

FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

Vol. 62 No. 1

13th January 2001

50p

The myth of economic growth

George W. Bush is learning economics. "A lot of folks in this room have brought some pretty bad news – that their sales are slowing, that they're having to trim back their workforce" he drawled after meeting thirty corporate fat cats last week. Pretty bad news? If you think that's bad, George, look what else capitalism's got in store for us.

Growth in the US economy fell last year from 5% to 2% and it's still sliding. As much as \$2.5 trillion was wiped off its value after the dotcom boom shrank in the spring. The vultures, in the form of corporate lawyers, are starting to circle as big firms – household names – begin to issue profits warnings or even file for bankruptcy. "I have definitely noticed much greater interest in immediate hiring in bankruptcy groups" says Jeff Hunter, a New York legal headhunter. Consumer confidence has plummeted and a senior economist has now said the R-word: "the United States has probably entered a recession". A few months back it was all so different. As recently as the autumn, American shoppers still splurged on goods and shares and the stockmarket shimmered brightly. Even now most commentators predict a 'soft landing' for the 1990s American boom, in which economic growth continues but without the 'irrational exuberance' that Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank, criticised as long ago as 1996.

We disagree. We think the landing is going to be harder than they expect, which means that not only Bush and Greenspan should be worried but the rest of us too, if we're trying to live by capitalism's rules. Clinton and Bush both rabbit away about paying off public debt within a decade. But private debt (firms and households) shows a very different pattern. For the last three years, demand for goods has shot up by 5.3% pa while gross domestic product (GDP) has increased by only 4.6%. The difference between these two figures, very roughly,

could only be met by importing goods from abroad. Because more imports came in than exports went out, the US trade deficit last year hit a whopping \$429bn (6% GDP). Most of it was paid for like the stockmarket boom itself, with borrowed money.

Capitalism and its modern form, globalisation, are sustained on a lie. Or more accurately, as the people who say it seem to believe it themselves, it's built on a myth. This is the myth of economic growth. We're told it's something we should pursue as a good in itself, that it can be sustained. We're told it's been going on for the last few years, particularly in the 'new economy' of the United States. And the longest boom in history really does show that growth is achievable, just as it shows why this growth can never be sustained. Globalisation has been around for thirty years at least, long before the invention of the internet. Its effect has been to put US firms in direct competition with firms in emerging economies around the world. To compete successfully they have to boost productivity while simultaneously cutting productivity costs. In other words produce more while holding wages down. This process has gone on

everywhere that's been part of globalisation (that's most places) and its effect has been to create huge global surpluses of goods for consumers who don't have the money to buy them. This has happened across all sectors of manufacturing from computers to planes, from steel to cars; and it explains why auto-manufacturing in the UK and abroad is under such pressure. The whole capitalist system is dysfunctional because it's impossible to reconcile the two sides. When surpluses grow, profits fall. When profits fall, firms try to boost productivity and cut wages. This in turn leads to greater surpluses.

Boosting productivity has forced firms to borrow, so they can buy the new technologies they need to compete. Households, because their incomes are flat, have had to borrow to survive. When creditors do finally decide to pull the plug, the whole damn thing is going to collapse. Instability and crisis will hop infectiously across continents as they did after the Asian financial crash of 1995, and millions of human beings will suffer as a result. It's scary, but it's also true. Capitalism is a bubble, and when they are pricked bubbles burst. We cannot go on living this way.



Could the depression happen again?

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Freedom

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Factions squabble over Czech television



Czechs fill Wenceslas Square in solidarity with the journalists holding out at the state-run television station

An estimated 100,000 people gathered in Prague's Wenceslas Square last week to show solidarity with beleaguered journalists at state-owned Czech Television (Ceska Televisie). Around thirty journalists began an occupation of the CT studios on Christmas Eve demanding the dismissal of director Jiri Hodac, who has close ties to the rightwing Civil Democratic opposition (ODS) in the Czech Republic. He

was appointed to the post last month by the state television Broadcasting Council, whose members are nominated by the main political parties and whose chair is a senior ODS activist. ODS boss Vaclav Kraus, who is hotly tipped to win the presidency in 2002, plans to privatise the service. Journalists fear for their livelihoods and also claim that the station's editorial independence is under threat. "All of us face a danger that Czech

television will become an obedient instrument of the people who are in power" they said in a statement.

The journalists immediately began to broadcast their own news reports, accessible via internet and cable connections, and the International Federation of Journalists expressed its support. IFJ Secretary General Aidan White said "the fight for media freedom and democracy does not take place in one country". Meanwhile Hodac's supporters, who still control the transmitters, put together news programmes of their own.

Czech anarchists however were quick to point out that, much as they welcomed people coming onto the streets to protest,

many of the journalists were less concerned with freedom of speech than they liked to pretend. CT coverage of the S26 protests in Prague last year showed little sympathy for protesters and presented the IMF and World Bank in a highly favourable light. No coverage had been given the treatment handed down to prisoners afterwards by Czech police.

The striking journalists are also being supported by a coalition of smaller rightwing opposition parties, whose MPs have symbolically take part in the occupation as they jockey to displace the ODS as the main neoliberal opposition group.

"Czech State television employees are not fighting for general freedom of speech, but primarily for their group interests", a Czechoslovak Anarchist News Service statement said. "There are no good guys in this conflict, but just the bad ones. The Czech television dispute is exclusively about a clash of two power-centres of contemporary Czech capitalist society".

Simon Jones: CPS to prosecute employers

After an eighteen month campaign, logistics company Euromin is to be prosecuted for manslaughter following the death of Simon Jones. Simon, who was 24 when he died, was killed by a crane in 1998 as he unloaded freight on his first day of work at Shoreham Harbour, Sussex.

The Crown Prosecution Service had earlier decided not to go ahead with the prosecution, but was forced to reconsider under orders from the courts. "We are overjoyed", said Colin Chambers, one of the campaigners on the case.



Simon Jones

Greek anarchist appeals

The appeal against his conviction began on Monday of Greek anarchist Nikos Maziotis, who was sentenced last July to fifteen years in prison for a 1997 bombing attempt on the Ministry of Industry and Development in Athens. Nikos does not deny his involvement, which he says was to show his solidarity with the residents of villages in the Strymonikos bay area, who were resisting the installation of a plant by multinational gold company TVX GOLD. But he points out that the original trial was carried out with huge pressure being exerted on the Greek government by the United States, and as such was part of a wider political attack on social struggles and

solidarity around the world.

In an open letter from Athens's Koridallios prison, sent recently, Nikos says "capitalism and power kill in many ways. Capitalism poisons us, like TVX GOLD to end up with Strymonikos bay by polluting it permanently. Capitalism kills, like Union Carbide, which has killed thousands of people in Bhopal of India. There are no accidents in the technological civilisation in which we live. There are only crimes, where the states and the corporations face the people and the land as consumable fuel for their profits and power. Their development and democracy means for us exploitation, war, repression, death and devastation of the land".

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Turkish prison massacres

Santa comes early to Nike

Release UK prisoners, says prison boss

Vincent Bethell in court again

Report from Warsaw on the Polish nurses strike

No change at OFSTED ...

Santa comes early to Nike



Santa came early to Oxford Circus on 17th December, along with several exploited 'elves', dressed in green. Together, they went to the Niketown store there, carrying a giant Nike shoe and squeaky hammers. They unfurled a banner which read "no sweatshop – just do them", and while bemused security guards watched they gave out leaflets describing working conditions in the firm's Asian sweatshops, pointing out that unions are prohibited in them.

In fact, Nike recently stopped a proposed corporate donation to the University of Oregon in the US, because of the university's membership of the Workers' Rights Consortium, a labour rights group. As Phil Knight, founder and Chief Executive of Nike pointed out, "the university inserted itself into the new global economy where I make my living [by its membership of WRC]. And inserted itself on the wrong side".

The Nike Corporation is worth \$6bn.

Report from Warsaw

Polish Nurses in Action

Polish people are accustomed to nurses protesting. The national protests which began last month are the third wave of protests aimed at improving nurses' wages since the start of health care reforms in Poland two years ago. But this time the protests show an incredible determination which has led to a government reaction – the same government which claimed until now that it was a matter for nurses and the directors of hospitals to resolve. The flash point of the latest protests was a strike by nurses in Dolny Slask, in the south west of the country, which began on 27th November. They organised a hunger-strike, occupied hospitals and left patients' beds. This last resort was highly effective because neither government nor hospital administrators believed that the nurses would do it. The Vice-Marshall of the region warned them that unless they returned to work they would be replaced by personnel from the military hospital, who do obey orders. But the nurses' action gained popular support. The national Trade Union of Nurses and Midwives

(OZZPIP) announced a nationwide strike from 5th December.

Nurses want more money, with OZZPIP demanding a 500 zloty pay rise and a minimum wage guarantee. The government says that the demands are unrealistic, but quickly offered a system of wage regulation that would give a rise of about 70 zloty, which OZZPIP rejected.

The national protests culminated during 13th to 19th December. Nurses occupied over half the hospitals in the country, blockaded the Department of Health building in Warsaw with a noisy protest to distract bureaucrats from their work, and hung a banner on it saying "Restructure government and parliament: 100% downsizing!". They also obstructed border crossings and roads. In Dolny Slask they pelted officials and policemen with eggs. On 14th December, the government offered a 12% rise, which nurses rejected. Four days later, the nurses blockaded main roads in Warsaw, but were dislodged by police two hours later with about a dozen injuries to protesters but no arrests.

On 21st December, the government offered a rise of over 200 zloty, but OZZPIP again rejected it, saying that there was no guarantee nurses would actually get the full amount.

On the same day, discussions between striking nurses and visiting anarchists were brutally broken up in Krakow by riot police, who removed the anarchists from the occupied administration building. The strike went on through the Christmas period, with nurses visiting their colleagues who still occupied the Ministry of Health and holding a Christmas party in the middle of the street, which the police did not dare stop. Members of the Warsaw Anarchist Federation (Federacja Anarchistyczna) organised hot tea, set up a Christmas tree and distributed leaflets. On 30th December, anarchist nurses joined with a group of miners to blockade the Polish Council of Ministers building in the capital.

The Trade Union of Doctors showed its support by sending out mock coupons to show how rationed and under-resourced the Polish health care system is. The Minister of Health criticised them for "crossing the limits of decency".

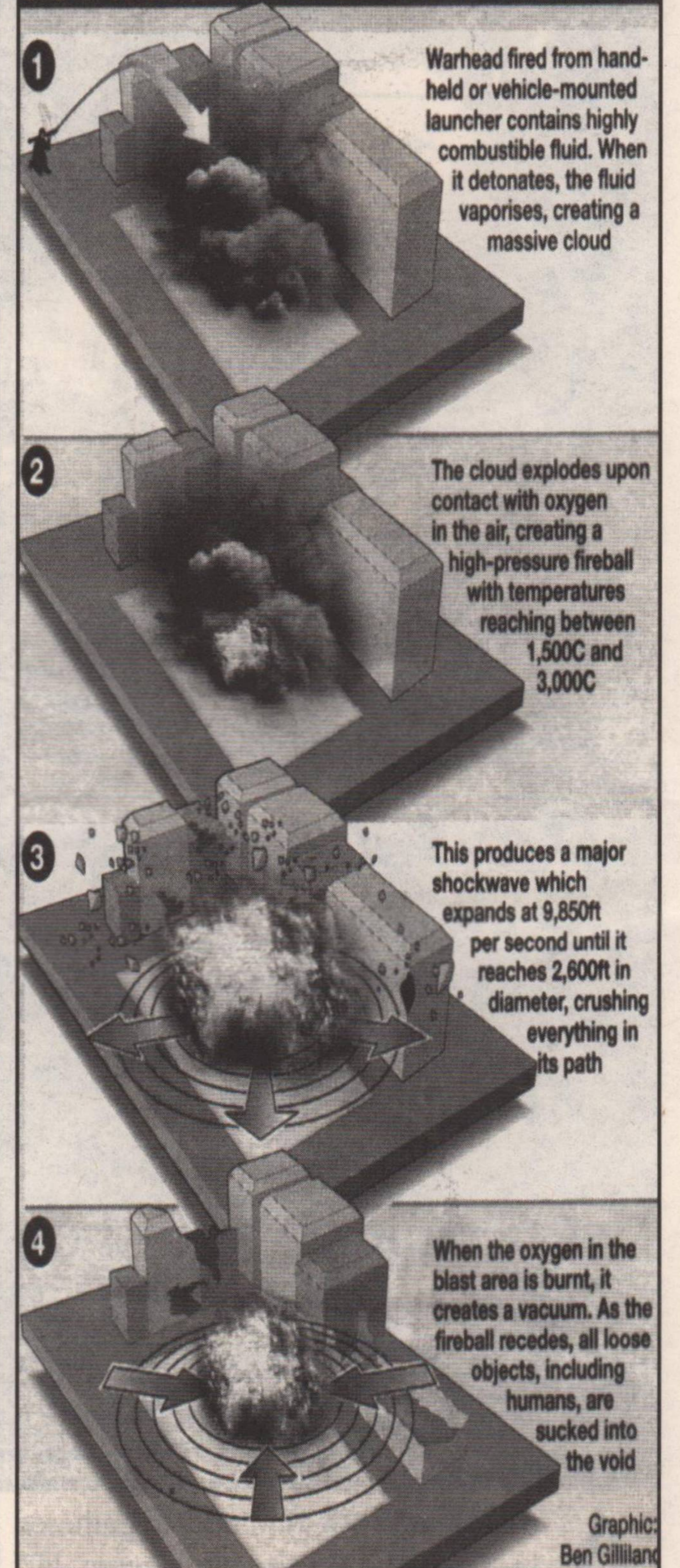
Talks between OZZPIP and the government began again over the new year.

MK

Army's new toy

The Ministry of Defence is planning to buy or build its own version of Russia's Schmel rocket-launcher. The hand-held weapon, used by Russian forces in Chechnya last year to the anger of human rights groups, works by firing a 'thermobaric' missile at targets in a range of 600 yards. When detonated, this creates a fireball of temperatures up to 3,000° Celsius, incinerating anything within a 24ft-diameter 'killing zone'. A massive shockwave then creates a 60ft area of damage, leaving human bodies in the vicinity with severe internal

HOW THE THERMOBARIC BOMB WORKS



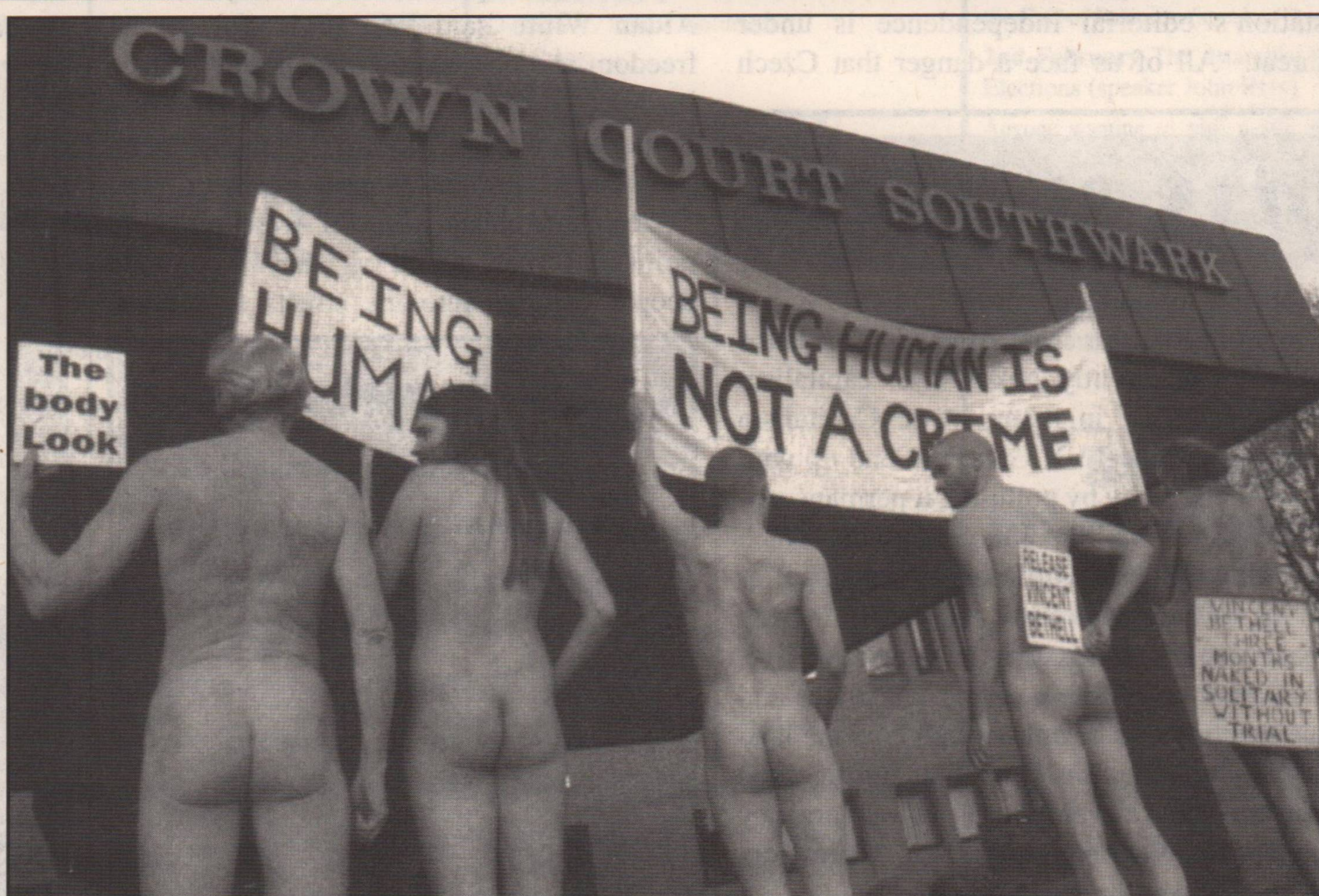
injuries. Finally a vacuum sucks in all loose objects, again including human beings, as the fireball recedes. This would make its effects similar to those of a tactical nuclear missile, though without the radiation effects, and it is no surprise that Afghan fighters against Soviet forces in the 1980s called the Schmel "Satan's Sticks". Boffins at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency have already begun to work on a prototype for defence chiefs, and it could be in service with infantry units by 2005. A spokesman for the MoD said that it would be 'irresponsible' for them not to do so, particularly as 'terrorist groups' are thought to possess older versions of the weapon themselves. "It's very effective I imagine, but I wouldn't like to be there!" said a human rights activist in response.



Vincent Bethell in court again

The last time we reported on Vincent Bethell, naked protester from the Campaign to Be Yourself (*Freedom*, 9th September 2000), it was about an appearance in a magistrates' court for walking nude through London's streets. He missed sentencing then, because he would not appear in the dock with clothes on, and he left the court after being fined £100 with £75 costs, again with no clothes on.

The forces of the state do not like being mocked, it seems – he went on trial again last week, this time at Southwark Crown Court, after being kept in Brixton Prison on remand (as is usual for prisoners judged too dangerous to be released before they can be tried). A naked protest by other campaigners for being allowed to do what they want with their own bodies was held outside the court.



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Tory wins award

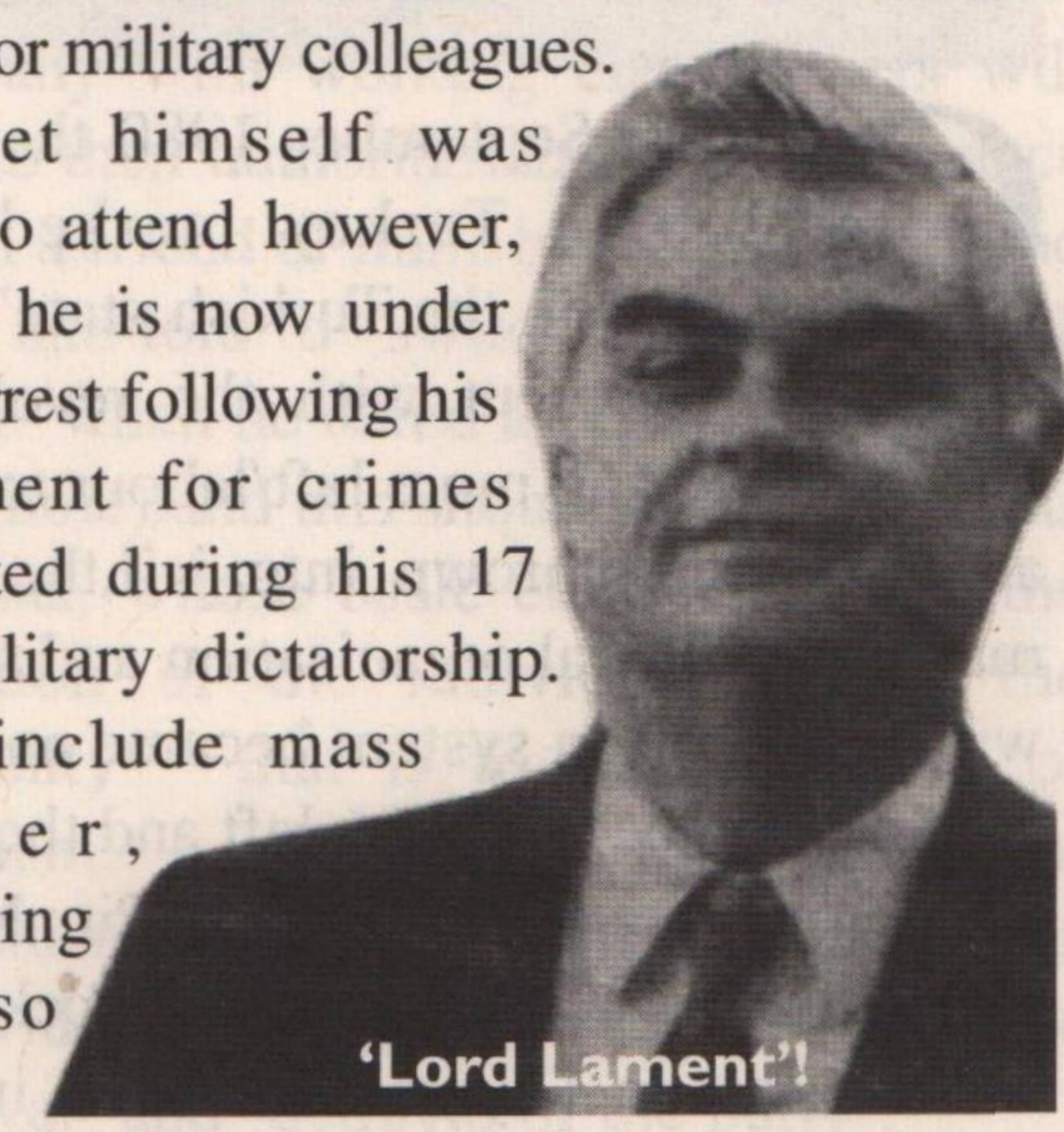
Conservative ex-Chancellor Norman Lamont was last month celebrating after being awarded the Star of Honour and Merit by the Augusto Pinochet Foundation in Chile.

He is the first foreigner to receive the award, which was given to him for his "extraordinary and valiant attitude in defending Senator Pinochet" during Pinochet's enforced stay in a Surrey mansion last year.

Attending the televised award ceremony in Santiago in person, Lamont was unfortunately referred to throughout as Lord Lament by his

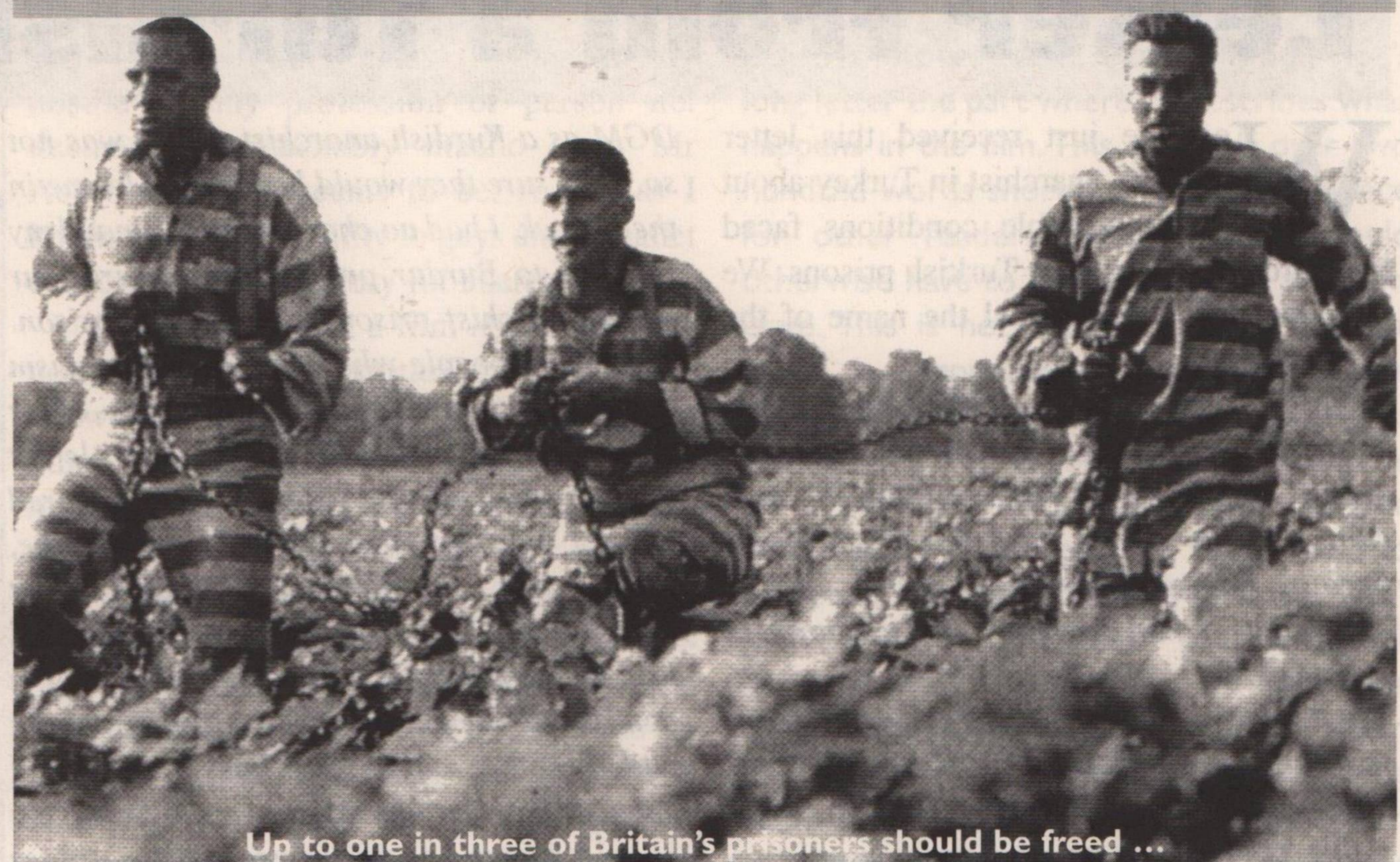
Chilean hosts, who included Pinochet's son and senior military colleagues.

Pinochet himself was unable to attend however, because he is now under house arrest following his indictment for crimes committed during his 17 year military dictatorship. These include mass murder, kidnapping and also torture.



'Lord Lament'

Release prisoners, says prison boss



Up to one in three of Britain's prisoners should be freed ...

Sir David Ramsbotham, Chief Inspector of Britain's prisons, has said that up to a third of prisoners should be freed. "Overcrowding means that far too many people are left sitting idle", he told the *Observer* (31st December 2000). This means that they spend their time discussing crime, and emerge simply as more skilled criminals. In particular, he said that many women prisoners should be released. "A hideous number have drugs problems. A large number are also the primary carers for children, which adds to the problem".

Richard Garside of prison reform organisation NACRO agreed, saying "there

is no obvious link between a rise in the prison population and a decrease in crime". He also supported Ramsbotham's call for "a proper system of community punishments".

A London-based supporter of the CAGE network, which coordinates resistance to prisons and prison-building in the UK, said neither went far enough. "They're not against sending people to prison, they just want the prison system to be more effective". She went on, "it's the whole system of imprisonment and punishment that's wrong. We send individuals to jail because that's easier than looking at how society turns them into criminals in the first place".

COPY DEADLINE

The next issue of Freedom will be dated 27th January, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 18th January. 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).

Turkish prison massacres

On 12th September 1980 the military coup in Turkey marked a new chapter in the Turkish state's always bloody engagement with the revolutionary left. As more and more left/labour movement activists were thrown into jail, the right to maintain political organisation and solidarity within the prison system became an arena of contestation between the left and the state. In 1982, four prisoners (Kemal Pir, M. Hayri Durmus, Akif Yilmaz and Ali Cicek) died in a death fast in Diyarbakir Prison in protest against the military regime's attempts to smash attempts at maintaining political

organisation in jail.

In 1984 in Metris Prison, Istanbul, Hassan Telci, Abdullah Meral, Haydar Basbag and Mehmet Fatih Oktulmus died on a hunger strike against the attempt to impose prison uniforms. Since 1984 the state and the left forces within the Turkish jails (Marxist, Marxist Leninist and anarchist) have been engaged in a permanent war, with the prisoners willingness to struggle helping them retain a basic level of control over their daily lives and a basic structure of organisation. Most Turkish prisons have a dormitory – rather than single-cell – structure, and the

various sections of the Turkish revolutionary left have been able to control their own dormitories, hold political education classes, provide support and welfare, etc. This maintenance of organisational identity has been under constant assault by the state.

In 1989 the state made an attempt to introduce F-type (single-cell) prison structures for the prisoners of the left, who recognised immediately that to concede to such efforts would leave them isolated and open to attack by prison guards. An attempt was made to transfer a group of prisoners from Aydin Prison to the F-type regime at Eskihir. Again

the prisoners engaged in a death fast. Two of the prisoners, Huseyin Eroglu and Mehmet Yalcinkaya, were tortured to death by guards, but ultimately the prisoners' solidarity won out and the imposition of F-type cells was successfully resisted. From 1995 the state stepped up the level of violence against the prison structures of the left. In Buca prison Turan Kilic, Yusuf Bag and Ugar Sariaslan, and in Umraniye, Riza Boybas, Abdulmecit Seckin, Orhan Ozen and Gultekin Beyhan were murdered by prison guards and troops.

In 1996 the state moved again to transfer revolutionary prisoners to the 'coffin prison' at Eskisehir. Hundreds of prisoners commenced a hunger strike in May to resist again the imposition of the F-type cell structure. In the ensuing struggle twelve prisoners (Aygun Ugur, Alktan Berdan Kerimgiller, Ilginc Ozkeskin, Huseyin Demircioglu, Ali Ayata, Mujdat Yanat, Tahsin Yilmaz, Ayce Idil Erkmen, Yemliha Kaya, Osman Akgun, Ulas Hicabi Kucuk and Hyati Can) died while refusing food, and a further ten Kurdish prisoners were massacred in an attack by guards and special forces at Diyarbakir prison. The regime, though, was ultimately forced to withdraw its plans in the face of the prisoners' resistance.

In September 1999 revolutionary prisoners held a protest against overcrowding at

Letter from a Turkish prisoner

We have just received this letter from an anarchist in Turkey about the unbearable conditions faced by anarchist prisoners in Turkish prisons. We have decided not to reveal the name of the correspondent.

5th May Group

"I have been an anarchist prisoner for five years. They (DGM, Malatya) [DGM is a state security court] gave me fifteen years because I did not deny my anarchist identity and ideas. I had to deal with all sorts of problems.

In Malatya prison I was put in the block that dominated by Marxist-Leninists prisoners. However, I was not accepted by them. I was told to stay only as an ordinary, non-political human being not as an anarchist. Only PKK accepted me, with one condition I was not to talk to anyone about anarchism. Although they gave me way a little after I insisted not to, they did not recognise my anarchist identity. They were moderate towards me because in the past I had defended myself in

DGM as a Kurdish anarchist. If this was not so, I am sure they would have never let me in their block. I had no choice but to demand my transfer to Burdur prison. There were four other anarchist prisoners in Burdur prison. They were people who converted anarchism inside the prison walls. Like many other anarchists in prisons, they came from leftist back-ground. At that time I was tortured when I was arrested. Difficulty to breathe, liver aches, ear and eye problems. Most importantly, I had serious trauma. My cell had no air conditioning and my health began deteriorate even more. I was having problems with breathing and sometimes I fainted. I suggested to my anarchist comrades that we should demand to be transferred to a block with air conditioning. They agreed. But the prison authorities rejected us outright. We were told to contact the representatives of the Prisoners' Committee which was controlled by Marxist-Leninist organisations. I explained to them about this matter. In the meantime, I could not see a doctor about my deteriorating

health. I also talked to the representatives of MLKP (Marxist Leninist Communist Party) and PKK and asked them for help. They got upset. They refused to help us because we were anarchists, not 'revolutionaries'. They did not see us as revolutionaries. They told us not to cause any more problems. Me and my comrades discussed the matter among ourselves. We decided to ask for a transfer to another prison where they were no Marxists. Some friends told me to stay in one of the political blocks until my health got better. First I refused, but then I got worried because I was fainting more frequently. I decided to tell this to the representatives of Prisoners Committee. MLKP refused to let me stay in their block straight away. PKK, on the other hand, told me to stay with one condition: I had to be an 'ordinary' citizen. I was very much hurt and refused. In the meantime, some of my visitors from outside were sent back by the Prisoners' Committee. The reason was that we were not revolutionaries ... We were transferred to different places. I was sent to Konya/Ermenek prison.

For about two years I lived there. For a while I stayed with Trotskyists, because they too were rejected and treated like us by Prisoners' Committee. Finally I realised how difficult it was to live with Marxists. My own political leanings were the reason for this.

My health was in danger in solitary confinement. I was sent to Ankara Numune Hospital and had an operation. However, they couldn't do anything about my severe headaches and ear problems.

As you can see the penalty of being an anarchist is very severe. You are confronted from everywhere. I think this is something which anarchists have highly been aware of. I hope this letter would be helpful in informing you about the conditions which an anarchist faces in Turkish prisons."



Ulcanlar prison. The state's response was to launch a military assault on the prisoners, with ten prisoners killed and hundreds more injured. Prisoners were beaten and tortured. Some of the dead were found to have been shot and stabbed, and to have had corrosive substances poured into their wounds.

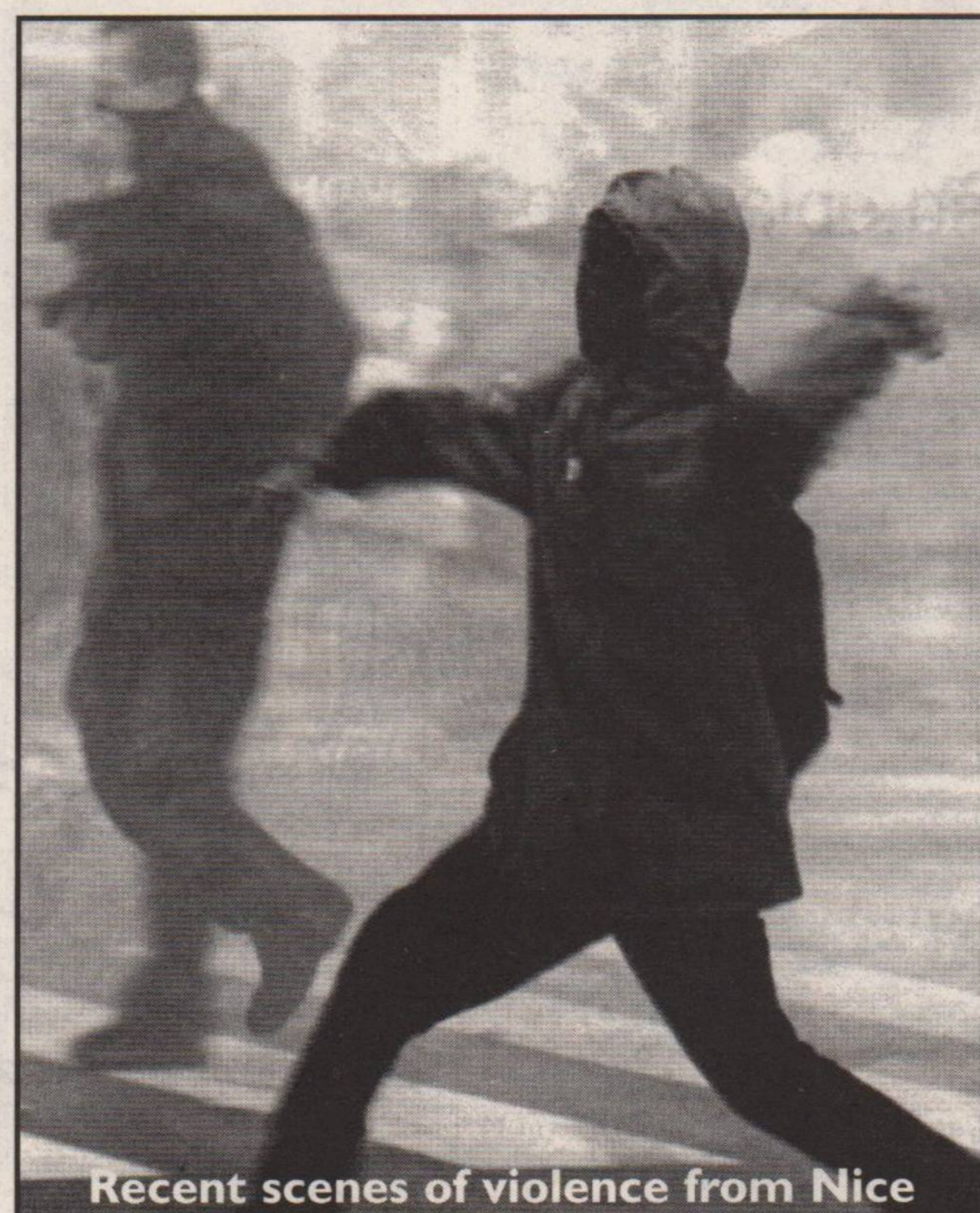
On 5th January 2000 the Ecevit government and the National Security Council moved again to impose the F-type prison structure, opening new prisons for this purpose in Ankara, Izmir, Bolu, Kocaeli and Tekirdag (the Turkish regime is more than happy to spend millions on expanding its prison building programme while the survivors of the 1999 earthquakes are forced to live in tents). In October 2000 a hunger strike was launched in protest. In November the prisoners agreed that the strike would be a death fast, declaring that "if necessary we will die, but we will not go into the cells." On 19th December the military and police launched a co-ordinated attack on twenty prisons intended to end the death fast, which now involved hundreds of political prisoners. Latest reports suggest at least thirty prisoners were killed by the state during the attacks, with hundreds injured.

Palestinians and Israelis demand peace



On 28th December, hundreds of Palestinians marched together with Israelis of the Gush Shalom Israeli Peace Bloc and members of the Italian Women in Black organisation to the Shdema military camp in the occupied territories.

Since the start of the Al Aqsa intifada last October, this camp has been the centre of repeated confrontations and the base for missile and artillery attack on Palestinian homes in Beit Sahour. The protesters managed to enter the camp, chanting "soldiers go home" in Hebrew and English. They later left unmolested.



Recent scenes of violence from Nice

Mayor of Nice involved in 'direct action'!

Around fifty protesters were gathered outside the town hall in Nice on 21st December, protesting at police violence against demonstrators when EU bosses met in the town at the beginning of the month. It was a peaceful protest, held in a party atmosphere.

At about 6pm, a line of cars with dark windows appeared. They stopped only a few metres from the protesters, and out of the first one stepped the mayor of Nice, who is a member of the French National Front. He began to attack one of the protesters, quickly followed by men who jumped out of the

other cars. This piece of 'direct action' by members of the country's biggest fascist organisation lasted for about twenty minutes, with people of both sexes and all ages (including children) getting beaten up and musical instruments they had brought to play getting smashed.

Despite a heavy police presence up till then, no police happened to be in the area to see any of this going on. A television crew which did see, and which filmed the attack taking place, had their cameras taken away by the mayor's associates, and the film was destroyed.

It's all happening in January

Following successful mobilisations in Seattle and Cincinnati, American groups are preparing to march in Washington to coincide with Bush's inauguration as president on 20th January, "against the state and against the death machine of globalisation".

In the week after, anarchists in Switzerland will be demonstrating as world bosses of various sorts meet in Davos for the meeting of the shady World Economic Forum (WEF), the little-reported discussion gathering for top politicians and business tycoons.

Monkeys out

Dear *Freedom*,

What goes on in schools has been the subject of several recent articles in *Freedom*. As a twenty-four year veteran of teaching, entering the service (sic) just after James Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1975, which many think was the start of the squeeze on education into the narrowly utilitarian straitjacket, I have seen many initiatives come and go, and there is indeed a pleasantly timeless quality about the circularity of the themes. However, I cannot share the optimism of many colleagues that all things change back. Now there is an unpleasantness about government rhetoric that cranks up a notch year on year. Sir Keith Joseph never sounded as bullying and unpleasant as Blunkett does and Woodhead did. Would-be recruits are getting the message. According to the *Times Educational Supplement* (2nd June 2000) the £10 million recruiting campaign "no-one forgets a good teacher" has flopped. It has been suggested that the children of teachers are a prime factor in this decline, seeing their parents under pressure. In the last three years I have marked for the first time ever sociology examination projects on the stresses of OFSTED on teachers – all written and researched by the children of teachers. I don't remember suicides after inspections in the earlier years of my job. I do remember many of us wanting to teach in areas of economic deprivation – now you are punished for doing so, because, as any fool

knows, a non-English speaking, bed and breakfast plus vouchered, war-traumatised refugee is just as capable of hitting the exam targets as Tarquin of Thames Ditton and the teacher is failing if they don't.

As to what can be done, the unions are spineless and divided. The authoritarian left in the NUT, NATFHE and the NASUWT only suggest as a solution to a given issue strike action, which alienates the students and doesn't bother the government, and are in any case ultimately undermined by the leaders of their unions. We need to think more creatively and be less cowed: far from striking we need a 'lock in' whereby we refuse to communicate with central government and especially deny entrance to the inspectorates and auditors but continue to teach, talk to parents and even to employers and locally-based businesses. I'm not averse to directly dealing with the organ grinders of capitalism. It's the monkey that's getting on my nerves.

Andrew S.

Bouquet?

Dear *Freedom*,

Thank you for a combination of sanity and irritation during 2000. You have some insufferable contributors and some wise ones. Whatever your correspondents say, it remains the case that the idea of the state as the focus for stability and continuity is the greatest falsehood afflicting humanity. To continue to re-state that truth is what makes *Freedom* essential. The North East of England is not a region which hosts debate on matters anarchic with much steam, but if you would like any notes from Tyneside on the happenings of those antagonists to centralised or party power structures. I will be happy to contribute some lines either regularly or irregularly.

Peter Regan

Billy Edited

Dear *Freedom* Editors,

When I read Keith Ackermann's comments on the film *Billy Elliot*, I thought we had seen different films. But a work of art lives not only through the vision of its creator(s) but also that of its viewer/reader/listener. So I counted the times Keith Ackermann used the word 'class' (6), 'snob' (2), 'bourgeoisie' (3) and noted that he calls ballet dancers 'prancing idiots', and I realised that he took the films as a direct attack on himself and the creed he has. In fact the film – as the title shows – is a biography, even autobiography, of a boy of about 10: not an age when we are much concerned with 'the bourgeoisie' or with political theory. I grew up in a northern industrial town and can vouch for the fact that what Mr Ackermann, without definition, calls 'the working class' is ingrainedly hostile to any profession or person not deemed irreproachably macho – as Mr Ackermann also seems to be. As far as I know, however, hostility to gays and to ballet dancers is not obligatory for anarchists.

In the second place, a film about Barnsley does not have to be a political tract: artists are allowed to, and do, focus their attention on other human aspects. The film shows the miners' strike as background to Billy's self-discovery (as it would be for him): even so, the strike is portrayed sympathetically, showing the hardships endured by strikers and especially the emotional tension generated, which is worked off at home on family members, notably in an aggressively masculine culture like that of the exploited miners. Incidentally, Billy, true to his roots, does attack a London boy in the changing-room for being a 'poof'. The film has an unnecessary and sentimentalised conclusion, but as a whole it is a tribute to the capacity of one family of the 'working class' to recognise the needs of a son to develop himself in his own way.

I admire the films of the (middle class) Ken Loach very much: though politically committed, he avoids black-and-white pamphleteering. Many with working class fathers will testify to their authoritarianism and arrogance (I recall a friend of mine being clipped round the ear and told to "switch off that snobbish rubbish" when he dared to listen to the Third Programme) and this should not be off limits for artists, whose basic ethic should be the realisation of the individual within the community – that is to say, the ethic of anarchism; a philosophy different from communism, which sacrifices the awareness of individual worth to abstract concepts like 'class war' and 'betrayal of the party'.

Jonn Roe

Rio de Janeiro

P.S. I should be glad if you do not censor any of this letter.

Editors' note: We've cut from Jonn Roe's long letter the part where he describes what happens in the film. This makes it over two hundred words shorter and so leaves space for other readers' letters, which would otherwise have to be held over till the next issue. This is not the same as censorship, which is suppressing information because you disagree with it or because it threatens your interests. As it goes, we haven't cut the bit of his letter that we certainly disagree with, when he says "hostility to gays and to ballet dancers is not obligatory for anarchists". Jonn, not only are these prejudices not obligatory for an anarchist – we fail to see any possible way in which an anarchist could hold them and still be an anarchist. And while we're on the theme, we recommend (to Jonn and everyone else) the latest issue of *The Raven*, on 'Censorship and Social Control'. So there!

Please keep sending
in your letters and
donations

And what we say ...

Prisons in society

It is hard to know what to make of Sir David Ramsbotham's statement that a third of prisoners in Britain's jails should be released. Of course if you are one of them it seems like an excellent idea. And up to a point it is. But Ramsbotham is supposed to be the government's (or more accurately, the queen's) Chief Inspector of Prisons. It is his job to ensure that prisons function humanely and that the prison system works efficiently. We maintain that the first part of his job is impossible. There's no way prisons can ever function humanely, because they exist solely to deprive human beings of their

liberty. It's never going to be a humane process. Which brings us to the second part of the job description, ensuring that the system runs efficiently. This was how we should understand what the Chief Inspector said. He objects to overcrowding in prisons because it means that prisons don't work properly. We beg to differ. We don't want prisons to work better, we want to abolish them. Whatever the people who get banged up in them have done, it's too easy to blame individual human beings for the actions society thrusts upon them. A third isn't enough. Let them all out.

Vincent Bethell

So Vincent Bethell, naked campaigner for the right to be yourself, is in court again. Last time it was the magistrates' court, now it is the crown court. The forces of the state do not like being mocked, it seems, and mocking is how it must've seemed to them: he wouldn't appear before the magistrates unless they would talk to him while he had no clothes on (they wouldn't) and he left the court that day with nothing on either.

His desire to be naked, which started as a personal wish, quickly took on a political dimension. "I started to get more radical, thinking about human rights, civil liberties and freedom of expression", he has said.

The response of the legal system has been harsh, of course. Remanded in Brixton prison before his appearance at Southwark Crown Court last week, by Christmas Day he had spent over three thousand hours in the segregation unit (the place where sex offenders are placed for their own safety). He has been promised release on bail if only he would get dressed, an offer he has refused.

We wish Vincent well in his struggle. And we reject the state's claim to have any right to tell him what to do with his own body.

Lamentable Lamont

Tory politicians in the 1980s always claimed to be in favour of freedom. The more right wing they got, the more they said it. The worst of the lot was an organisation inexplicably known as the 'Freedom Association', led by wealthy businessman Gerald Hartup, a man whose preferred type of freedom began and ended with the freedom of bosses to order other people about. So it should come as no surprise to see another freedom-lover from those days, the atrocious Lord Lamont of Lerwick, happily trotting off to Chile to get an award from something called the Augusto

Pinochet Foundation. How somebody who spent those years lecturing anyone who'd listen about the evils of dictatorship can happily accept a gong for his support of one of freedom's great enemies is beyond us. Perhaps he was following the example of Mrs T. herself, who had a bit of a turn shortly after leaving Downing Street at a dinky little dinner given by the old monster himself. She also used to have him round to tea every time he visited the UK.

We don't know how these hypocrites justify it to themselves. They'd never be able to justify it to us.

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December 2000

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December total = £166
Total for 2000 = £868

Captain Bird's-Eye and the Monkey's Toss

The resignation of the government's Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, just before Christmas led many to believe that there is a Santa Claus, but unfortunately there are plenty more like him left in the packet ...

The monkey's tosser

Teachers displayed characteristic political naivety in their rejoicing. Woodhead's deputy, Michael Tomlinson is now acting head of OFSTED, an appointment likely to be made permanent once the job has been advertised in the spring. There is no reason to think Tomlinson will prove any less authoritarian or centralist than Woodhead, just more sycophantic to Blunkett. Although he's now trying to keep his head down until his permanent appointment is confirmed Tomlinson hasn't always been so shy. Schoolteachers would do well to remember Tomlinson's lack of reticence when asked, in 1997, if he had any comments to make on Woodhead's outrageous, unsubstantiated claims about the number of 'incompetent teachers'. Addressing reporters, he sensitively confided, "I do not give a monkey's toss about the teachers".

OFSTED's racism

At least Woodhead's departure has prompted a few timorous creatures to pop their heads over the parapet and lob a few well-deserved grenades OFSTED's way. Colin Richards, professor of education at St Martin's College, Cumbria and a former senior inspector spoke out about the inherent racism of many OFSTED inspection reports. He cites as a typical example comments about under-fives at a school where 66% of the children did not speak English as their first language: "At the time they enter key stage 1, pupils' speaking skills are underdeveloped. The number of words they have available is limited and many of them can only put them together in a basic way." Many of those children, in fact, have highly developed language skills but in their home language. Instead of admitting their own inability to properly assess children's full-range of language skills OFSTED inspectors deny their existence. Inspectors systematically ignore children's competence in languages other than English yet have no hesitation in recording damning summary judgements. This institutionalised racism has long characterised the state's educational inspectorate (although pre-OFSTED inspection statements had become much less judg-

mental). In 1847 government inspectors sent to report on every school in Wales pulled exactly the same trick, competence in Welsh was ignored and inherently racist conclusions drawn. To this day this event is spoken of in Wales as 'the treason of the blue books'. Inspectors have now had more than 150 years to 'modernise' their practice yet OFSTED have consistently refused to even meet researchers from the Commission for Racial Equality. Its chairman, Gurbux Singh, describes OFSTED's correspondence on this matter as 'offensive'.

I see no evidence

Following a damning inspection report, last April Summerhill free-school challenged OFSTED's claim to be objective and to make only evidence based judgements. They took OFSTED to court and wiped the floor with them. Chris Woodhead's final week with OFSTED was marked by a similar ignominious defeat. Threatened with a High Court challenge to a report, which had failed Crown Woods School, Eltham, OFSTED again backed down and retracted their claims the day before the hearing was scheduled to begin. It was made clear that the decision of inspectors to fail the school and impose 'special measures' was based on totally inadequate evidence. As well as making a humiliating climb down OFSTED agreed to meet all the legal costs incurred.

It's not just personal

Much as it suits liberal commentators to think all political problems can be solved with just a change of personnel Tomlinson's elevation won't alter the basic nature of OFSTED. Racist judgements are implicit as long as inspectors are required to assess success against targets defined by a National(ist) Curriculum. OFSTED was not designed by educationalists as an agency to encourage and support the development and free exchange of good ideas and practices, it was created by politicians to impose political orthodoxy. An OFSTED inspection is not an objective, scientific observation. Scientific observations are capable of overturning dominant theories. The National(ist) Curriculum is not open to be challenged as a result of educational observation, it is the closed creation of government, a dogma shaped by political decision. The National (ist) Curriculum and OFSTED are jointly antithetical to any proper system of education, of learning from experience. One defines the content, the other enforces the practice, effectively replacing education with state approved training. OFSTED inspections are political acts posing as clinical observations. Swapping Tomlinson's for Woodhead is about as politically significant as a change of personnel at your local McDonalds, the essentially unhealthy, inhuman nature of the enterprise continues intact.

Public-private initiative

Woodhead will now depart to write for the *Telegraph* and work in public relations for Thatcher's former guru Tim Bell. He is not alone in pursuing New Labour's favoured linking of public and private enterprises. Blunkett has just appointed Captain Birdseye as chairman of the new 'National College for School Leadership'. From his early days, managing Birdseye's 'sprout-trimming station', Richard Greenhalgh graduated to become chairman of the parent company, Unilever UK. Presumably thirty years of private-sector corporate management produces the perspective New Labour wants

to inject into education's officer class. Meanwhile, over at the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the chairman and managing director of Vauxhall Motors Ltd has just been made chairman-designate. Clearly New Labour has little desire that education should serve the individual needs of the learner and every concern that it should meet the collective needs of capitalist industry. The government's new flagship, the leadership college, is designed to encourage the interchange of personnel between schools and industry and to further promote their corporatist philosophy. Although not yet fully operative the leadership scheme has already been allotted a new £25 million Nottingham headquarters and is currently advertising "free laptops for new head-teachers in exchange for active involvement in the new online Leadership College" (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1st December 2000).

Not all bad news

Not all public-private initiatives are to be condemned, some individuals, despite the financial sacrifices, seem determined to maintain their integrity and pursue careers they believe in. Katie Oak, of Manchester, for example, has abandoned imposing the National Curriculum on unsuspecting children in favour of retailing products that

meet the needs of transvestites and transsexuals. Katie, who now sells items such as false breasts and stilettos to cross-dressers, said "I think I'm typical of young teachers. Nearly everyone I met going into teaching is now trying to leave." Labour may be losing the hearts and minds of classroom practitioners but they are happy to rule top down and nurture a cadre of loyal heads and deputies. 'Leadership' is the current buzzword in education and New Labour pay well for loyal leadership; Education Secretary Blunkett 91K, State-School Head up to 92K, Head of Qualifications and Curriculum Agency 93K, Director of Leadership College 100K. The highest paid leader of education on the state payroll is Sir Michael Bichard, top man at the DFEE, who makes a cool 170K (including bonus). Politicians claim big salaries ensure quality, commitment and independence but during a recent interview Michael Bichard let the cat out of the bag. His words expose the myth of leadership, independence is to be avoided, authoritarian control and its flip-side absolute conformity are essential: "Many of us in leadership positions are control freaks with predictable views that's how we got there" (*Times Educational Supplement*, 10th November 2000). I couldn't have put it better myself.

Christopher Draper



Chris Woodhead (centre) and Mike Tomlinson (right)

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Reasons to be cheerful?

One of the most dispiriting aspects of the 'festive season' is the extent to which the daily broadsheets are filled – even more than usual – with petit-bourgeois prattle which takes its own prejudices as a norm. Over the last few weeks we've thrilled to the insights of Yasmina Reza, writer of the play *Art*: "We pass the sad brick houses alongside the tracks. Who lives in them? Who wakes each morning to look upon this low horizon of bricks, chimneys and bewildering walls? A few yards ahead, I'll think no more of them. I'll be thinking of the things that are travelling with me and don't leave me. For the world is not outside the self. Outside the self is the illusion of the world, not the world" (that world outside the self which does not exist for Reza has currently handed over the best part of £200 million to see *Art* performed). In *The Observer* on 30th December Emily Barr informed us that although in the last year she'd been to Tibet, Pakistan, Laos and Morocco "Liverpool is familiar to me only through Brookside, although I have been there en route to Ireland when I was about six." Don't worry, though, Emily intends to make up for the fact that while she's been able to slum it in other peoples misery across the globe, she's never taken advantage of the photo-opportunities closer to home: "James and I have decided we'll do something different, so we're greeting 2001 in the north of Scotland (and passing through Nottingham as we go)." I hope you turned out to wave, you good people of Nottingham, as a member of the useless metropolitan elite graced your streets. Most galling of all though was John Diamond's article 'Reasons To Be Cheerful' in the same issue. Diamond is living proof that class is still, contra Tony Blair, an issue in contemporary society. John Diamond is dying of cancer and while our sympathies are doubtless with him, it remains the case that his death is deemed more interesting than yours or mine – and worth a regular newspaper column – because he's married to Nigella Lawson and has all the right connections, writes for the right papers, etc. (Post-Wapping, an increasing amount of broadsheet column space is devoted to the fostering of a banal obsession with the life and death of minor media names, a shameful drift from the 'new' journalism to a journal-

ism of sentiment, with freelancers hawking their personal tragedies in a grotesque parody of slum kids selling kidneys and blood and limbs.) Anyway, Diamond's deepest insight into the 'meaning of it all' amounts to "I can't bring myself to believe that the reason for most of the unhappiness in the country has to do with economic imbalance as much as it does with some innate need for a couple of portions of discontent as part of our psyche's emotional diet" (the same issue of *The Observer* also reports that there are currently about 1,180 sleeping rough in England). "The truth is that in the developed world, for most of us, most of the time, life is as good as it ever could be and infinitely better than it was for any generation preceding ours."

'Life is as good as it ever could be'. The Advisory Committee on Nutritional Information drew up a 'Modest But Adequate' (MBA) budget standard for households. In 1998 it calculated that 40% of couples with two children earn below the MBA standard. The United Nations found in 1994 that 1.5 million British families could not afford a nutritionally adequate diet. The annual mortality rate of social class five is nearly three times as high as that for social class one. It is not just Diamond's smug ignorance though which should stop us in our tracks, so much as the fact that no alternative perspective is ever entertained in the mainstream press which panders to the 'bleeding heartlands' of New Labour's core constituency. That spectre which once so haunted the property-owning classes has now been exorcised, such that its existence can now be entirely denied. We are, after all, all middle class now. Power, as Frederick Douglass once observed, concedes nothing without demand, and a class defeated, a class whose organisations are diminishing, a class which does not vote but does not either mobilise as an extra-parliamentary force, is a class from which no-one, it seems, needs to hear. Thus, the liberal intelligentsia can suggest that the real problem with New Labour in power is that it needs to do more, and those of us at the sharp end of what it has already done are left without a voice.

For the media, the working class therefore exists only as an 'underclass' – either a victim of its own sloth or a leprous presence hanging round the backstreets waiting to

steal the hard-earned wealth of the security-gated new rich. After the *Macpherson Report* the ideological agenda becomes clearer. Both New Labour and the Tories compete to play the race card as a means of focusing our thoughts on the distribution of resources within the working class, between black and white, native and refugee, etc., rather than on the distribution of wealth between classes. Racism, though, carries an extra benefit. Not only does it help divide working class communities but it further aids the denial of working class subjectivity by allowing the demonisation of that section of the white working class which buys the racist argument. The truth is, though, that given the extent to which racist arguments have been deployed by politicians, the tabloids, etc., since New Labour took office, it is a testament to the continued existence of basic traditions of solidarity that racist attacks are not higher still, and racial polarisation not greater than it currently appears. (It's also the case that mixed relationships and friendships are far more common at the bottom of the social ladder than the top.) 'Working class' now as a coherent identity doesn't exist for the media – instead we get the endless procession of stereotypes – single mothers, racist thugs, white van man. As the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant have observed, "within a matter of a few years, in all the advanced societies, employers, international officials, high ranking civil servants, media intellectuals and high-flying journalists have all started to voice a strange Newspeak. Its vocabulary, which seems to have sprung out of nowhere, is now on everyone's lips: 'globalisation' and 'flexibility', 'governance' and 'employability', 'underclass' and 'exclusion', 'new economy' and 'zero tolerance', 'communitarianism' and 'multiculturalism', not to mention their so-called post-modern cousins, 'minority', 'ethnicity', 'identity', 'fragmentation' and so on. The diffusion of this new planetary vulgate – from which the terms 'capitalism', 'class', 'exploitation', 'domination' and 'inequality' are conspicuous by their absence, having been peremptorily dismissed under the pretext that they are obsolete and non-pertinent – is the result of a new type of imperialism". As Bourdieu and Wacquant make clear, the rhetoric of classlessness which issues from the likes of

Anthony Giddens and is parroted by the likes of John Diamond superimposes "the appearance of reason ... on the social fantasies of the dominant" such that what is obscured by this "universal common sense" is a society "characterised by the deliberate dismantling of the social state and the correlative hypertrophy of the penal state, the crushing of trade unions and the dictatorship of the 'shareholder-value' conception of the firm, and their sociological effects: the generalisation of precarious wage labour and social insecurity, turned into the privileged engine of economic activity." What is denied, excluded, is precisely the viewpoint of the victims of the process.

Post-1979 the working class suffered a series of strategic defeats. Our fair weather friends took flight and declared that 'class' was no longer a useful concept. The rest of us were left to take a kicking. The labour movement was disarmed in dealing with the assaults launched by Callaghan and then Thatcher by a left that had preached for years that the solution to the immiseration heaped on the working class by capital lay with parliamentary socialism / the Labour Party / the welfare state, so that the state was seen as a potential shield for the working class even as the state machine rolled over us. If we are to begin to rebuild working class self-organisation such that we might haunt the dreams of Blair and Straw again we have to start by recognising that we have no friends save ourselves and that the state which jails so many of us now can never be used as a tool to undermine the system of exploitation it defends. There is no good news at the start of 2001, no reasons to be cheerful save perhaps the recognition that those who would deny our voice today do so because they fear the fact that the wealth they enjoy comes from our labour not theirs, and that while we can live without them, they can't survive without us.

Nick S.

The CAGE Network, which supports resistance to prisons and prison building, can be contacted on 07931 401 962.

Support Turkish militants

At least thirty prisoners have now been killed by Turkish state soldiers and police as they moved to end the hunger strikes in twenty prisons. The prisoners, with typical courage, resisted the state attack and many are continuing the death fast despite the attempts by the state to force-feed them. This latest massacre of thirty or more political activists briefly made the news across Europe. No European state has moved to condemn the slaughter and the continued onslaught by the state has been ignored. Solidarity actions have taken place across Europe and solidarity hunger strikes have been staged in Britain and Europe by friends and relatives of prisoners.

The notion of 'human rights' in Turkey is, bluntly, a sick joke. The state has mounted death squad operations against the left and the Kurdish resistance which have been supplemented by the state-backed Grey Wolves fascist groups. Akin Birdal, former President of the Turkish Human Rights Association, was imprisoned in 1999 for "inciting people to hatred and enmity on the basis of class, race or regional difference" for

using the phrase "the Kurdish people" in a speech. Birdal's imprisonment, like the death sentence handed out for PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, was imposed even as the state made positive – and well-received – noises about 'human rights' in preparation for EU partnership. Tens of thousands have been killed by the Turkish state in its war against the Kurdish people; three thousand villages have been destroyed and two and a half million people displaced. In the period following the recognition of Turkey by the Helsinki Summit as a candidate country on its way to EU membership, the Human Rights Association of Turkey recorded (January to June 2000) 102 extra judicial killings and deaths under torture and/or in detention; 263 allegations of torture; six disappearances; 40 banned NGOs/political organisations; 75 raids on NGOs/political organisations and 169 banned publications. All of this, it appears, is a level of abuse of human rights the EU states can tolerate. We should ask ourselves why it is that Blair and Co – so keen to appear as defenders of 'human rights' in Yugoslavia – raise no protest at the massacres at Ulcanlar

and across the prison regime today. The answer is simple: the Turkish state's violence is directed against an organised, militant revolutionary milieu, and Blair and his EU counterparts know that under similar circumstances they would use the same methods.

We do not need to agree with all the ideological positions adopted by the Turkish revolutionary left to be impressed by their solidarity and militant resolve in the face of the violence of the state, nor to recognise the need for our solidarity in their support.

Nick S.

The Committee for Solidarity With Political Prisoners can be contacted at Taunusstrasse 12/b, 51105, Cologne, Germany. Telephone 0049 221 8306249 or e-mail Detudak@gmx.de

The Free Captives / Anti-Fascist and Anti-Imperialist Prisoners Support Group can be contacted at London Information Bureau, BM Box 8253, London WC 1N 3XX. Telephone 020 7254 1266 or e-mail ozguruk@xs4all.nl. Their internet site is at <http://www.ozguruk.org>

Messages of solidarity can be sent to jogiches11@hotmail.com or ikm-london@yahoo.com

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— MEETINGS FOR 2001 —

- 5th January** Open debate (any topic)
- 12th January** Counter Culture and Anarchism: Part II (speaker Steve Ash)
- 19th January** Rationalism, Irrationalism and Non-rationalism in Anarchism (general debate)
- 26th January** The Messianic Banquet and the End of Religion (speaker Peter Lumsden)
- 2nd February** The Anarchist Response to Elections (speaker John Rety)

Anyone wanting to give a talk or facilitate a discussion should contact Steve Ash, or any other regular, at a meeting, giving topic and preferred dates. A contact address will be available soon. Monthly free dialogues may be cancelled at short notice and used for scheduled talks if necessary. For more information see: LAF@anarchic.co.uk or www.trak.to/LAF

Steve Ash
for London Anarchist Forum

**Support
Mark Barnsley**

On Saturday 20th January the London Mark Barnsley Support Group will be holding an information picket at the surgery of Paul Boateng MP at Harlesden library, to raise awareness of Mark's case. All supporters of Mark Barnsley are urged to attend. Assemble at 9.15am, Harlesden Library (nearest tube Willesden Junction, or number 18 bus from Euston Station or Baker Street)

Red Rambles 2001

After a break of one year, and back by popular request, Red Rambles are being relaunched with an annual Summer-Autumn season of walks and rambles for Radicals, Libertarians, Anarchists, Greens, Socialists, Syndicalists, et al. Walkers are reminded to wear walking boots, appropriate clothing and to bring waterproofs, food and drink. You can also visit our website at http://members.tripod.co.uk/ainema/index-2.html

Mayday bank holiday 7th May 2001

Meet at 12 noon outside Hurt Arms Hotel, Ambergate, Derbyshire, on the A6 road (also on bus route R1 for Nottingham to Manchester, 100 yards from Ambergate railway station) for a short and easy walk four miles in length through Shining Cliff Woods. Walk concludes with a Mayday picnic, so bring food and drink to share, musical instruments, blankets to sit on, etc. Walk leader Jonathan.

Sunday 2nd July 2001

Cromford Canal to Scarthin Promenade for lunch and return, 6 miles. Meet at 11am at Whatstandwell railway station car park on the A6 north of Ambergate. Also on route of R1 Manchester to Nottingham Trans-Peak bus. Walk leader Mike.

Telephone 07939 440548 / 01773 827513
e-mail ain@ziplip.com

We're planning Human Rights as our theme for
**International
Labour Day
(Mayday) 2001**

We are planning and organising events for the day now, and we'd welcome suggestions, help, comments and co-operation from your group. Perhaps you would like to get involved. What do you and your members think. Contact us at:
Lancaster & Morecambe Trade Union Council, 178a Lancaster Road, Morecambe
Tel/Fax: 01524 413600

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