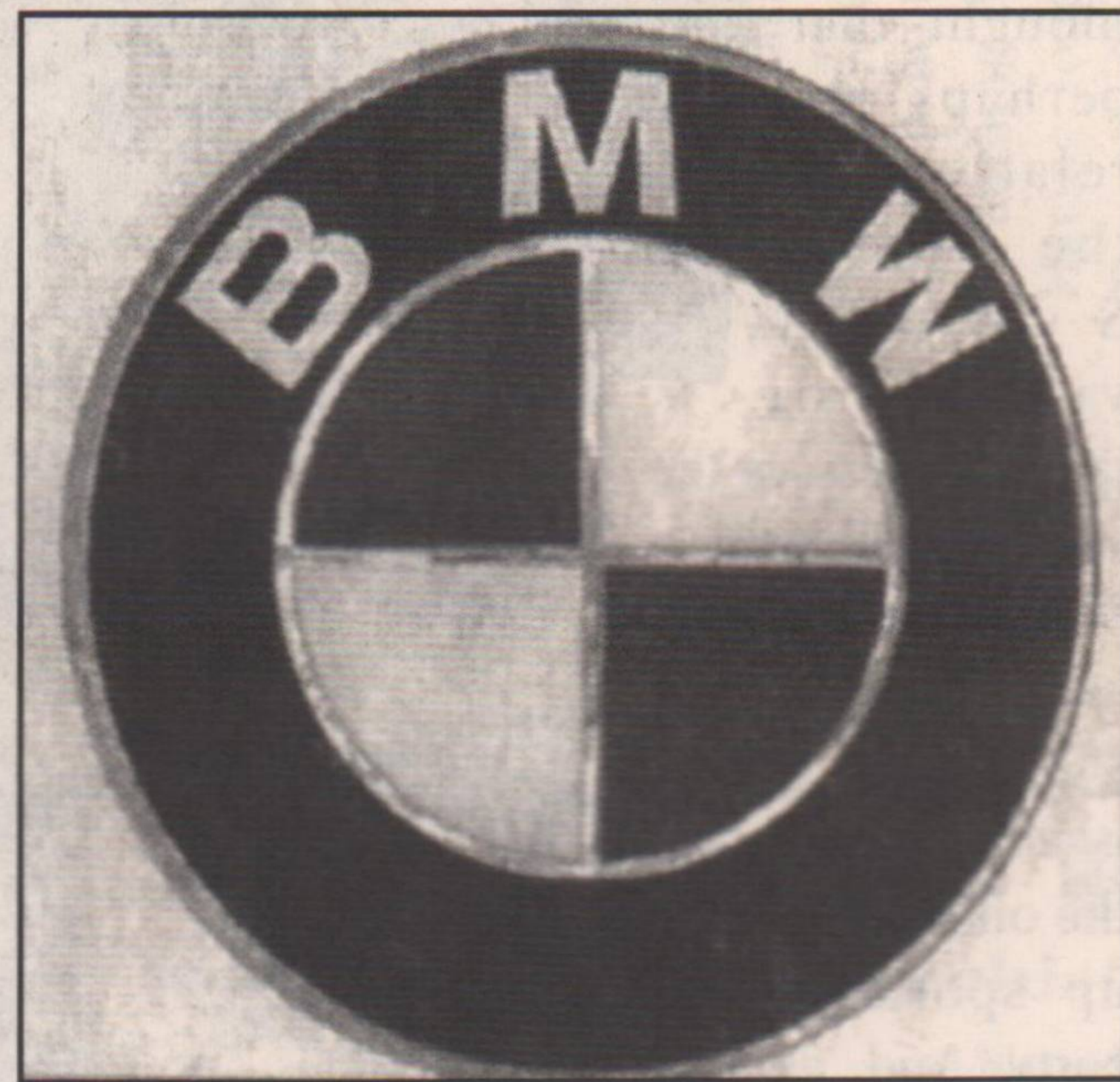
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concludes that “the impending loss of thousands of jobs in the West Midlands is a great tragedy. It is also a great opportunity. Were the government to exercise a little of that vision it claims to possess in abundance, it would abandon the backward looking policies which have compromised the future of British manufacturing and launch, instead, a genuine ‘knowledge-based economy’. I fear however that the forces of conservatism are alive and well, sustained by the misguided philanthropy of the government which claims to despise them”. It’s clear, I think, from this that George Monbiot and Tony Blair have more in common beyond their public school backgrounds than either might initially recognise. Both, for instance, are happy to equate the desperation of thousands of workers in the Midlands to secure some kind of future for themselves with ‘forces of conservatism’. Moreover, both have a similar vision of that future. Contrary to what Monbiot believes, Blair and Gordon Brown have been happy to let an overvalued pound decimate what remains of Britain’s manufacturing base as a means of cementing a future ‘knowledge-based economy’. If Rover gets any kind of bail out it will be entirely down to the expediency of preserving the Labour vote in the Midlands in the run up to the general election. After that, if they rely on the goodwill of John Towers and Stephen Byers, the Rover workers will hang. Monbiot might favour a knowledge based economy because it means the air will be cleaner when he cycles round Oxford. Blair, the pragmatic friend of capital, welcomes the move to information technology because it serves to guarantee lower wages and a more fragmented, disorganised work force. Mass redundancies in the Midlands will drive wages down yet further. Working class people in areas like the West Midlands don’t need lessons in environmental justice from trust-funded ex-public schoolboys. They’ve borne the physical scars of heavy industry in dust-filled lungs and mangled limbs and raised children in environments poisoned by the same employers who’ve then turned their children into assembly line fodder. When eighty thousand people demonstrated in Birmingham in defence of jobs at Rover it wasn’t because they want the continuation of an economy predicated upon environmental destruction but because, unlike those who might be able to scrape by on Vestry trust funds valued at £2.7 million, they’re trapped in a social relation with capital and recognise that any solution to their ills will have to come about through the re-negotiation of the

terms of that relation, or as some (too few) of us recognise, its destruction. If car production is to cease in the West Midlands and make way for investment in less harmful new technologies and – crucially (although Monbiot doesn’t think so) – preserve and improve the standard of living of working people in the area, such transformation can only come about through the social power mobilised by Rover workers and other workers whose jobs and futures are directly linked to theirs. If, for instance, Rover workers seized the Rover plant and other Rover offices and equipment, they would be in a position to force New Labour’s hand to invest in the future of the West Midlands – to push for job creation (perhaps in the solar and wind technologies Monbiot eulogises) and a guaranteed social wage. If they continue to place their hopes in John Towers their fate will be that sought for them by both George Monbiot and Tony Blair.

The Rover rescue package agreed on 9th May is premised only on a delay in future redundancies. The same choices still face Rover workers to rely on their own strength or place their hopes in a government committed only to their ruin. Workers at Ford Dagenham face a similar choice, having been deemed to be out of fashion.

The defeat of the organised labour movement in the period from 1979 has allowed capital to abandon the social



democratic consensus forced upon it by the labour militancy of the preceding years. The working class as a political force has been removed from the political arena. One result of this has been the extent to which ‘protest’ has become precisely the forum for public school radicalism celebrated by John Vidal. More importantly, a movement has developed which can set itself against capital and against globalisation without recognising the relations of exploitation at the heart of capital, without recognising the centrality of the productivity of labour to capitalism’s survival. As the economist David Coates observes: “the narrow conception of globalisation ... predisposes commentators to treat capital as a ‘thing’ rather than as a ‘social relationship’, and in consequence not to spot the degree to which capital’s ability to realise itself on a global scale is itself dependent on the creation of real production processes on the same global scale. For underneath the movements of capital lies the world of global labour; and beneath the global circuits of financial capital lie circuits of industrial production itself. Capital is not suddenly globally mobile simply because of an IT revolution ... Technological change in information and communication systems facilitates (and thereby amplifies) capital mobility; but it does not create or trigger that mobility. The enhanced global mobility of capital in the past three decades has social rather than technical roots. Capital is more geographically mobile than it was in the past because it now has more proletariats on which to land” (quote David Coates, *Models of Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2000). Or, much as some might wish otherwise, the truth



Car workers marching on the eve of talks between the Phoenix Consortium and BMW

Photo: Timothy Allen

about the working class is somewhat similar to Gerry Adams’s comment about the IRA: “They’ve not gone away, you know.”

Capitalism survives through the exploitation of labour – and the social relations established by capital to keep labour at heel are the root of the forms of oppression through race, gender, sexual orientation, which beset our lives. Two conclusions need to be drawn from this:

- 1) that capitalism is, as Eugene Debs once proposed, “inherently a criminal system, for it is based upon the robbery of the working class and cornerstoned in slavery”, and that, as such, the self-organisation and resistance of the working class should be central to any effective movement against capital, and
- 2) the forms of resistance that movement employs should be directed against the miseries of everyday life under capital – around issues which affect working class communities – wages, debt, rents, housing conditions, food and transport costs, retention and control of facilities for education and

health, criminalisation, etc. Set-piece battles in central London on dates declared in advance might allow a few of us to let off steam, but they change little. As Toni Negri and Michael Hardt put it, “fear is what binds and ensures social order ... fear of violence, poverty and unemployment is (capitalism’s) ultimate guarantee” (Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*, Harvard Press, 2000). Any serious anti-capitalist movement has to set about reversing such fears, ensuring that the ‘spectre’ of working class militancy makes fear as much a part of the life of capital as labour. It was clear from some of the workshops organised as part of the Mayday 2000 events, that many of the participants have begun to realise this. However much old Etonian rebels might wish to upset mummy and daddy, any anti-capitalist movement which seeks to matter has to become the property of those without property, has to be a vehicle for working class autonomy and working class emancipation.

Nick S.

## Mayday surprises

The Mayday weekend saw what was probably the most effective Anti-Capitalist Conference for some time. Despite knowing the soundness of the organisers’ reputations, I had feared some kind of archaic leftist ‘Living Anti-Capitalism’ convention (particularly after seeing some of the flyers) but was fortunately surprised. The turn-out was both large and diverse and, while there were many disagreements, I was encouraged by the degree of political enlightenment and accord between the attendees. Even the old Marxists made sense occasionally. It was good to see the spirit of Mayday ‘98 was still intact. And while it was somewhat saddening to hear that at least one meeting was threatened with exclusion (on the grounds of simple prejudice

it seems), fortunately this was resolved and the Conference was relatively all inclusive. Outbursts of transitory prejudice are always more human, I feel, than boring old detached liberalism anyway.

Is some new revolutionary consensus building, burying the old sectarian bullshit, or is this all just comradely diplomacy? No doubt future deeds will be necessary to elucidate here. One good sign was the inclusion of groups previously scarce at such gatherings, particularly black radicals and full-on counter-culturalists (whose presence was also encouragingly high at the attendant demos). The some of the latter also brought news of that weekends 24-hour Warp rave at the Drome, which was undoubtedly more

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Turf on the tarmac in Parliament Square



Parliament Square’s ‘guerrilla gardeners’



# Mayday in Manchester

About five hundred anti-capitalist demonstrators gathered in Piccadilly Gardens, in the Mayday sunshine. Fine bank holiday weather brought out the crowds, who showed interest in our invitation to participate. The leaflet entitled *Challenge Anarchy* said "there is a difference to other demonstrations and actions you have been on in the past. Here there are no leaders – there is no person at the front telling you what to do. There will be no mass of crowd milling around in which you can hide yourself. The aim of *Challenge Anarchy* is not only to challenge the crap capitalist system, but to challenge ourselves and our ways of organising. The aim is to encourage participants to work in small groups, think for themselves, use initiative, cunning and wit to outfox the Greater Manchester Constabulary, and above all have fun. We are trying to avoid [what] has happened on actions ... where police have penned in the crowd ... and provoked confrontation."

Each group will have an 'Anarchy Rice' – a facilitator who is there to help the group decide what they want to do. 'Anarchy Rice' however, is not there to make decisions for you, or tell you what to do. Each group will receive an action pack to set forth on their treasure hunt around some of the nastier specimens that the capitalist system has to offer."

A street band (plus me!) added to the carnival atmosphere. As the main body of the demo moved away, police tried unsuccessfully to surround us. We split into about six groups, heading in different directions for specific targets. A metal barrier, obstructing one of our routes was quickly moved without damage. Taken as a whole, we tried to show the connection between specific targets: we leafleted outside a jobcentre, several supermarkets (that do so much to destroy

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anarchic than most of the official entertainment arranged by the 'proper anarchists'.

The attendant demos were mostly well thought out and the most inspiring thing about the largest (centred on the 'Trustafarian' gesturism in Parliament Square) were the sheer numbers involved, apparently close to ten thousand people. It was only a shame that theirs weren't channelled into more effective action (come on RTS, we know you can do better than that). But at least the police behaved intelligently for once (even if they did have to recruit a philosopher to do it), and the traditional pointless ruck at the end was enjoyable for many. But after walking round in circles all day stepping over dying sods, some of us decided to stroll to Green Park, rather than get nicked for no good reason or be shepherded by the hippie 'cops' in the RTS exodus to Kennington Park – even if I did miss out on a free burger.

Some may feel that the orthodox anarchist movement is elitist and dominated by a small group of leftists. While this may have been (at least arguably) true five years ago, the Mayday Conference shows that our movement is now far more open and in productive discourse with other revolutionaries. Though the 'heretics', like all dissidents, have a valuable role to play in ensuring this remains the case, and if things had been otherwise the previous weekend, would have been proved right. True pluralists should have no trouble supporting both gatherings.

In conclusion, Mayday week has been a memorable one, and hopefully another step in the right direction.

Prometheus Rex

communities), several employment agencies (where slave auctions used to be held); and picketed a large Shell garage, with leaflets telling how that company is robbing and polluting Nigeria. One team, in a supermarket, showed what it's like for asylum seekers to try and shop with vouchers.

We were accused by the police of forcing McDonalds, Lewis's department store and Tescos (all on Market Street) to shut down due to our bad behaviour. I report that the truth of the matter is what I saw, or was told by trusted friends.

A group did meet outside Tescos, but went on to other targets mentioned above. The demonstrators outside McDonalds were good humoured and calm, but were moved by a line of cops marching side by side the width of the street. Some members of the public complained about the police bully-boy tactics. Another group was dancing outside Lewis's (terrifying rampage?) but, threatened by police behaviour, they ran into the store which immediately brought down its steel shutters and closed the building. Our street band was encircled by cops (I confess to banging a saucepan with a wooden spoon) but you could walk through their lines without difficulty. First reports on the media were that the demo was peaceful, but later

reports followed the police line. Granada Television that evening gave us Councillor Pat Karney, who liaises with the Greater Manchester police. Raging against the demonstrators, he accepted every false allegation they had made. He had no wish to consider the possibility that Market Street venues had been closed due to instructions from distant head offices of the companies concerned and/or police instructions. In fact

a non-existent 'riot' had been 'contained' by the police, who needed to look needed. Councillor Karney went on to add that he had been on more demonstrations than he had had hot dinners – without questioning the ways the police can exaggerate things, Councillor?

That night we partied at the much loved but long boarded-up Hacienda club, scene of past squats that have led to political activity.

Martin S. Gilbert

## In court in Manchester

Six Mayday demo defendants and one juvenile defendant appeared before Manchester magistrates on Friday 5th May. All of them (except one charged with possession of cannabis) pleaded not guilty. The others were charged under the public order offence 'Fear of provocation of violence code no. 105'. It was claimed that on 1st May at Manchester they "used towards another threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, within the hearing of persons likely to cause harassment or alarm".

A Mr Thomas from York, Mr Faulds, Mr Cramp, Mr Lilly, Mr Hubes and Andrew Fauld were all given 'unconditional bail' and told to attend a pre-trial review on 15th June.

B.

### COPY DEADLINE

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 3rd June, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 25th 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).

## Northern Anarchists in Bradford

"Every other factory town in England is a paradise compared to this hole" wrote the German poet Weerth in 1840, "if anyone wishes to feel how a sinner is tormented in purgatory, let him travel to Bradford".

There are at least two other reasons to go to Bradford. One is the Mumtaz Paan House for 'authentic' Indian food, and the other is the '1 in 12' Club. The '1 in 12' Club is a kind of social club run on a libertarian theme – I think it was originally set up as an unemployed centre (one in twelve people in Bradford being on the dole when it was founded).

On 1st April it was the venue of the conference of the Northern Anarchist

Network. This time the conference was poorly attended, as it had to compete with a demo against the new Anti-Terrorism Bill in Manchester.

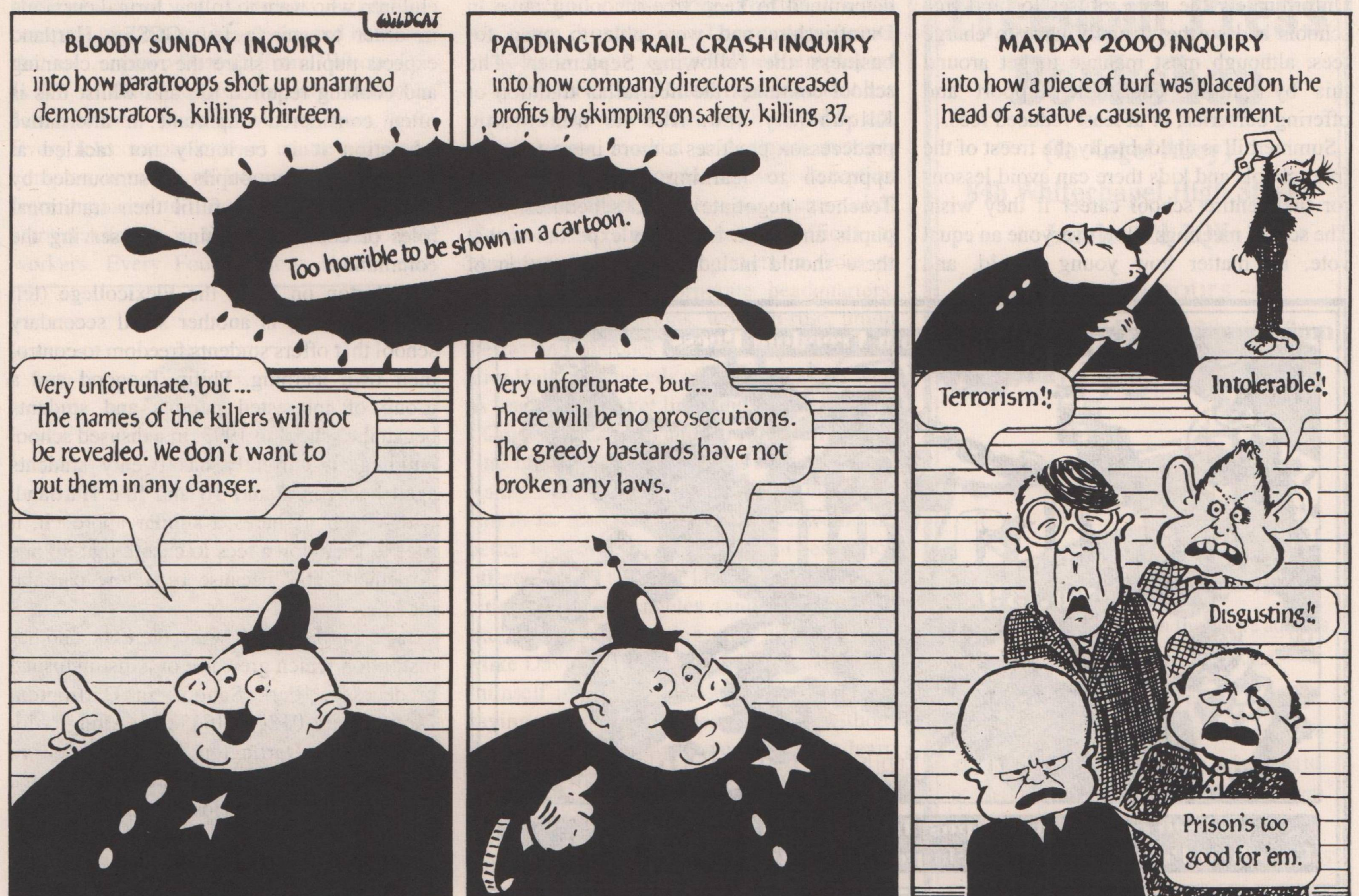
This Bill was the first item of the agenda. It was explained that there had been little opposition in Parliament. In theory people on anti-capitalist demos could be charged if this Bill becomes law. It was decided to support campaigns against this new legislation.

There was some discussion of how the Northern Anarchists should relate to other political and activist groups. Bury, Manchester and Tameside indicated that they intend to link the unemployed groups in the north west with the disabled groups around the Direct

Action Network (DAN) protests against the New Labour big-wigs in the run-up to the next general election.

Some argued that we should coordinate our libertarian contribution to the Riotous Assembly in Manchester. Suggestions that we could work more closely with the Manchester Socialist Alliance (Trot) were rejected, though it was thought we might usefully approach the Revolutionary Socialist Network to consider some joint activity.

The next NAN conference will be held at Bury in September with speakers to cover such themes as the disabled and unemployed actions, anti-capitalist actions, Earth First! and CND.





Some alternatives to state schooling

**'Seeds beneath the snow'**

You don't have to go to school. The State demands that children are educated at recognised schools, "or otherwise". Thousands of parents and children prefer to follow the 'otherwise' alternative and opt for home education. Local authorities have a legal obligation to ensure that children in their area receive an efficient education and their inspectors often insist on state-defined targets and curricula, but there is no need to accept their bullying. Home educators can happily ignore the National Curriculum and advice on how to deal with inspectors is available from Education Otherwise (tel: 08707 300074). Education Otherwise (EO) is an excellent, decentralised, mutual aid organisation of home-learners and their parents.

Some home-educators band together to create local learning groups which occasionally develop into informal schools. Southwark Small School (tel: 020 8693 5495) began in 1990 when a group of EO parents got together to educate their children in each others' homes. As more people got involved in 1994 it was decided to rent a building and operate as a small school. After three years some of the original families moved away and with fewer children involved it was considered more appropriate to close the school and return to home-learning.

This fluid arranging and rearranging of learning contexts demonstrates that alternative education doesn't require huge funds, complex organisation or social isolation. It just needs imagination, commitment and a few children.

If you live near Leiston in Suffolk, Ashburton in Devon, Dumfries in Galloway, Hartland in Devon, Burton in Derbyshire or Dartington you are fortunate in having a free school nearby. Boarding is possible at most of these schools but usually entails staying with a local family and attending the school as a day pupil. Only Summerhill in Leiston (tel: 01728 830540) sees boarding as central part to its philosophy, with the school serving as a sort of alternative family and community. Still the possibility of boarding at least allows anyone to opt of the state-system if they are sufficiently determined. Unfortunately the state refuses to fund free schools and so they usually have to charge fees, although most manage to get around this by gaining charitable support and offering bursaries, or at least reduced fees.

Summerhill is undoubtedly the freest of the free schools and kids there can avoid lessons for their entire school career if they wish. The school meetings allow everyone an equal vote, no matter how young or old, and

virtually all matters are open to debate and democratic control. It's easy to see why this didn't go down too well with OFSTED but the school defeated the State's attempts to close it down and it continues to help pupils gain creditable GCSE results as well as more important skills like cooperation and bullshit detection! Summerhill has occupied the same large Victorian detached house, set in several acres of partly wooded grounds since 1927. Student numbers have fluctuated over the years but there are generally around sixty boys and girls, aged from 6 to 16, with a good proportion coming from overseas, notably Japan. Sands School in Ashburton, Devon (tel: 01364 653666) places a higher value on academic achievement than Summerhill and is less wary of the influence of adult teachers on child learners. Personally I like their more structured approach but Summerhill probably allows more scope for kids who need to work through their feelings and emotions before they get to grips with more academic concerns. This is not to deny that freedom is at the very heart of all that goes on at Sands. As it says in their brochure: "The weekly School Meeting is the hub of Sands' structure. It is the place where school policies are discussed and adjusted and where grievances are heard. It makes all the decisions that affect the school and takes on those responsibilities which are normally held by the head teacher." The school occupies a large Georgian town house near the centre of Ashburton and backs onto a secluded two-acre garden with lawns and mature trees. Sands currently has 65 students aged between 10 and 17 and like Summerhill is keen to keep the school reasonably small to maintain close, supportive relationships between everyone involved.

Three hundred miles north in Carnsalloch near Dumfries, set amidst six acres of wooded grounds, near the River Nith, is Galloway Small School (tel: 01387 254924). The venture arose from the closure of the wonderful Kilquhanity School in July 1997, following the death of its founder John Aitkenhead. A group of former parents, teachers and pupils got together and determined to keep free-schooling alive in Dumfriesshire and were able to open for business the following September! The school continues the libertarian tradition of Kilquhanity and, like its honourable predecessor, practises a more interventionist approach to learning than Summerhill. Teachers negotiate work schedules with pupils and there is a clear expectation that these should include a high proportion of

academic studies. The policies and practices of Galloway Small School are controlled by the weekly school council. The aim is to build up student numbers to around the level of Sands and Summerhill but it's early days and there are still plenty of vacancies. GSS accepts day pupils and boarders and although fees are charged they "make every effort to enable children to attend regardless of parental wealth."

Hartland School, Devon (01237 441672) had no radical predecessor. It was opened in 1982 by a group of parents concerned about two aspects of education in their area, firstly the increasingly authoritarian approach of



A bunch of free-school kids expressing unbridled enthusiasm for libertarian education.

state schools and secondly the LEA's determination to introduce commuting for schoolkids! As they closed more village schools they were bussing kids on longer and longer journeys to bigger and bigger schools. Secondary school pupils were expected to travel furthest so parents determined to offer local, alternative secondary education. The Small School occupies a converted chapel and derives about 70% of its income from charitable donations and 30% from voluntary parental contributions. Like other free-schools Hartland refuses to sacrifice the needs and enthusiasms of the kids to the demands of the National Curriculum and companion SATs tests. Again like the other schools, it does however support older children who want to follow formal curricula in order to gain a few GCSEs. Hartland expects pupils to share the routine cleaning and cooking required too and whilst this is often considered important in alternative education it is curiously not tackled at Summerhill where pupils are surrounded by women employed to fulfil their traditional roles of cooking, cleaning and serving the community.

In Burton on Trent the Flexicollege (tel: 01283 500234) is another small secondary school that offers students freedom to control their own learning. Philip Toogood and a group of interested parents and students began the school in 1993, in a disused school building. It currently has twenty students aged between 9 and 16 and like Hartland, with which it shares a similar approach, it tries to keep down fees to ensure that no one is denied entry because of a low parental income.

Back in the south-west there is another institution which grew out of a distinguished predecessor, Park School, in Dartington, Devon (tel: 01803 864588). Along with Summerhill, Dartington Hall, founded in 1925, was one of the pioneering British free schools and when its closure was announced in 1986 a group of parents and teachers determined to carry on with educating in the Dartington spirit. Unlike all the schools above,

Park only educates primary age children and has sixty pupils aged from 3 to 11. The position of the school on the Dartington Estate provides a unique context for the artistic and environmental work. "The school is very fortunate in having extensive grounds with a paddock containing pigs, ducks and hens. It has its own orchard, tree nursery, pond and wetland area, garden, composting bins and greenhouse. The school also grows its own vegetables and provides organic, GM-free lunches." Like other free schools Park holds weekly meetings and although all learning is negotiated with the students, the teachers probably have more influence here than at Summerhill or Sands.

Like all democratic institutions free-schools evolve with the coming and going of different pupils and different teachers. Similarly there are a whole spectrum of other alternative schools which may currently seem less radical than those featured above but nevertheless still remain open to libertarian ideas, especially when accompanied by offers of practical help and support. It is vital that we value and nurture these precious germs of freedom and help them grow.

Even isolated communities like Scoraig in Rosshire (tel: 01854 633277) have managed to challenge the dictates of the State and set up small local schools as an alternative to junior commuting. Scoraig's campaign is to secure funding from a local authority reluctant to finance what they don't control, even when it can be provided at a lower cost than traditional schooling.

Many who are disturbed by the competitive, materialist values of state schooling support more spiritual alternatives, such as Steiner Education (tel: 01342 822115) or the Buddhist inspired Dharma School in Brighton (tel: 01273 502055).

Learners with special needs can also find places free from the controlling ideology and practice of state education. The Caldecott Community, near Ashford, Kent (tel: 01233 503954) has provided a "therapeutic learning community" since it was founded by Lelia and Edith Rendel in 1911. Although the children have all previously suffered severely stressful experiences Caldecott's philosophy is overwhelmingly positive and continues the Rendel's concern for children's, "independence of spirit and joyousness of life." Although independent of state control Caldecott kids usually get their fees paid by local authorities who have come to appreciate the unique value of this residential community. Oaktree House in Liverpool (tel: 01517 277231) offers a similarly supportive, though non-residential education for boys and girls seriously stressed out by the rigours of their lives. Founded in 1988 the school aims to serve the kids failed by Liverpool's conventional schools. Although it hasn't yet managed to get its hands on state money it doesn't charge fees or even request any voluntary donations from parents, it has so far survived on grants and lottery funding. Oaktree may not be as libertarian as Summerhill but it is far more caring, holistic and democratic than local state schools who would never dream of following Oaktree's practice of having pupil interviews for staff appointments.

In *Anarchy in Action* (Freedom Press, 1982) Colin Ward argued that, "an anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state." Summerhill, Sands and all these other centres of liberated learning are seeds beneath the heavy snowfall of authoritarian education. They are a delight, an inspiration and a demonstration that freedom works.

Christopher Draper

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# Freedom Press Bookshop Readers' round-up

If it's discussion of the Battle of Seattle you're after, the spring 2000 issue of *Fifth Estate* goes into it big time with six pages on it. Among other features of interest are 'The US War Against the Iraqi People' and 'A Short History of Radical Puppetry'. £1.50 for 28 pages. Also coming on strong on Seattle, though from a different perspective, is the *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* no. 28 (36 pages, £2.95), just in, which also devotes six pages to it. There is a substantial piece by Jon Bekken comparing various utopias including the Freedom Press title *The Last Capitalist* by Steve Cullen, Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* by Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget. Part two of the *IWW Chronology: 95 Years of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism* brings us up to 1996, and there is the usual good selection of US and international news. Some of the Seattle articles in the above magazine surface in *Organise!* no. 53 (32 pages, £1.50), alongside other good pieces like 'The Débauché in Timor', 'Young People and the Nazis: the Edelweiss Pirates' and 'Conservation: anti-people or anti-capitalist?'

*Industrial Worker* April/May 2000, being a monthly, has moved on from discussions of Seattle and covers the spreading US anti-sweatshop protests at a number of universities by both workers and students, whether they be multinational sweatshops in which the universities invest their massive funds (Wal-Mart, Gap, Walt Disney Corporation, etc.) or the domestic sweatshops made up of the workers employed by the universities through unscrupulous contractors. A3, 12 pages for 75p (back issues also available).

It's no wonder that so many Russians and other ethnic groups in the former USSR have been such willing converts to alcohol or capitalism, when you read first-hand accounts of what daily life was like for ordinary people under the Soviet régime, such as Ivan Petrov. His detailed account of how he chose to become a drunk, *Ivan Petrov: Russia*

*Through a Shot Glass*, is written by C.S. Walton from two years of conversations with him in the West, and published in smart book form by Garrett County Press (244 pages, £8.00). C.S. Walton will be familiar to some readers as the author of the excellent *Little Tenement on the Volga* about her own experiences in Russia, and her new book is equally lucid and compelling. Something of the flavour of Petrov's life – dark and depressing, but simultaneously hilariously funny – comes through even in the prologue: "People ask me: 'What was it like?' Well I'll tell them what it was like. Where I grew up – a provincial Russian town in the middle years of this century – it made no difference which side of the barbed wire you lived on. Prisoners in camps, collective farmers, factory workers – one man's life was as bleak as another's. Some people accepted things as they were and tried to carve out careers for

themselves as informers or bureaucrats; others sought a way out. I chose to become a drunk, not an ordinary drink-up-your-wage-packet drunk or even a flog-your-house-and-furniture drunk, but a vagabond and a beggar who became intimate with forests, garbage dumps and railway stations all over our great country ... And what of it? As a man I once knew, who happened to be a cannibal, remarked: 'You'd have done the same in my place'."

Chaz Bufe has written a new pamphlet for See Sharp Press based on the pessimism and disarray he sees as afflicting the North American Left for the last thirty years. Called *A Future Worth Living: thoughts on getting there\** (26 pages, £1.60), it first examines the socio-economic conditions that govern society, then various conditioning institutions such as religion, the family, education and mass media. The reason, he thinks, that anarchists and marxists have so far failed in their attempts to change society for the better is that they have not paid enough attention to psychology; that the majority of people are alienated and living in fear and thus not receptive to rational intellectual persuasion based solely on social and economic matters. I fear that this is a great underestimation of the average person and that, whilst it is true that progress can often seem painfully slow, looked at from a broader perspective there are now many thousands of individuals worldwide who are operating in non-hierarchical and non-exploitative ways. I think Bufe is being a bit over-pessimistic about the situation – we never promised you a rose garden (well, perhaps we did, but not within thirty years necessarily). But at least he does put forward a number of suggestions for improving our prospects of getting through to people – principles, practices and projects that could lead to 'a future worth living'. This in itself shows that he still has hope for humanity. Keep the flag flying, Chaz.

Four Eyes

(continued from page 8)

though, is just as much a barrier to self-realisation. Gilles Deleuze once observed that "Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school ... then the barracks ... then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement" (from *Negotiations*, Columbia University Press, 1995).

Symbolic violence is the violence that tells us that we have no power, no capacity to bring



The interior of the Lloyd's building in the City of London

about any change in our own lives. It is the violence that carries out the essential cover-up for capital – the violence that obscures the fact that without the physical and mental labour of ordinary working people, the society which impoverishes us could not exist. A politics based around self-organisation and self-emancipation, with an orientation to direct action rather than electoralism has some chance of bringing about meaningful change because it allows us to recognise our own social power. It's why stopping an eviction carries more weight than winning 39,000 votes.

Is it possible to build such a politics today? On one level it might appear not. The confidence and grandiloquence of the 'ruling' class can seem unchallengeable. One sign of this is the extent to which more and more public space is colonised to build totems to wealth. We are in the midst of a boom in building schemes – from the plan to

turn the centre of Birmingham into a giant glassed-over shopping mall, to the bridge of light across the Thames and the new Tate Modern Gallery. Through the transforming agency of the Lottery, the dreamchasing cash of the poor underwrites the building of pillars of glass designed to reflect the vitality of the rich. Ninety percent of us live in cities. Few of us feel any longer that we really belong. London, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham – all global cities now we're told. Public transport, housing, regeneration – all are irrelevant. Cities exist to service the needs of those who can afford to eat at Coq d'Argent or stay at Terence Conran's Great Eastern Hotel (suite £515 per night) or St Martin's Lane (suite £1,250 per night). If you choose to stay at the Four Seasons Hotel at Canary Wharf, for £1,400 you can have a suite with a view designed to show you the glory of the Thames without having to catch a glimpse of the Barkantine Estate. Global cities might well be "sites for immense concentrations of economic power and command centres in a global economy" but, as Saskia Sassen notes, "even the most advanced information industries have a work process – that is, a complex of workers, machines and buildings that are ... place-bound" (from 'Whose City Is It?' in *Cities and Citizenship*, edited by James Holston, Duke University Press, 1999). Every telecommunications centre requires a complex network of labour to sustain it – from engineers to cleaners. Every Michelin-starred kitchen is filled with poorly paid workers. Every Four Seasons Hotel needs



Living in the shadow of the Canary Wharf tower in London

someone to turn back the sheets. Moreover, all of the invisible labourers upon whom our cities depend live in housing near their workplaces, have to use public transport to get to work, etc.

In his stirring new book *Magical Urbanism* (Verve 2000), the urban theorist Mike Davis shows forcefully how the growth of the Latino population in the US has both revitalised urban life and rejuvenated the US



Docklands children at play

labour movement. From the unionisation campaign at the New Otani Hotel, to the Justice for Janitors Campaign, "the American Racing Equipment strikers in 1990-91, the militant drywallers in 1992 who struck down construction sites from Ventura to the Mexican border ... These new wave campaigns have overwhelmed employers with an innovative tactical repertoire that has included guerrilla theatre and film, public art, a pro-labour masked and caped avenger (Mopman) ... corporate exposes, disruption of stockholders' meetings, mass civil disobedience (from sit-ins in offices to blockages of freeways) pickets in front of bosses' homes or corporate headquarters, community delegations, work to rule, union fiestas and marches and the encirclement of City Hall by hundreds of huge trucks, as well as traditional picket lines and boycotts."

Cities like London and Birmingham remain sites of exploitation as well as sites of wealth. Rather than following the road of electoralism to its inevitable dead end, we would do better to look to the examples of resistance offered up by the new labour movements in cities like Los Angeles (and to the IWW tradition of organising the unorganised). Mike Davis quotes LA mayor Omar Bradley (himself misquoting Frederick Douglass) as saying "Power concedes nothing without demand". It is a lesson we need to re-learn here if we want to challenge the forces which see our cities as playgrounds for wealth, and the role of the rest of us to uncork the bottles and clean the cars.

Nick S.

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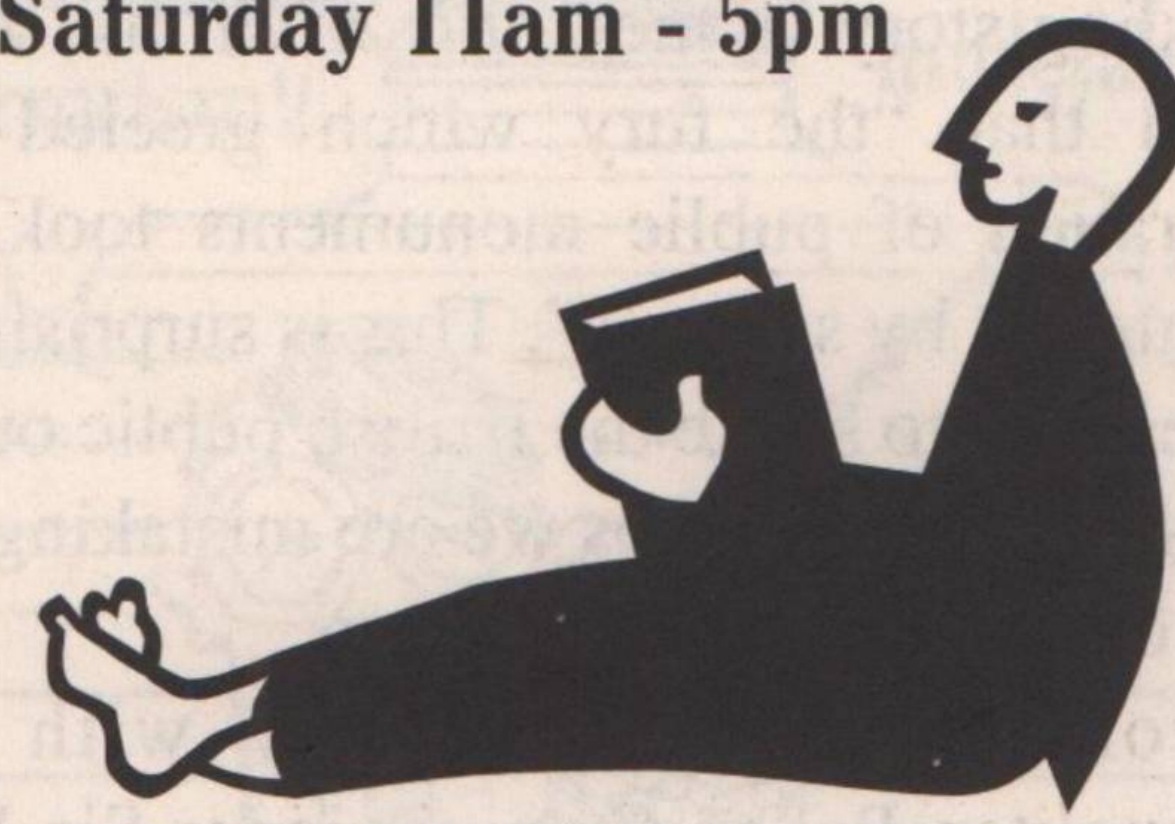
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# Sacred objects of our time

Now, following the London Mayday 'riot', the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens has declared that "we have some more difficult times coming". He added that the perpetrators "are anarchists, and they want the Royal Family dismantled".

Everyone – the press, the police, the politicians – seem to be squeezing the hysteria over the graffiti on the Cenotaph and other monuments on May Day for all they can get out of it. No doubt Sir John is trying to use the incidents to tap the Home Secretary for

Graffiti sprayed at the feet of Field Marshal Viscount Slim



more funds and support for the police.

The politicians tried to use it to drum

up support, amid voter apathy, in the week of the local elections. An article in *The Times* declared that the "nation's heroes may never recover". The column continued, "not a single statue, not one field marshall, monarch or prime minister escaped the desecrators' paint".

In Manchester, where a Mayday protest also took place, the *Manchester Evening News* reported that "city centre supremo Councillor Pat Karney slammed the event and described demonstrators as 'mindless anarchists'." He fumed that he was going to hand over council video footage to the police to get the culprits. Coppers' nark Karney claimed the demonstrators had closed down a branch of McDonalds on Market Street, though people at the scene say the police closed shops down in the vicinity of the demo.

## 'Anarchists to target queen'

A leading story in the *Daily Mail* last week argued that "the fury which greeted the desecration of public monuments took the government by surprise". This is surprising – it takes a lot to shake the British public out of their slumbers. Perhaps we are mistaking the press outcry for public concern.

According to an interview with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens in the *Daily Mail*, he thinks "the threat posed by hard-line anarchists is so severe that he is considering a 'highly unusual' call for Jack Straw to ban the next wave of demonstrations". Sir John, nicknamed Captain Beaujolais because of his boozing habits, was described by lady of the press Mary Riddell as 'swashbuckling' when he declared: "I can't say until nearer the demonstrations, but if we think there is going

to be major public disorder and we can't have confidence in handling it, then the only other way of dealing with it is a ban".

However, headline hacks Steven Wright and Michael Clark, in a front-page article in the *Daily Mail*, are not convinced. They argue that "the Home Secretary can ban a procession or march if a chief constable asks him to do so – and if the organisers have asked for police permission". But, they caution, "in the case of the Mayday riots, the Reclaim the Streets group did not seek permission and its hard-line activists refused to discuss their plans with the police".

By claiming, as he does in the *Daily Mail*, that anarchists are to target the Queen perhaps Sir John hopes to get the public and the government onto his side at a time when crime is reported to be on the up and a series of police corruption trials are about to begin. After the Cenotaph graffiti and the rendering of Churchill's statue as a contender for the Turner Prize, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner invokes threats to perhaps our most sacred object of all: the Queen and the Royal Family.

## Behaviour in public squares

Half a century ago Ignazio Silone argued that public squares were becoming the centre of theatrical and liturgical activity, leaving the theatres and churches empty. He wrote that "in the squares you can also see the symbols and fetishes of the new idolatry: the eagles, swastikas, fasces, flags".

Silone quoted Napoleon: "Give me a button and I will make people live or die for it".

Though a socialist himself, Silone believed that symbolic fictions were vital in every kind of state, but particularly totalitarian states. He invoked the English anthropologist Frazer, who "once stated that maintaining the public order and the state's authority has always been essentially based on the superstitious images that the masses form of it".

Without these kinds of symbolic images, Silone claims, "much of history would remain incomprehensible". He continued that "wars would be incomprehensible, the existence of parasitical social classes would be incomprehensible, and so would barracks, prisons, the relationship between colonies and metropolises, and all the rest".

Anarchists and realists often challenge these sacred objects. Some of the Mayday graffiti asked 'Why glorify war?' – resistance to sacred images is always possible, but we must not expect people to love us because of it.

## 'Jail the anarchists'

The Manchester Mayday demo seems to have been a peaceful affair. Eyewitness and early media reports suggested it was. Only the next day, after Councillor Karney and the *Manchester Evening News* got in on the act,

was the episode built-up into a major confrontation. It seems that the Hacienda club was occupied again.

Karney is one of those self-publicist politicians who, libertarian activists claim, presents himself as a 'cool dude' ever-active with the gays on Manchester's Mardi Gras. Now he really wants to punish the anarchists locally. Attempts by *Freedom* correspondents to get him to comment have been unsuccessful.

The *Manchester Evening News* editorial called the Mayday demos a "demonstration of thuggery", it bemoaned the "vacuum in ideological politics" caused by the abolition of socialism in 1989 and ran a poll of its readers on whether or not 'anarchists' should be given long jail sentences. It's hard to believe now that Brian Redhead once edited the *Manchester Evening News* and George Orwell graced its columns.

Even the right-wing philosopher Roger Scruton, writing in the business supplement of the *Financial Times* last week on the Washington protest against global capitalism, declared that "the global distribution of food leads inexorably to the destruction of small farms, of traditional agricultural practices and of a healthy, sustainable relation to the landscape".

## Go and spit on a Goddess

The irony of the episode of the so-called desecration of the Cenotaph is that the soldiers commemorated thereon were great and heroic precisely because they were paid so little for their work and efforts – global businessmen like Bill Gates or Rupert Murdoch owe their glory and success to gaining the highest possible reward. In 1864 John Ruskin asked some businessmen in Bradford Town Hall: "I can never make out how it is that a knight-errant does not expect to be paid for his trouble, but a pedlar-errant always does – that people are willing to take

hard knocks for nothing, but never to sell ribbons cheap ... and are perfectly ready to give the Gospel gratis, but never the loaves and fishes".

Ruskin detected that capitalist civilisation had a split personality in the nineteenth century. Worshipping in Gothic churches, but whose mansions and mills were anything but Gothic – posing a a Christian gentleman, but in business captivated by Britannia of the Market, the goddess of getting-on. Today this division may be even more acute.

The trouble with this particular goddess is, as the Mayday protesters know, she belongs to a market deity which means getting-on for one, but not getting-on for a thousand or more. Getting-on for somebody means losing out for millions in that kind of lottery of market economics. The Virgin aimed to give comfort to everyone, but Britannia of the Market only rewards the few. Why don't they build us a status of Britannia of the market, as Ruskin suggested to those Bradford businessmen, to grace the inner chambers of their Stock Exchange. Then, in the same way that Italian peasants spit on the Virgin when she fails them, we can abuse the Goddess of Getting On.

Mack the Knife



Graffiti on the Cenotaph

# In defence of flat-earthers

Neo-conservatives dismiss opposition to the WTO as a species of luddism and flat-earthism. They see us as a gang of protectionist-inclined reactionaries and hysterical enviromaniacs. Sure, some of this is undoubtedly true, throw together any vast coalition and you will have your nutters. It is also possible the negative effects of the WTO (or any of the other contemporary joys such as genetically engineered food) may be exaggerated. (I have lived long enough to know that things rarely turn out as badly as the doomsters claim or as wonderful as the optimists wish.) Also, we might well be a bunch of raving loonies and still be making a valid point, a point the neo-cons refuse to see.

The point is one of prudence. Why shouldn't we be cautious in the face of threatened sweeping change? Especially change initiated from above by our beloved leaders. Isn't the old saying 'better the Devil you know' often true? Prudence is supposedly one of the virtues conservatives (neo or otherwise) endorse. Old Burke must be spinning in his grave at the sheer imprudence of his alleged offspring!

You could throw it back in my face that it is equally ironic an anarchist should praise a conservative virtue. Not necessarily the case. Conservatives do not hold a copyright on the notion of prudence. Anarchists are not nihilists and we have rarely wanted to throw

all caution to the winds. We have always been suspicious of what the authorities wish to do to us. If you want to develop a faculty for prudence, you need only look at this history of the twentieth century. One might name it the imprudent century.

The twentieth century saw the same sort of people who are pushing the WTO – politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals, media types and business people – giving us such humanitarian advances as the two world wars, the Depression and the Vietnam War. The same

kind of 'experts' have also given us tax-eating, environment-destroying mega-projects, city-destroying expressways, neighbourhood and community destroying 'urban renewal', school consolidation and political centralisation. The same experts herded the rural folk into the cities, depopulated the countryside and turned the remaining farmers into glorified welfare recipients. How about thalidomide babies, atomic power, shock treatment, eugenics, and the War on Drugs? Don't you just love those experts!

All of this was done in the name of democracy, progress and 'for our own good.' All opposition was rudely dismissed as reactionary, ignorant, treasonous and paranoid. They were wrong and dishonest then, so why should we trust them now?

Larry Gambone



A précis of reports received by Indymedia

# UK Mayday Report

With the success of Friday's Mayday Critical Mass bicycle protest, an exciting weekend of anti-capitalist ideas and action began. Following the successful Anti-Terrorism Bill photo shoot and inspiring two-day conference, the capital braced itself for Mayday 2000. The main event, the Reclaim the Streets Guerrilla Gardening action, would run in parallel with national and international events inspired by last summer's 'Carnival against Capitalism' and the shutting down of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle.

Mayday events in London kicked off at 10am with a 'Carnival Against Junk Food' outside a McDonalds outlet on the Strand – one of the capital's most prestigious streets. A protective line of police was formed outside the hamburger franchise with reinforcements nearby – the biggest police operation in London since the early 1970s allowed authorities to station officers at key corporate locations. Activists from various animal rights and anti-genetics campaigns joined forces with legendary French farmer Jose Bove and began handing out free vegeburgers. The action, which sought to provide an alternative to McDonalds' 'factory farmed, genetically modified' produce, appeared to be popular with both activists and the general public alike.

Despite the early morning arrest of two Reclaim The Streets (RTS) activists who had been driving a van of gardening equipment through central London, the 'Guerrilla Gardening' event went ahead as planned at around 12.30pm. As the Critical Mass cyclists arrived in Parliament Square from Hyde Park Corner, the 'transformation' of the square began with a 'permacultural makeover': Turf was 'liberated' and laid out on the surrounding roads transforming them into a temporary sea of green. Where the turf had been removed fertiliser was added and the planting of a community garden began. The ground was uncommonly waterlogged, which was later discovered to have been the result of the police flooding the area. If this was a tactic meant to dissuade people from using the space, it backfired because the gardeners found it easier both to remove the turf and plant their seedlings, and even used it to their advantage creating a decorative pond.

While people worked on the garden they were entertained by poetry and songs at various microphone stands. Some weaved sculptures, while in one corner the space was used as an art gallery.

Diverse groups of people working together from all age groups joined Reclaim The Streets (RTS) in this task, using only plastic trowels and bare hands – a far cry from the 'pick-axes, shovels, and pitchforks' the mainstream media insisted it would be. The erection of several banners and a Maypole, in addition to the arrival of a flamboyant Samba band and their troupe of dancers, fuelled the celebratory atmosphere. The gardening action remained peaceful throughout the day.

As the gardening action continued, public access terminals set up by the Independent

Media Centre UK (IMC) provided participants with an opportunity to air their unedited views from a tent located on the north side of the green. Images and text were then webcast as part of the IMC's 'street media' project.

An IMC film crew, moving in the direction of Trafalgar Square, reported the massing of several thousand people in Whitehall and a multitude of journalists gathered outside Downing Street. Towards Trafalgar Square attention had focused on a McDonalds restaurant where a small number of people attacked the restaurant for about ten minutes. The IMC noted that subsequent coverage of the McDonalds actions reported through mainstream media outlets failed to give air-time to the earlier non-confrontational action located in the Strand preferring to focus exclusively on the damage inflicted on the hamburger franchise in Whitehall. The premises of a neighbouring bureau de change was also damaged.

Nearby Trafalgar Square was packed to capacity – a mixture of protesters, journalists and sightseers rubbed shoulders under the shadow of Nelson's Column. A significant proportion of the demonstrators was made up of left-leaning groups including the Socialist Worker's Party, groups of Maoists and members of the Kurdish Communist Party (for whom Mayday is a traditional and significant day of festivity dedicated to workers).

With the sun continuing to shine protesters meandered up and down Whitehall between the two locations, until police moved to split the crowd, pushing one half up towards Trafalgar Square.

Without warning large numbers of riot police moved to close all exits from the still peaceful Parliament Square, trapping everyone within. They were backed up by lines of mounted riot police, who were further reinforced by lines of police vans. No one was allowed to leave the square, be they corporate media or mothers with young children.

In Parliament Square negotiations between police and RTS began with the crowd now becoming noticeably apprehensive. People pleaded with the police guarding the key roads leading to Westminster Bridge, St James Park, Victoria Station and Millbank as police drafted in reinforcements including 'snatch squads'. In the face of a growing sense of confrontation the atmosphere tangibly changed. High-ranking officers present for the event refused to allow people to leave. Several officers expressed concern over the confusion clearly demonstrated by their own rank regarding the planned exit points and commented that this was not helping the situation.

An IMC reporter was told by a police officer at Victoria street that he thought that not allowing people out was creating an impossible situation for all those trapped

inside Parliament Square. A young woman from Hackney in East London was only able to leave with her friend after they showed police officers their bank cards for ID purposes and the contents of their handbags. Several people later complained that they had their names and addresses recorded and their pictures taken (without their legal rights being made clear). Police explained to an IMC reporter that they were only going to let people leave if they could prove they had not committed a crime.

With the numbers of riot police increasing around the edges of the square (now blocked off for well over one hour) many of the crowd began to get nervous about the intentions of the police. In the light of this a Public Assembly was held in the centre of the



square to decide what the crowd should do. One of the PA systems, which earlier had been used for speeches and smaller discussions (as well as some acoustic music), was now used to discuss the situation. Throughout the discussions an RTS guerrilla gardener relayed the negotiating positions between the public assembly and the police. The assembly eventually decided to leave the square *en masse* together, and to leave immediately, after the police had proposed people could leave, but that they would have to wait for at least another half hour. With the samba band playing the crowd moved directly towards the police lines. After a short while with no movement the crowd made a push to get through the police line, but failed. While there was some pushing and shoving, the crowd remained calm and defiant. Still dancing with the samba band, they made another attempt to push through, and this time succeeded with the police line dissolving as people began to pour down Millbank cheering and clapping.

This contrasted sharply with the experience in Trafalgar Square where there was no such explicit collective initiative.

The crowd snaked out of the square up Millbank and over Vauxhall Bridge, with many activists citing the gardening as a great success. As the front of the crowd turned off over the bridge people were still pouring out into Millbank, forming a long procession. A short while later, the crowd became separated after crossing the bridge. Those left behind soon found their path blocked by police vans and had to wind their way through side streets in order to reach Kennington Park, where people had agreed to meet. The tail end of the group which had already gone ahead found itself surrounded by riot police as it approached the park. With

Following the events of the Mayday weekend we received an unprecedented amount of copy which we thought would be as interesting to our readers as it was to us. We decided to hold a number of our regular features to our next issue.

tensions again rising there were skirmishes with police and it was only the arrival of the second group of people that allowed them to finally make it into the park.

With a huge police presence that included over forty vans and mounted riot police the last few hundred of the crowd from Parliament Square were pushed into the park. Inside people were relaxing and chatting after a long day's gardening. After some time a small number of people inside the park began throwing missiles at the police while others made an attempt to block the road again which had by now been returned to the motor car. The police began charging those outside of the park, until they sent around fifty mounted riot police into the park along with a large number of foot police. Those inside the park scattered including those throwing the missiles. The situation which had suddenly looked about to completely disintegrate was rescued by many of the people who began petting the horses and talking to the police – soon a football had been produced and a huge game was played out right next to the police lines with tension dissipating.

Latest reports talked of the police then later encircling those still in the park using large numbers and photographing and searching everyone there – this report to be confirmed.

In Trafalgar Square later that night the group of protesters who had been surrounded by riot police were only allowed to leave one by one after being searched and photographed.

Central London provided the venue for most of the day's action but events in surrounding areas were reported as successful.

Much-hyped actions at Canary Wharf, the London Eye, and the billed 'big surprise for the Millennium Dome' kept large numbers of police officers stationed at the key London landmarks – many activists noted with a wry smile that the big surprise for the Dome was that nothing actually happened.

Further events included an action in East London where people organised an occupation of Hackney Marshes – where children gardened happily and organisers described the event as a 'success'.

To contribute your report on the Mayday2000 weekend, please e-mail: [mayday@indymedia.org.uk](mailto:mayday@indymedia.org.uk)

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**— PROGRAMME 2000 —**

**19th May** Some Thoughts on Political  
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**26th May** General discussion

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**9th June** General discussion

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**21st June** General discussion

**28th June** Should Women be Honest?  
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**4th August** General discussion

**11th August** The London Anarchist Forum  
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Anyone interested in giving a talk or  
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**A conference in Plainfield, Vermont,  
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for more info contact either of the co-organisers:

Cindy Milstein, 5641 S. Blackstone Ave.,  
Chicago, IL 60637-1898, USA

e-mail: [cbmilstein@aol.com](mailto:cbmilstein@aol.com)

John Petrovato, PO Box 715, Conway,  
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