

anarchist fortnightly Freedom

Vol. 62 No. 24

15th December 2001

50p



Plods get done over

British police were left bleeding and dazed last week, following a brutal assault by home secretary David Blunkett. As he unveiled plans for reforms of police working conditions and methods, he denounced them for failing the public with their 'appallingly low' detection rates. He said sickness levels were unacceptable, and insisted it was intolerable that as many as 77% of

cops take early retirement on medical grounds. He pledged to do something about it.

Can the upholders of law and 'order' now expect a pasting similar to the one Blunkett dumped on teachers when he was education secretary? Unlike their colleagues elsewhere in Europe, British police are not allowed to strike. So it will be interesting to see how they react

if Blunkett carries out the threats implied in his words.

If he does, and if the effects on police morale compare to the effect he had on the state's education workforce, David Blunkett could unwittingly do us all a favour. Just because he's making the police force miserable doesn't make him a friend of ours, of course. But it'll certainly give us a laugh.

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Children put under state surveillance

Parents and civil rights groups have expressed horror at police plans to set up a register of children considered potential 'criminals'. Children as young as three will be put on the database, allowing them to be monitored throughout their childhood. The scheme will be pioneered in eleven areas of London from March. Children caught being 'cheeky' to cops, engaged in acts of 'vandalism' or 'causing nuisance' will be targeted.

When he unveiled the plan last month, Ian Blair, deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, claimed it grew out of the investigation into the murder of Peckham schoolboy Damilola Taylor a year ago. He said that investigators in that case found "a feeding chain leading to rampant criminality, a mixture of abuse, victimisation and criminality". But he admitted that some people might find the proposal alarming. "This is pretty revolutionary stuff. There will be lots of worries, but as long as it is understood that the purpose of holding this information is to ensure that we should collectively intervene to prevent children from becoming criminal, I think that it will be accepted".

Meanwhile, another government scheme for monitoring children and teenagers has also come under fire. The Connexions service for 13 to 19 year olds combines the work of the old Careers' Service with that of other state agencies working with young people. It has been piloted in selected areas of the country during 2001, and is now being expanded throughout the UK.

But teenagers and other activists say the Connexions database, which can be accessed by commercial companies, could soon amount to a national identity scheme. They say it could be used to track thousands of people. Specifically, they want to know who will have access to the information stored on the register, whether teenagers and their parents will be able to check their own records and whether the information will be destroyed when a teenager reaches the age of 20. They say that attempts to gain answers to their questions have been repeatedly rebuffed by civil servants.

Connexions is based on a network of 'partnerships' between the state and commercial organisations contracted by councils to run their careers' services for them. These organisations can access the database.

Editorial on page 7

US sabotages bioweapons ban



The US government sabotaged an international attempt to curb the proliferation of biological weapons last week, despite anthrax attacks on American targets this autumn. A conference in Geneva, designed to review the 1972 biological and toxic weapons convention, was thrown into disarray on 7th December when US representatives proposed that negotiations be 'terminated'. Diplomats from other states were forced to suspend the talks for a year, fearing that otherwise they would collapse entirely. Anti-militarist activists blamed lobbying of American politicians by the pharmaceutical industry, saying that firms wanted to protect 'trade secrets'.

As European bosses meet in Brussels, anarchists say ... 'We will expose your lies'

The current development of the EU shows an increase in the pro-capitalist policies taken by European institutions, despite the ever-increasing criticism and protest against them. The bosses enjoy special treatment while inequality, oppression and social injustice grow between Europe's rich and those from the eastern and southern countries who are exploited by them.

This summit is concerned with the preparation of a European constitution, the preamble of which will be the Charter of Human Rights. It was precisely our opposition to this charter, and its insistence that the lowest common denominator be followed in terms of our civil rights, that brought thousands of demonstrators to Nice a year ago. The bosses of Europe stand by their charter, in complete opposition to the aspirations and needs of the

Brussels is currently hosting a crucial inter-governmental conference, at which EU bosses are planning further economic 'liberalisation' and political repression. Thousands of activists were last week set to hit the streets of the Belgian capital, to remind bosses that we, the people, aren't so keen. This is an extract from a libertarian declaration, endorsed by *Alternative Libertaire* (France), *Apoyo Mutuo* (Spain) and the Spanish CGT.

majority of us. That's why we are on the march again, to resist the stripping away of our basic rights and to regain some of those we've already lost.

All our resistance, all the demands the anarchist movement makes through its direct

action and self-management, are part of our fight to radically change society, to share wealth, establish equality and build a libertarian self-managed democratic community.

We go to Brussels to show our rejection of the capitalist Europe that EU bosses are imposing on us. Brussels will carry on the torch from Nice and Gothenburg. A march of social resistance will spread the fire of our anger from city to city, the cry of our needs and our desire for another world will be carried on from here to the Seville summit next year.

Marching is advancing, creating a new world with each step. Marching is building an alternative in solidarity with others. Our fight for social justice, for a libertarian world based on justice and solidarity will not stop here in Belgium.

Vernon Richards

19 July 1915 - 10 December 2001

Vernon Richards, lifelong anarchist and brilliant organiser, revived Freedom Press at the time of the Spanish revolution in 1936, and was still at work with Freedom Press until a few days before his death. A full obituary will appear next issue.

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Fighters for children's rights



'To discipline children is prohibited in the city from now on. Equal rights without age discrimination!'

Germany

Krätzä is a group of people in Berlin who are concerned about children's rights, and who are working for fundamental changes in society. Every evening, a dozen or so of the twenty members turn up to discuss new action, answer emails, drink tea and coffee, talk about life, read texts that other Krätzä people have written, discuss their website or the next edition of their magazine, *Regenbogen* (Rainbow in English), prepare for events or conferences, get information stands ready, organise the distribution of new texts or leaflets and so on. The members of Krätzä are almost all between fourteen and twenty years old.

It all began in 1992, with a few simple questions. For instance: are parents allowed to force you to put on clothes that you don't want to wear? When do people go to bed? Are teachers allowed to stop you going to the loo? A whole booklet of young people's problems was soon compiled, and before long they found they had moved on from the specific daily injustices of which young people are often the victims to much more general questions. What gives parents the right to make rules for their children? Why do we have compulsory schooling? Wouldn't it be better to replace it with a right to education? Why do children not have the vote?

The KinderRächTsZänker (Children's Rights Fighters) have been working on these and similar questions for the last few years, and they have found that the main difficulty – again and again – has been reaching a point where something is really changed. In many children's parliaments, children's days, children's summits and other events, the KinderRächTsZänker have found that it is almost impossible even to discuss significant matters, let alone to have any real influence. Young people are only invited to discuss problems which the grown-ups actually already know about and could solve them-selves, such as (for example) the increased efforts of the government to encourage the use of the energy-saving light-bulb, or the setting up of a 30kph speed limit, or safer road-crossings in front of schools.

A further peculiarity is that the subject of school seldom comes up. People talk a lot about violence in schools, but the violence of the schools themselves – that is to say, the violence that arises from the system and which is perhaps a cause of the violence of young people, is generally ignored. The main problem, which is always avoided, is this: children are not perceived as citizens with really equal rights and interests.

Krätzä have therefore turned to other methods of getting their points across. They have designed and displayed posters, which have attracted much support. The posters consist almost entirely of text, which people waiting in the underground stations have plenty of time to read. The Krätzä people have been interviewed by journalists and they published touchstones for the 1994 election which were sent to all the main political parties. The parties, almost without exception, sent the thick brochures they sent to everyone in response, without making any effort to respond to the touchstones themselves. The group, represented by two of its members aged 13 and 16, went to Germany's constitutional court in Karlsruhe, demanding not to be excluded from the right to vote. Although the demand was dismissed, it had its effect. The subject has been raised, and is still being discussed everywhere.

Seventeen members of the group went to Nicaragua for four weeks, in order to make contact with the children's movement there, and to learn to understand its attitude to child labour. Through work, one can learn a lot, have the experience of being important and take responsibility. What's more, one may become financially independent. Of course exploitation and abuse must be prevented. But is a general prohibition on children's work the right way of setting about it?

Krätzä has also drawn public attention to the question of compulsory schooling. After preparing an extensive written justification Benjamin Kiesewetter, a member of the group, refused to take part in chemistry lessons for more than six months. In spite of his seven-page justification, to which neither the school itself nor the education authority responded, and in spite of his eventual

renewed participation in lessons (under protest), the student was excluded from the school.

An appeal against this 'disciplinary measure' resulted in the local educational authority reversing this exclusion. But Benjamin had to continue to take chemistry until the court made a final decision on whether schoolchildren were allowed to stay out of lessons in some subjects if they gave good reasons. The case aroused great interest in the media, as a positive outcome would have meant that other schoolchildren would have followed Benjamin's example.

The Berlin Administrative Court finally decided against freedom from instruction. The consequent request that the appeal should be heard by the Higher Administrative Court was refused. At the end of the year, Benjamin got a top grade in chemistry, and legally dropped the subject.

Krätzä would like to grow, but it sees risk in this growth. The members do not want to lose their independence and spontaneity, and they are determined to avoid management structure and hierarchy. Everyone must have equal rights, they say, regardless of age.

Although nothing material has changed as yet, they are making progress. They have increased public awareness, they have the ear of the media, their demands are gaining credibility, various groups and organisations publicly support their objectives, and members of the group are often invited to speak about their ideas.

The Krätzä website is partly in English, and it is well worth a visit. Go to www.kraetzae.de

Lib Ed

MISUSES OF THE WORD 'ANARCHY'

Number One in an occasional series

This is from the *Guardian* of 24th November 2001, sport section, page 14, under the heading 'Anarchy puts doubt over England tour': "Lord MacLaurin, chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board, described the political situation surrounding the third test between India and South Africa as 'anarchy' ..."

Simon's not forgotten

Essex

There were protests last week, after dock operator Euromin was found not guilty of the manslaughter of casual worker Simon Jones. He was killed just two hours after starting work for the company in May 1998.

On 3rd December, thirty supporters of the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign blockaded the Shoreham dockyard where he was killed. Several lorries were stopped from entering or leaving the complex, and the Euromin site office was occupied.

Three days later, on 7th December, there was a picket of Personnel Selection in Brighton. This was the temping agency that sent Simon to his death.

Simon received no training before starting work offloading containers. His head was severed when the jaws of a crane were closed round it. The operator's clothing had snagged on the controls.

On 29th November this year, an Old Bailey jury found Euromin and the yard's general manager, Richard Martell, not guilty of the manslaughter charge. But the company was found guilty of two breaches of health and safety regulations, and fined £50,000.



Shoreham dockyard, 3rd December 2001

The case was only brought after three years of pressure from the Campaign. The Crown Prosecution Service had initially decided not to press charges.

Simon's friends and family condemned the verdict. His parents, Chris and Anne, said in a letter to the *Guardian* (6th December), "it is no surprise that James Martell waddled away; the miracle is that he was ever in the dock. If anyone is guilty of gross criminal negligence, it is Blair's government".

Campaign representative Jo Makepeace said, "there is no doubt that Euromin's

practice of cutting corners on safety led directly to Simon's death. Unfortunately, as the paltry fine showed, the law puts little value on the lives of workers. The message to companies is that it makes good business sense to pay small fines rather than take steps to ensure that workers aren't killed or injured".

According to TUC figures, there were 442 work-related deaths in the UK last year. For more info see www.simonjones.org.uk

Editorial on page 7

Shut the base

Hillingdon

Hundreds of anti-militarist activists were expected to gather outside the Northwood terror base this week, in a nonviolent attempt to close it down.

The action, sponsored by groups including CND and the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, was due to take place early on Monday 10th December, to coincide with International Human Rights' Day.

Northwood is the headquarters of British military forces, and has been used to coordinate the state's involvement in the American attack on Afghanistan.

Richard Byrne, one of the organisers of the action, said beforehand, "we are intending to blockade the base on Human Rights' Day in order to draw attention to the responsibility that the British government must take for the violations of human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law perpetrated by British and US forces in the war".

He went on, "people can stop war all over the world by refusing to co-operate. Pilots can refuse to drop cluster bombs, daisy-cutters and all the warmongers' instruments of misery. Civilians can do what we are doing, get together with others and obstruct the war machine".

News in Brief

• **Colchester** We held a torchlit anti-war march round the town centre on 1st December, followed by a short rally. The event was organised by Essex Peace Campaign (principally CND, but with support from the Socialist Alliance). As well as local people, there were participants from Clacton, Witham, Basildon, Southend and other places in the county. The turnout was disappointing, with about 100 marchers. But we blocked all the traffic for a considerable time, just as we did on our previous march (*Freedom*, 3rd November). There was singing and chanting against Bush and Blair. We were well-received by shoppers and bystanders, several of them coming to join us. There were no arrests, and further actions are planned.

Tim Oxtan

• **Manchester** Participants in the city's Anarchist Bookfair on 8th December declared it a success. Various groups and publishers, including Earth First!, SolFed, AK Press and the Mark Barnsley Campaign had stalls at the event in Ancoats. One participant, *Green Anarchist* editor Steve Booth, said, "it was a really good day out, a bit like the London bookfair in microcosm, but much quieter". Another bookfair is planned for next May.

• **London** The South London Action Group (SLAG) held its inaugural meeting at Elephant and Castle on 8th December. The group is being set up to provide networking opportunities for those involved in anti-capitalist actions south of the river. Visit www.slagfest.org.uk

• **Croydon** The European Management Centre of French catering company Sodexo was occupied by activists last week, in protest at the firm's involvement in oppressing asylum-seekers. Six activists calling themselves 'Sodexo Screws Refugees for Money' occupied the office on 4th December, marching past receptionists and D-locking themselves on to furniture. Cops quickly arrived, but units of the Territorial Support Group had to be summoned to remove the D-locks. The six were arrested and charged with illegal imprisonment. This was later changed to using threatening words and behaviour. All of them were bailed to appear in court in January.

Sodexo runs the state's voucher system for asylum-seekers. The firm is also part-owner of UK Detention Services, a company which builds and runs prisons.

• **Central London** Two anti-nuclear campaigners climbed the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square last week, in a protest against radioactive emissions from the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria. The protesters, who were both dressed as Santa Claus, climbed up the 75ft Norwegian spruce on Friday 7th December and unfurled a banner, while a group of their supporters gathered underneath.

Gap gets that saggy feeling

Guildford

Eleven activists from the Surrey Activist Group (SAG) protested outside Gap and Starbucks on 1st December. The demo, designed to mark World Anti-Gap day, began with leafleting outside the main Gap store and its offshoot, Gap Kids, on the High Street. Several activists went inside to put leaflets into the pockets of clothes on sale. They also swapped price tags round.

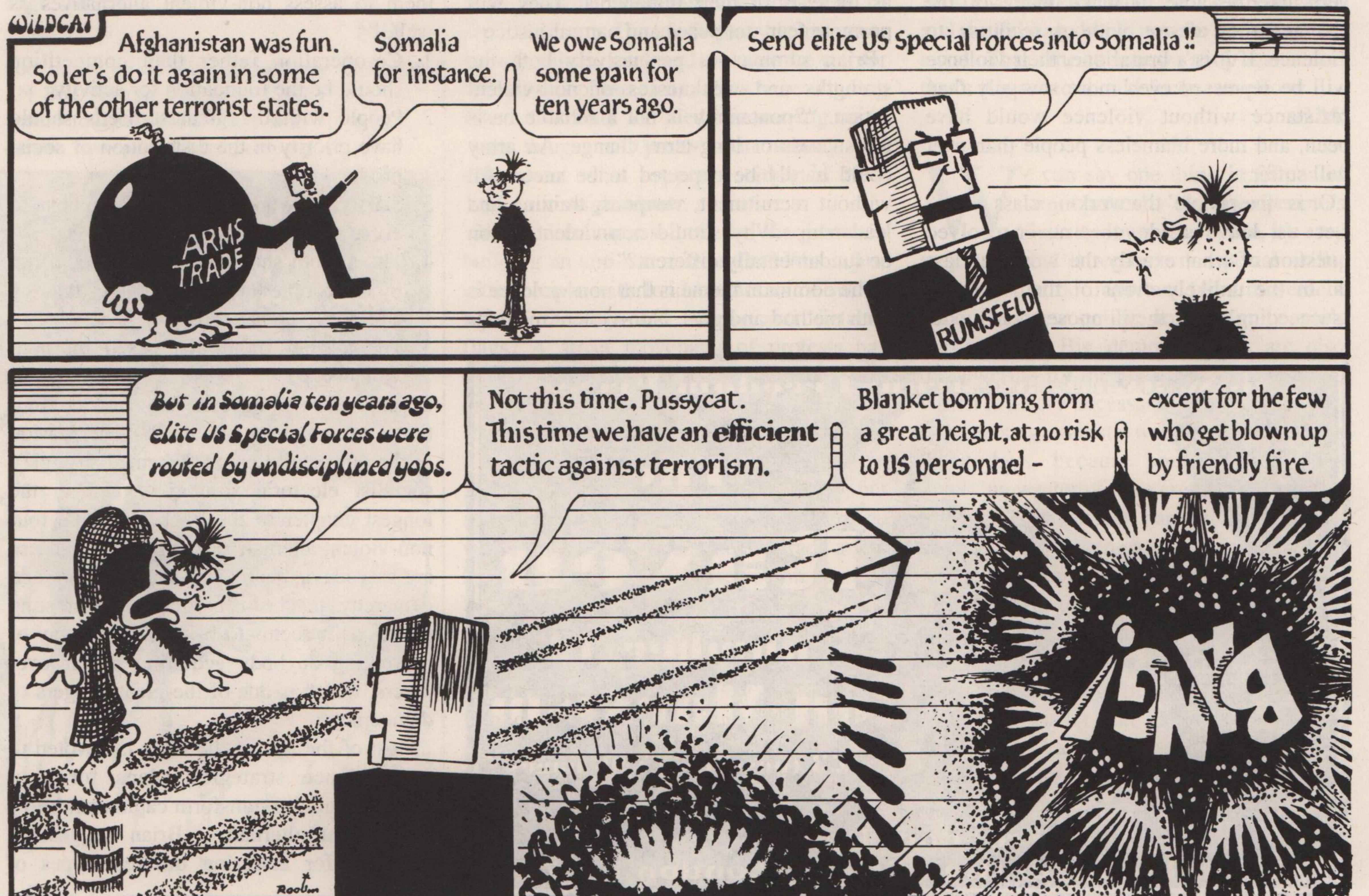
They then moved to one of the town's branches of Starbucks. After ten minutes, managers began shouting at them, but they were able to complete their protest without major interference.

Explaining the decision to target Gap, a SAG member said, "multinational corporations, with the help of global institutions like the

World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund, have used globalisation to spread themselves across the world. Businesses such as Gap employ workers in the third world to make the products they sell in the west. In a Gap factory in Honduras, workers were subjected to forced pregnancy tests, forced overtime, exceedingly high production goals, locked bathrooms and wages of £2.50 a day which met only a third of their basic needs. Whilst this is happening, the Chief Executive of Gap is making £15,000 an hour".

Further actions are planned in Guildford town centre to coincide with the EU summit in Brussels (see back page).

Contact saggymail@hushmail.com or write to SAG, PO Box 375, Knaphill, Woking GU21 2XL.



Nonviolent Resistance

Nonviolence versus Capitalism

by Brian Martin

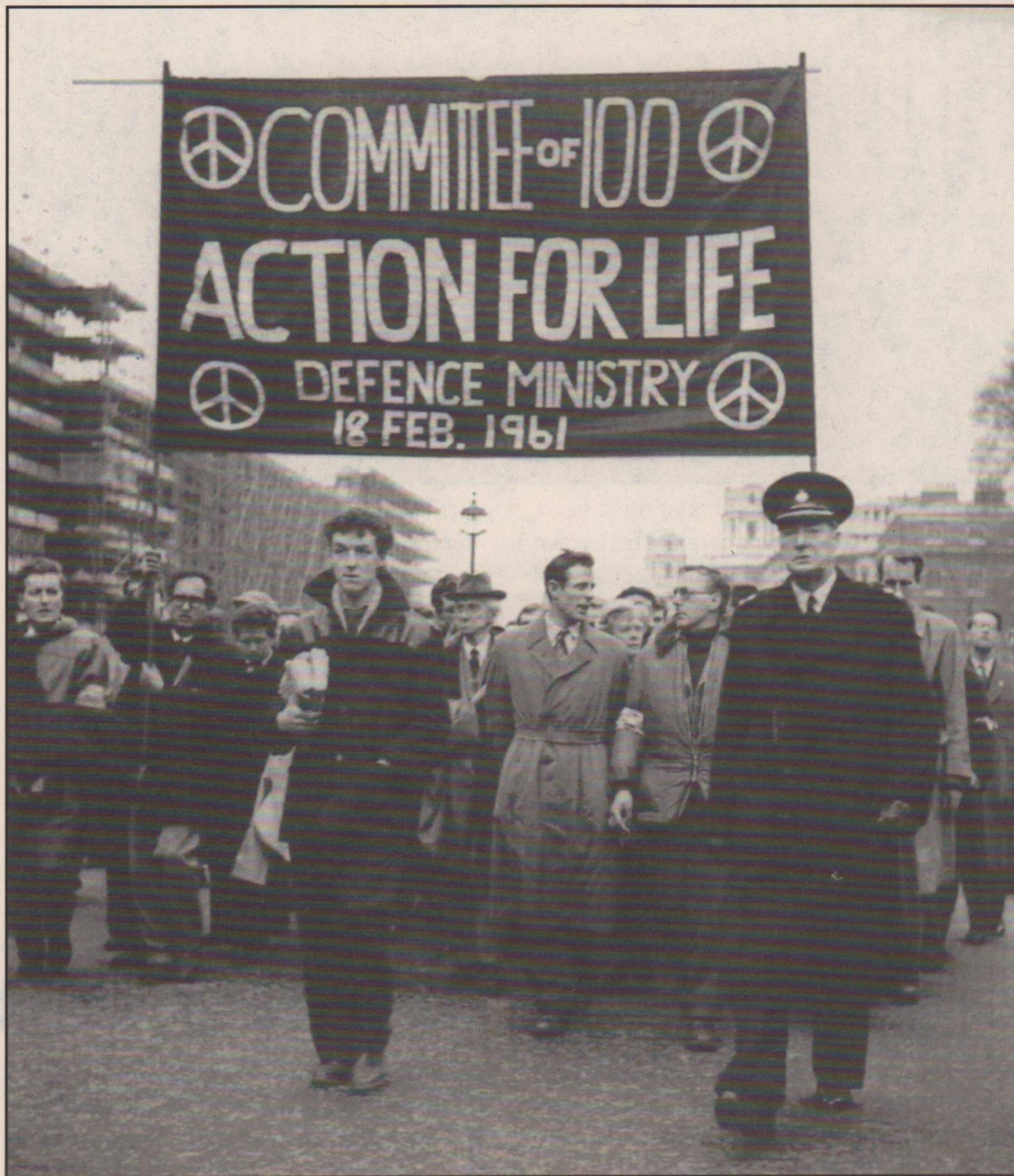
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Brian has written many excellent books. This is his latest, and perhaps the most important so far. It has his usual virtues. His English is simple and clear, perfectly adapted to the transparent logic of his analyses and arguments. The work is the product of wide scholarship – he is an academic at the University of Wollongong in Australia – yet his writing has no academic pretentiousness. He writes for non-experts, not to impress other academics. His passion for fairness and decency is obvious, and he is never dogmatic or strident. He is outstandingly practical and realistic. He recognises the difficulties facing radical movements, and realises that the dreamt-of land is not just around the corner.

Many who aspire to make the world a happier place say that violence is necessary to achieve their aim. But I know of none of these who are ever specific about the nature of that violence. They do not say in what circumstances the violence is to take place, what form it will take, what its immediate purposes are, who exactly is to engage in it, what are the criteria by which it will be judged successful or not. Even Kroppie, writing against revolutionary violence in these pages last summer (14th July) argued that there would, ultimately, be a time for violence, “brief, joyless and productive”, without explaining anything about when that time would be or how it would be productive.

Some of the more reluctant advocates of violence argue that it is right and proper if it is the violence of the people rising up against their oppressors. But they do not explain what ‘the people’ is. Do people become ‘the people’ when they are a vast majority agreed on the same principles and on what should be done? In such a case, if the regime they live under is not a very brutal one, they will very like be able to make many of the changes they desire without recourse to violence. If it is a brutal one, their violence will be repressed even more savagely than resistance without violence would have been, and more blameless people than ever will suffer.

Or is ‘the people’ the working class alone? Let us leave aside the never-resolved question of what exactly the working class is. In the unlikely event of their violence ‘succeeding’, will they impose their model



Photograph by Vernon Richards

of society by force on the reluctant remainder of the population? (The only real criticism I would make of the content of Brian’s book is that he uses the terms ‘the people’ and ‘democratic’ in the same casual and vague way that nearly everyone else does).

The greater happiness and self-fulfilment of human beings in a community can only be achieved by the agreement of most people on humane fundamental principles. That agreement can and should only be achieved by persuasion. But there will be no persuasion so long as the champions of those humane fundamental principles engage in violence, and show that there is as much hate in them as there is in their opponents. They will promote fear, not peace and natural justice.

Brian summarises persuasively both the strengths and weaknesses of non-violent action. “Spontaneity is not a reliable basis for success or long-term change. An army could hardly be expected to be successful without recruitment, weapons, training and leadership. Why should non-violent action be fundamentally different?”

The dominant theme is that non-violence is both method and goal. Non-violent methods

without some idea of a non-violent society to replace capitalism are meaningless. On the other hand, you can’t achieve a non-violent society through violence. But although capitalism is in the end based on violence, “for most of the time it is sustained by belief systems and everyday behaviours, so it is in the area of beliefs and behaviours that the most effort [in developing non-violent options] is needed, especially because capitalism has an unparalleled capacity to co-opt ideological challenges”.

The author examines the nature of capitalism, and sets out five principles against which he judges it. Later in the book, he uses them to assess non-violent alternatives as well.

1. Co-operation rather than competition should be the foundation for activity.
2. People with the greatest needs should have priority in the distribution of social production.
3. Satisfying work should be available to everyone who wants it.
4. The system should be designed and run by the people themselves, rather than by authorities and experts.
5. The system should be based on non-violence.

Brian briefly examines the failure of “conventional anti-capitalist strategies” – persuasion of the powerful, Leninism (armed struggle), socialist electoral strategy – and in the longest chapter of the book considers four non-violent alternatives to capitalism. These are sarvodaya, anarchism, voluntaryism and demarchy (this last is particularly interesting to me, as it seems to offer the best way of preventing anybody acquiring power over others, which is one of the great dangers of democracy).

Most of the rest of the book is devoted to non-violence strategies, plans for non-violent action to transform capitalism into a non-violent alternative. Brian suggests a checklist for assessing different types of campaign.

1. Does the campaign help to undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism or the legitimacy of capitalism or to build a non-violent alternative to capitalism?
 2. Is the campaign participatory?
 3. Are the campaign’s goals built into its methods?
 4. Is the campaign resistant to co-option?
- In the light of these criteria, he examines workers’ struggles, sabotage, environmental campaigns and social defence. The chapter on this last is particularly interesting. He points out that “no society has ever systematically prepared itself for social defence. A full-scale non-violent alternative to the military is yet to be tried”.

In the chapter entitled ‘Global issues’, Brian examines the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, genetically-modified organisms, and free software to illustrate the potential of ‘global-local’ campaigning. In his concluding chapter, he discusses small, local, individual ways in which one can challenge present attitudes and practices.

I have one mild complaint about the book’s organisation. I think the author spends too much time telling the reader what he is going to write about and what he has written about – this is something that could be done better by expanding the chapter headings on the contents page.

Brian Martin has written an excellent survey of the faults of capitalism, of the sorts of community that might replace it, of the non-violent methods that could be used to achieve these communities, and of the problems involved. He also gives many valuable insights which there is not space to relate here. I recommend it strongly to everyone genuinely interested in the search for a better world.

It’s good for a work like this to be published in a period when liberties are under even more threat than usual. The radical spirits who advocate and resort to violence should consider how irresponsible their violent acts are. Violent acts don’t just work off the frustrations of those who commit them; perhaps violent activists don’t mind ending up in prison, or worse, themselves. But they have no right to risk the welfare of fellow activists, or to bring their ideals of a better society into greater disrepute than ever. To indulge in violence is to play the game of bosses and governments. Nothing could be more stupid, or less radical.

Amorey Gethin

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A war without end

The notion that the devastation wrought on Afghanistan somehow constitutes a 'war to defend civilisation' has been unable, since the campaign's inception, to withstand rigorous examination. After the horror of Qala-I-Jhangi, any such claim is dead in the water. The repression of the 'uprising' of Taliban prisoners in a fort there, completed on 1st December, was a war crime committed by the Northern Alliance and their western backers. It was comparable with the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam.

The prisoners, fearing torture and possible execution at the hands of CIA operatives present, attempted to escape. They were suppressed by the deployment of B52 bombers, and over 170 were killed. The majority of those who died still had their hands bound from their earlier capture. When the survivors of the bombing retreated into the bowels of the fort, Northern Alliance soldiers (under Allied command) poured in petrol and set it alight. After the massacre, and in full view of their CIA bosses, they looted corpses, cut gold teeth from mouths and looted.

The butchering of Afghanistan has sent out a simple message – that there isn't even an approximation of equality of arms between US imperialism and the independent nationalist forces which the American government labels 'terrorist'. There will be complete prostration before US interests or there will be bloodshed. As George Bush put it as he tried to justify extending the conflict to Iraq, "this war on terror is so unconventional that there will be strikes which people may not see until we tell them there has been a strike". This is a war without borders, a war fought by covert means – assassination, unlimited detention, execution by firing squad after a military tribunal – as much as by convention.

The 'war without end' now appears to be extending to allow Israeli boss Ariel Sharon a free hand to depose Yasser Arafat, or at least to force the Palestinian Authority into a civil war with Hamas. If you want a clear example of the ground rules of a 'civilisation' the western allies are shedding other people's blood to defend, they're encapsulated in the furore over suicide bombers in Palestine and the complete absence of condemnation of Israeli forces, despite their burying of a landmine at a Gaza primary school which killed five children.

"The attack of 11th September", wrote the



An Israeli soldier shows the Palestinians who's boss

Palestinian writer Shahid Alam recently, "painful and disturbing as it is, is a reminder that history has not ended ... Once again we live in a world whose rules have been restructured to the advantage of the richest, both globally and within the richest countries. Globalisation and global poverty do not mix well. A growing club of billionaires, more visible and more united than ever before, now confronts the growing masses of poor, starved, desperate and angry peoples in every corner of the world" (*Al-Ahram*, 22nd November).

Part of our task in rebuilding an effective revolutionary movement in Britain is the winning of working class people here to a recognition that their interests can best be met by solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and Palestine, rather than through support for the imperialist designs of Bush and Blair. A useful beginning would be the building of an effective militant movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people, in the face of US and Israeli aggression.

Nick S.

For more info: Palestine Solidarity Campaign, BM Box PSA, London WC1N 3XX
email Info@palestinecampaign.org
or visit www.palestinecampaign.org

The evidence against some 1,200 people detained by the United States government in response to the 11th September attacks appears negligible in all but a handful of cases. Most are believed to have been arrested because of their nationalities, and from vague associations with the attackers – such as taking flying lessons where the attackers trained, or having applied for driving licences in the same areas. Only 27 of them are believed to have direct associations with the attackers.

Many have been held in harsh and punitive conditions, denied access to lawyers and prevented from informing relatives of their arrest. Detainees have reportedly been kept

in cold cells without blankets or mattresses, and Muslims have been given *haram* food.

The self-styled 'US Justice Department' is refusing to reveal their names and has now stopped saying how many have been arrested. The US government further widened its legal powers on 13th November, when George Bush signed an order allowing foreigners to be tried by US military tribunals. These tribunals will be empowered to operate overseas, will be closed to the public, pass death sentences and allow evidence of a lower standard than civil courts or courts martial could. Those convicted will have no right of appeal.

Sam Buchanan

Effective resistance?

I want to take issue with all those people who have been talking about building an anti-war movement, or about turning the 'anti-capitalist movement' into some kind of anti-war group. I'm afraid that this has never been a realistic goal, and any way the war (or at least this phase of it) seems to be winding down. Certainly the media is moving on to other things, and pretty soon nobody will care about what happened either in New York or in Afghanistan.

What was supposed to be the point in building an anti-war movement? Was it just older people with fond memories of street-fighting the cops and waving anti-Vietnam flags? A street movement of protests has never made and never will make any difference to capitalism, because it doesn't strike at what capitalism values – capital itself. We can march all we like, sell a few papers, look like trots on a bad hair day, but at the end of it all the governments in the world just shrug their shoulders, crack a few heads and get on with the job in hand – bombing the fuck out of innocent people.

Can we stop these things? At the moment, realistically, no. So what's the point? What should we be doing? I'd say that our aim should always be to point out what the political and economic objectives of the state's actions are. Why is it bombing this or that country? To increase its own power, capital accumulation and the exploitation of people. Linking arms with liberals and lefties won't solve the problems.

Freedom has done a good job of examining what the state's up to, while others were only talking about a big movement against the war. Most I've spoken to think the war's been good, and the Taliban should now be put up against a wall. That's the attitude we're up against and that's where we should focus our efforts.

E.M.

We can say one thing in favour of street protest – it's often people's first step towards activism, it's easy to join in and it requires no special skills. That's got to be important for a movement that offers few public portals for people's participation. Big demonstrations are also empowering for the people that go on them, which is a very necessary thing.

Organising against a war is of limited value these days, because contemporary wars involving western forces are short, sharp and decisive. This is at least partly for PR reasons, which shows that the state is worried about public reaction to its actions. There has been some attempt to avoid civilian casualties in Afghanistan too, and pathetically small as this might seem, pressure on the state has probably saved Afghan lives.

The problem is that there is no ongoing anti-military campaign to stop the next bit of British military adventurism and colonialism. A priority for anarchists should be to keep our own state of other people's backs, even though we can't yet get it off our own.

Sam



Anarchists want to smash the state – but is it ...

Tactics or principles?

On 17th November, we ran an editorial under the title 'Court in the act'. This defended the use of the courts in an attempt to stop the opening of a new nuclear plant at Sellafield. In the last issue of *Freedom* (1st December), we printed a letter from Colin Johnson in response. We reprint that letter now, with some further comments.

I found it difficult to come to terms with what I read in your editorial. You said, "our rejection of the state has nothing to do with principles – it's a tactical preference". If that is true, you appear to be discounting over 100 years of philosophical development. And if that is really what you believe, then I am afraid you just are not anarchists.

Colin Johnson
Letter, 1st December 2001

The freedom of the individual and the concept of voluntary co-operation are central to my own vision of anarchism. For this reason, my opposition to the state, government and other hierarchical and oppressive institutions is indeed on principle (though I may vary my tactics when confronting oppression). I am of the belief that ethical and non-violent means are to be preferred on both a principled and a tactical basis.

Jonathan Simcock

If anarchism is not a moral philosophy, I don't know what it is. The state (I prefer to say 'rulers') should be opposed because what it does is morally wrong, not because that's good tactics for getting a better life, as the editorial maintained. I think there can be very few people who are anarchists just because they want a better life for themselves. Indeed, there can be few more impractical ways of bettering yourself in the modern world.

The question of whether one should use the courts for the sake of causes one supports is a difficult one. The courts are agents of power and instruments of enforcing the law, and I would normally be very reluctant to use them for my purposes. But although many, perhaps most, laws are bad laws (such as property laws), there are some 'good' ones – laws, that is, which have been developed over centuries to counter the effects of some of the bad laws and the power of the rulers. So it seems to me quite proper that members of London Greenpeace defended themselves in court against McDonalds, rather than remaining silent on the grounds that they refused to accept the jurisdiction of the court. In the same way, I think it's right to use the courts against the new Sellafield plant. And shouldn't anarchists use the courts in their attempts to free Mark Barnsley?

I believe in principles, but for me there is an overriding principle: one should not sacrifice real, existing people to abstractions. That principle (among others) lies at the heart of the case in favour of abortion, for example. A real existing woman has to come before an abstraction like 'the sanctity of life', which exists nowhere except in some people's minds.

Amorey Gethin

The term 'tactical' is ill-defined and vague. I object to it and to the use of 'principles' as well, because both seem to imply an objective viewpoint as a motivation – a god's eye view of the world, either in the form of a tactical plan as seen from above, or worse, from moral principle.



My own motives are entirely subjective, and based on my biased position in the world (I wouldn't dream of describing how things 'really are'). Any objectivism is a secondary tool, which could be defined as tactical. I think Bakunin shared this view, though Kropotkin's scientism excluded him from it.

Steve A.

Anarchists can't accept the authority of one person over another, unless obedience to that authority is freely given and can be freely withdrawn. It's a matter of philosophy and pragmatism, of cooperation rather than of competition.

The state is rejected because it forms a permanent authoritarian structure. It is an institution. Anarchists should reject all institutions, not only the ones of government and religion.

And this thing about morality – morals are rules given by an authority who tells you what to do or not to do. Morals have no place in anarchism. But ethics are codes of behaviour worked out by the individual, which are logical, rational and open to reason. Anarchism is based on ethical principles.

C.J.

If *Freedom* is saying that opposition to the state is tactical, presumably that means there are some states anarchists could approve of or support. Is it just that the state we live under in the UK isn't one of them?

My own anarchism is based on the fact that the concentration of power in the state systematically excludes the vast majority of people from having any meaningful control over their lives. These systems are operated for the benefit of the people who run them, not the people they are supposed to serve. Any contact I have with the state is done on a pragmatic basis – it helps me survive in the absence of libertarian alternatives.

Richard Alexander

To say "our rejection of the state has nothing to do with principles – it's a tactical preference" seems to suggest that there might be circumstances in which anarchists would embrace the state. But there's another reading of the editorial (whatever its writers meant by it).

Anarchists are against the state and all

other coercive institutions. But what we are against is not in itself a principle. It is a consequence of what we are for – the underlying principle of anarchism is a positive idea, about the proper function of society.

Charlotte Wilson, the founder and first editor of *Freedom*, said that in the anarchist's eyes, "the true purpose of every ... of it the largest possible opportunities in life ... Now the anarchist holds a natural human society good in proportion as it answers what he believes to be its true purpose, and bad in proportion as it departs from that purpose, and instead of enlarging the lives of the individuals composing it, crushes and narrows them".

The statement in the editorial, that our rejection of the state is a "tactical preference", puts the same idea succinctly. So succinctly that it was bound to be misunderstood.

Donald Room

Charlotte Wilson *Anarchist Essays* (Freedom Press £5.95), page 74, also in various authors, *What is Anarchism?* (Freedom Press, £2.95), page 42.

It's a commonplace to say there are two sides to every story, and in this story (as in every other) anarchists should be on the side of the working class. The alternative, after all, is to be on the side of the bosses.

Our perspective is different to theirs. We need electricity, but we can see that safer, cleaner alternatives exist. Nuclear power represents an unnecessary threat to our health and wellbeing. Consequently, we support those involved in the struggle to assert their human needs for a clean and safe environment in which to live and work, against the needs of those who profit from our exploitation and domination.

The question of whether or not the people involved in that struggle should make use of the courts or other capitalist institutions is a practical one. Will the use of the courts lead to success? Will it lead to an increase in the power, autonomy, initiative and confidence of our class? The answer to these questions may, of course, be no. The use of the legal and 'democratic' framework may indeed help to foster illusions about the nature of capitalism and its laws, and encourage an attitude of leaving matters in the hands of our 'political superiors'. But it is still a practical question, to be discussed and

decided upon by our own side, then put into practice. Those who attempt to stand outside of the two different perspectives and ask moral questions are of no use to us in our everyday struggles or in our efforts to achieve an anarchist-communist society.

S. Watkins

Away with every concern that is not altogether my concern. You think at least the 'Good Cause' must be my concern? What's good? What's bad? Neither has meaning for me. The divine is God's concern, the human is down to humans. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free etc, but is unique, as I am. Nothing is more to me than myself!

Max Stirner

German anarchist writer, 1806-1856

"Nothing is more to me than myself!" This is Stirner's essential truth. Everything beyond the individual must be seen as a false and tyrannical abstraction. The free individual, or egoist, must turn his or her back on such ideas as the state, society, religion, nation, morality, duty and obligation. All of these demand the continual sacrifice of the individual's own existence to the 'greater' good. Stirner insists that individuals should live only for themselves, bowing down to no-one and to nothing, and that they should expect the same of others. A true individual will always recognise, and so automatically safeguard, the uniqueness of other individuals. Only this, the 'union of egoists', can guarantee the freedom of the individual – and that of all other individuals.

Stirner's individualist anarchism, which seeks the end of all authority and asserts nothing in its place except the unique reality of the individual, has had a tremendous influence upon anarchism.

Clifford Harper

taken from *Anarchy, A Graphic Guide*, page 34

Many of these comments are taken from a discussion on the *Freedom* email discussion list, which is designed to allow readers to exchange ideas and information. If you'd like to join, send an empty email to FreedomAnarchistFortnightly-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Editorial on page 7

What we say ...

Schools out

Adults that we are, we've good reason to complain about the lack of freedom in society. But for our children it's even worse. Except for imprisonment and jury service, conscription for adults was abolished many years ago. But it remains the daily experience of most people between the ages of 5 and 16. For what is compulsory schooling but a form of conscription?

School students are told what to think and what to do, allegedly because one day they'll be grateful for it. Now the state has discovered fresh ways to monitor them and abuse their privacy. Anarchists, unless they have a special interest in education, tend to overlook how far coercion is deemed acceptable so long as its victims are children and teenagers. We can't afford to.

To tolerate oppression of young people is to open the door to oppression of older ones too. It is to sanction the indoctrination that creates obedience, and which in turn presents us with our greatest challenge on the road to a free society.

The struggle of children and young people against the repression that squashes them is the struggle of us all. Our resistance has no more important location than the playground and the classroom.

Not forgotten

Simon Jones had another life as political activist. But his concern for justice didn't help him the day he was sent to a casual job on Shoreham docks. He was killed within hours of starting work, by a piece of equipment that should never have been used.

Anarchists reject capitalism for many reasons. It's a system of bosses and bossed, for a start. It's inefficient. It sets up false values in place of the anarchist values of solidarity and community. But all of these reasons are reducible to one fundamental criticism. Capitalism is a system that is based on profit. In the face of that iron necessity, no other consideration will be allowed to intrude. Human rights, health and safety, doing 'the right thing' – all will be sacrificed in the interest of making money.

This isn't to say it's pointless to campaign for better health and safety regulations or their stricter enforcement. What it means is that when capitalist bosses grant concessions, they'll do their best to wriggle out of them as soon as they can. So often, under capitalism – as Simon Jones already knew – eternal vigilance is the price we pay, simply to stay alive.

Editorial blunder

In this column a month ago, we carried an editorial called 'Court in the act', which said "our rejection of the state has nothing to do with principles – it's a tactical preference". The person who wrote it stands by what he said. He put forward what he considers a Stirnerite individualist position, one which is (he maintains) compatible with anarchism.

But with hindsight, we think it was a mistake to run the article as an editorial. We try to make what we say in this column uncontroversial in anarchist terms (meaning that we try not to say things which other anarchists might object to), trying to put instead what might be called 'core anarchist' arguments.

Freedom aims to be a paper for the whole movement, not tied editorially to any particular stream within anarchist thought. The 'Court in the act' editorial put an argument that many anarchists disagree with profoundly. As such, it should have appeared as a signed article on another page. We blundered.

Readers' letters

Not impressed

Dear *Freedom*,

I can't say I was impressed by your front page opinion piece ('Don't fall for it, kids', 17th November). I'd be happy if this and the next generation of squaddies were reading *Freedom*, but somehow I doubt it; and if your line is that they should've known better than to join up, perhaps it's better that they don't.

Yes, people partly sign up because it sounds like a good idea (a safe bet, some would say), but it's also a traditional chance to get away from it all – debt, unemployment, crap work, even the threat of prison. By all means say "troops out of the army". One by one is fine, all together is better. Just don't say "we don't feel sorry for you", and that they should've got nice safe jobs somewhere (construction maybe?). They won't hear you for laughing.

John

Knock 'em dead

Dear *Freedom*,

Bedfordshire police have just kitted themselves out with plastic bullet guns, which are touted as able to knock down a mannequin from 30ft. That's nice and scientific, isn't it? Ask someone from Belfast what it can do fired into your head or chest from a few feet, or what a ricochet will do to a kid.

Some people will no doubt see this as a response to complaints about killings by armed police, but the police have said themselves that they are not going to be used as replacements for 'proper guns'. If they think you're a lethal threat (which comes down to 'I was dead worried by the plastic gnome he was holding'), they'll still shoot you properly; if not (maybe you're holding a

bottle, or a mop) hey presto, they've got another option. And for all the talk about 'non-lethal', it just opens the door to more 'accidental' killings when cops can't be bothered to read the instruction manual properly. After all, the first rule in the police handbook is, 'I am the law'.

Judge Nervous

Blair and Iraq

Dear *Freedom*,

Blair has clearly shown his opposition to major strikes on Iraq, but once the United States government starts to declare a commitment to strike he will fall into line and be publicly enthusiastic as if he never had any concerns.

Milan Rai

Losing my religion

Dear *Freedom*,

The religious are those who have not yet found themselves. Gods must be overthrown so human beings can stand up.

A. Carpenter

London students

Dear *Freedom*,

A handful of anarchist students (of all ages) at the University of London have decided to set up a Student Anarchist Society there. At present, the core group is based at Kings College and the London School of Economics, so we are starting local chapters there first. But we've recently made a contact at Birkbeck, so we're hoping a chapter will

emerge there soon as well. Eventually these college chapters (or affinity groups?) will be linked into a wider London Student Anarchist Society for the university as a whole.

We aim to be both a group for the study of anarchism and its relation to other disciplines, and also a network for a variety of forms of activism. The society will be primarily for students of the university (any age, full or part-time), but meetings will also be open to former students and their guests.

Ultimately we want to form a national federation of anarchist student groups.

Anyone interested in getting involved should mail lsas@anarchist.co.uk

Noms de plume

Dear *Freedom*,

Recent contributors to *Freedom* have included Nick S., Ronnie and Johnny M. What does the M stand for? We are left in the dark. Who are these people?

I rather feel that this imposition of pseudonyms and initials is rather getting out of hand. I can understand people's wish to be anonymous if, by admitting who they are, this could seriously compromise their jobs. But for many writers, there is no real reason for anonymity.

Perhaps the editors should have a policy on attributing articles. Can't they insist that, unless writers can justify it, all future articles and letters should be published under the writer's real name?

Richard Manfred

Correspondents are asked to keep their letters short. Letters may be cut for reasons of space.

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Contributions can be sent to us at FreedomCopy@aol.com

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Many subscriptions will expire with this issue.

Thanks to all those who have renewed early, and to everyone else we say please renew promptly now.

Please note that there will be a four-week gap (instead of the usual fortnight) between this issue of *Freedom* and the next. The first issue of 2002 will be published on 12th January.

The Freedom Press Bookshop will close at 5pm on Saturday 22nd December and reopen at 10.30am on Thursday 3rd January.

Finally, we extend our best wishes for the holiday and new year to you, our readers and comrades, and – especially – to our friends and printers at Aldgate Press.

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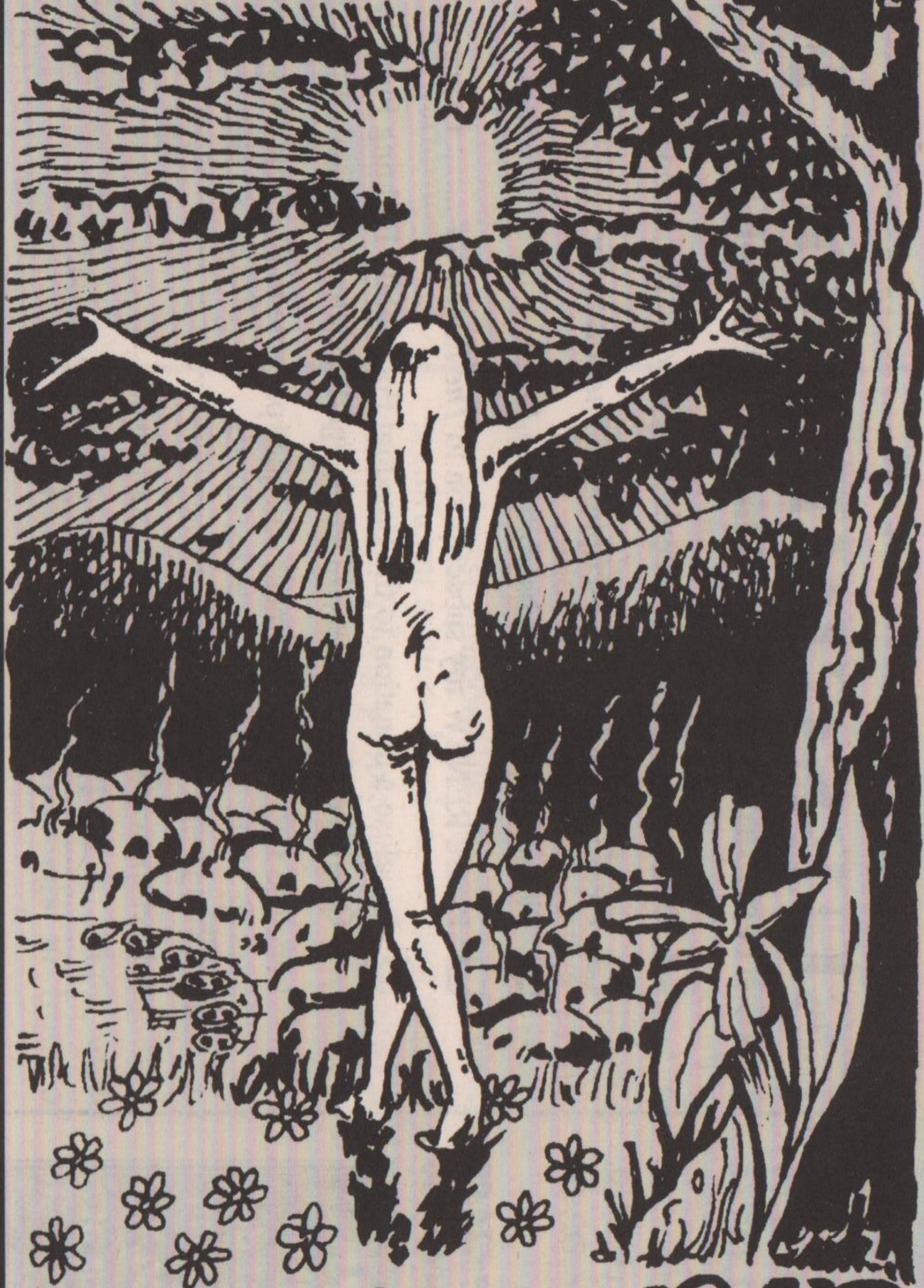
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ISSN 0016 0504

Published by Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

Printed in Great Britain by Aldgate Press, London E1 7RQ printed on recycled paper

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Mistletoe is one of Britain's longest-serving
hallucinogenics, revered by the Celts to the extent
that they would only cut it with a golden sickle.

So after you've kissed under it this Christmas, boil it
up for about an hour. Then remove the skin and eat
the body of the berry without the pips. The trip is
light and visual, and requires a relaxed state of mind
almost like meditation.

My experience involved feeling present in a series of
scenes.



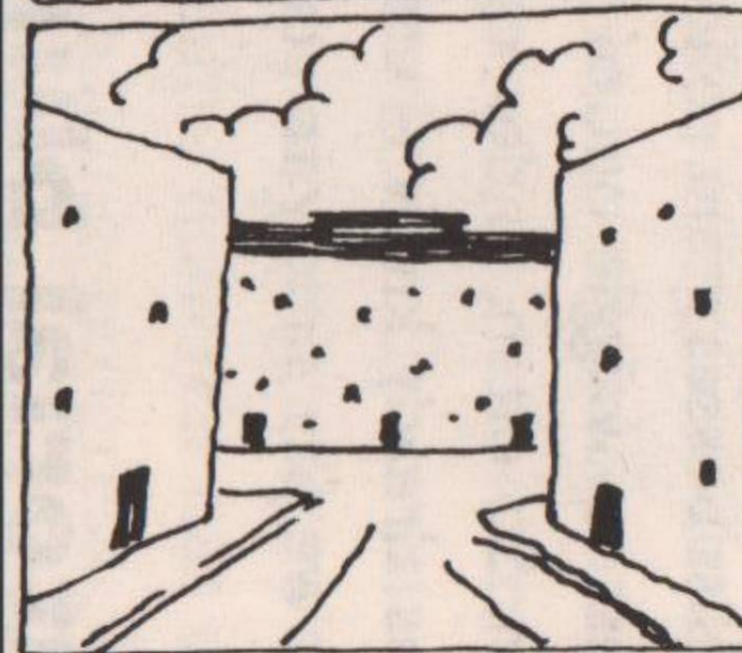
The first was a huge jellyfish,
which left me feeling absolutely
tiny.



The second scene speaks for
itself. The atmosphere felt very
humid around me.



In the third scene, a prairie or
savannah was crowded with a
stampeding herd of various
mammals, none of which I saw
clearly because of the dust
rising from their hooves.



Finally was a huge city, of no
architecture I recognised.

The visuals stopped and I slowly came back to the
surface again, like out of sleep.

Mark