

FREEDOM

50P ■ ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

THUMBS UP FOR PEOPLE POWER

Fewer people than ever voted in 2001. Trust in politicians is at an all-time low. The Hutton Enquiry is laying their lies bare for all to see. This could be our opportunity, says Richard Griffin.

States manufacture consent for their policies. Before the start of the invasion of Iraq, for example, Tony Blair stood in the House of Commons and said that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that could be used in 45 minutes. The original intelligence report actually said that intelligence "suggested that the Iraqi military would be able to use their chemical and biological weapons within 45 minutes of being ordered to do so."

Just over a week later this passage had become "[Iraq's] military planning allows for some WMD to be ready within 45 minutes." Note the new use of the term 'WMD', unspecific about the actual weapons or their capacity but suggesting and implying global doom. Scary. Note too the dropping of the word 'suggested'. Uncertainty has been replaced with certainty.

The way Blair used this 'sexed up' report gave the impression that Iraq was on the verge of using WMD against us. This allowed the invasion to be presented as a pre-emptive strike and therefore justified. This in turn helped swing public opinion from opposition to grudging support.

But almost as soon as the war was over the fallacy of this claim was exposed. There were no WMD. The reasons given to justify the invasion were lies. Lies that were rapidly exposed by the BBC and bought into sharp focus by the death of Dr Kelly, the government's expert. The circumstances around his death, exposed in minute detail by the Hutton Enquiry, further highlight the lengths the state will go to

in order to hide its lies.

In 1983 54% of people had a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust in parliament. In 1996 this had fallen to 10%. Trust in government as a whole has fallen from 47% in 1987 to 28% in 2001. As Michael Jacobs, general secretary of the Fabian Society, has noted, "the automatic reflex of trust in institutions and people in authority has gone. We're more sceptical."

People no longer trust politicians (just 18%), political parties (16%), government ministers (20%) and business (28%). The Financial Times recently went so far as to claim that Britain, like several other countries, was "in the grip of what many claim is a deepening crisis of trust directed at its most familiar institutions and office-holders."

One outcome of this was the record low turnout in the 2001 general election. Turnout amongst the young was particularly poor, prompting ex-minister Stephen Byers to say "there's a danger that we could be witnessing a whole generation being lost to our democratic process and not seeing it as relevant to their world."

For anarchists this decline in trust isn't a crisis but a healthy realisation by people that the state doesn't operate in their interests and that politicians can't be trusted. Sleaze, scandals, abuse of power, policy U-turns, corruption, lies and the dumping of manifesto promises are the everyday currency of liberal democracy. Events like the Hutton Enquiry confirm what people already know – the state just can't be trusted.

It could be the beginning of end for liberal democracy in the West. If fewer and fewer people vote, and less and less people trust the government, questions of legitimacy will increasingly be raised. If the British government were a department store nobody would be shopping there any more. They



wouldn't trust the product it sells or the people doing the selling. The shareholders (in this case the bosses) would quickly start questioning whether it was worth keeping the operation going. Eventually it would go bust.

This is all good news for anarchism. Slightly less encouraging are the institutions that people do trust. Authoritarian structures like the police, the army and the justice system still command substantial respect. So do professionals like doctors, teachers and scientists. This may stem from a (mistaken) belief that these individuals and institutions serve the public good and can therefore be trusted.

The fact that 78% of the population

trust Kellogg's, 74% trust Boots, 72% trust McVities and 63% trust Tesco is disappointing (only 41% trust trade unions) but while people may like shopping in Tesco, they don't want the chain to run the country. Unlike politicians, a packet of Kellogg's Corn Flakes delivers what it says it will every time you buy a packet. The fact that people trust a packet of breakfast cereal seven times more than they trust parliament says a lot about the state liberal democracy is in.

Western states are discovering that you can't fool all the people even some of the time. The Emperor's new clothes are being exposed. People are voting against liberal democracy with their feet. They aren't going to the ballot

stations, they aren't joining political parties and they aren't participating in the political process. They certainly don't trust the political system.

It's far too early to judge what the consequences of this collapse in trust will be. Anarchists shouldn't be complacent. A vacuum could just as easily be filled by the right as by the left. The most obvious benefactors of the decline in liberal democracy so far in Britain have been the racist BNP, who picked up another council seat last week. Anarchists need to work hard. But the tide does seem to be moving in our direction.

Sources for statistics: MORI/BMA 2003, British Election Study, Neilsen, Henley Centre, Starcom, MediaSpan.

TRICK NOT TRICKLE

A recent US survey revealed that company bosses presiding over the largest redundancy programmes, pension scheme shortfalls and tax breaks are enjoying the largest salary increases, says Anton Pawluk.

The research provides incontrovertible evidence that the tightening of the financial belt in the face of a slowdown in economic growth isn't being felt by all. While Hewlett-Packard found it necessary to shed 27,000 of its workforce, the company still felt able to offer its chief executive, Carla Fiorina, a 231% pay rise. AOL Time Warner recently laid off 4,380 employees, but still found enough reserve funds to

reward chief, Gerald Levin, with a staggering rise of 1,612%.

Companies with the greatest deficits in their pension schemes have also seen disproportionate pay increases awarded to chief executives. The 30 companies with the greatest pension deficits paid their bosses 59% more than the average. Exxon's pension short fall of \$11.3 billion didn't prevent its chief executive taking home \$42.5 million in the last year alone.

The researchers responsible for the survey, published in Business Week, calculate that on average chief executive pay has risen by 279% since 1990, while average worker pay has risen by just 46%. Despite the

predictions of neo-liberal rhetoricians, profits don't seem to be trickling down at quite the rate workers have been led to expect.

While diverging starkly from the rhetoric, these figures are in strict accordance with tacit neo-liberal orthodoxy. They show that the basic tenet – losses should be socialised and profits privatised – is being properly met. Society shoulders the burden of increased unemployment while corporations dispose of the common wealth. This fact is further reinforced by evidence that companies which enjoy the biggest tax breaks are the ones rewarding their bosses most generously.

FOUR YEARS ON

An inquest finally opened this week into the death of Roger Sylvester, who died after being restrained by eight cops in Tottenham, north London, in January 1999. An investigation into his death was carried out by Essex police, who passed a report to the Crown Prosecution Service that October.

In November 2000, thirteen months later, CPS bureaucrats announced that no police officer would face criminal charges. Roger's family challenged this decision in the courts, but Lord Chief Justice Woolf ruled in May 2001 that the challenge should wait until the results of the inquest were known.

Roger Sylvester was a healthy 30-year-old when he died. Activists from INQUEST, the group which campaigns

to halt a tide of deaths in police custody, said this week that they were particularly concerned by police restraint methods and the disproportionate number of black men who have died. Roger was black.

Sheila Sylvester, Roger's mother, said that five years waiting to know the truth had had a terrible effect on the family. "My physical health has deteriorated, I feel so worn out," she said. "The process and the police officers have taken their toll on me. To compound this, the inquest is only going to look at how my Roger died, not why."

The inquest began at St Pancras coroners court on 8th September. For more information, visit www.inquest.org.uk

Britain

FREEDOM

Volume 64 Number 17

Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject all government and economic repression.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice.

In our building in Whitechapel we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host a social centre and meeting space, the Autonomy Club. We're currently developing open-access IT provision for activists to use.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that human freedom can only thrive when the institutions of state and capital have been abolished.

New FP books

Freedom has just published two new books. Harold Barclay's primer on the origins of the state is featured on page 5. Donald Rooum's new Wildcat book, *Anarchists Against Bombs*, is a collection of cartoons attacking the arms trade and the militarist mindset. It's available from Freedom for £3 (post free in the UK, add £1 elsewhere). Please send cheques payable to Freedom Press. Our address is 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. Both books will be reviewed in forthcoming issues of this newspaper.

Contacts

The first issue of 40 Winks, the newsletter of the Campaign against Working Links (Awol) is now out. For everything you've yet to learn about the government's 'Employment Zones', 'war on benefit fraud' and JobCentre nonsense, with a particular focus on Brighton and Hove, send five stamps for five issues to Awol, c/o Brighton & Hove Unemployed Workers Centre, 4 Crestway Parade, Brighton BN1 7BL (next issue September).

Building Worker is the rank & file paper for the construction industry. The latest issue describes the truly appalling death rates amongst those who work in the trade and outlines what can be done to stop the carnage. There's an account of the intriguing approach to elections on the part of UCATT officials and a solidarity appeal for the Manchester electricians. Send SAE to Box 447, SWDO, 4 Falcon Road West, Edinburgh EH10 4AB.

Donations

20th July to 7th September
MB, York, £6; SH, Iceland, £3; JL, Wolverhampton, £4; AP, Whitley Bay, £10; ET, Swindon, £10.

Next issue

The next issue will be dated 27th September and the last day for copy will be Thursday 18th September. You can send articles to us by snail mail or at FreedomCopy@aol.com

Essex nazis win new seat

Boneheads from the far-right British National Party celebrated last week after they picked up another council seat in an Essex by-election. The BNP now has eighteen local councillors in Britain, following the election of building maintenance manager Nicholas Geri in Grays on 4th September.

Geri, the grandson of an Italian immigrant, said he was 'pleasantly surprised' to win a seat in the borough's Riverside ward. His win, which was based on a 22% turnout, left Labour with an overall majority of 21 on the council. The by-election was

triggered by the death of a Labour incumbent.

Geri hailed his victory. "We bring common sense," he said. "Things have gone the wrong way and the way that people don't want them to go, that's why they voted for us." Among the 'problems' he vowed to tackle he listed "asylum problems, NHS problems, crime and the causes of crime."

Local mainstream politicians said Geri's success should be 'a rallying call' for anyone opposed to racism. Alan Olive, an official of the local Labour Party, said "we'll redouble our efforts in this community and work on behalf of local people to prove the value of a hard-working Labour team. We'll work

hard to expose the BNP for what they really are - nasty, extremist and racist.

"The BNP got in narrowly on the back of empty promises, low turnout and bogus respectability," he said. "The truth is they've absolutely nothing to offer and will let local people down." Others called the result an 'aberration'. Earnshaw Palmer, a 'Liberal Democrat' councillor, said "this is what happens when the silent majority stay at home."

Essex anti-fascists disputed this analysis. "It's the Labour Party's blatant betrayal of this working class community that's opened the door to the BNP," said one. "If Olive's 'hard-working Labour team' is so good, why did people desert it?"

He disputed the liberal view that the answer to the fascist threat was to be found in more electoralism. "It's the failure of the mainstream parties that's created this situation in the first place," he said. "Why would voting for them improve it? Our response has to lie elsewhere - with working in our communities and opposing the nazis on the streets."

In May's local elections the BNP won eleven new council seats in England. Its biggest success was the gain of five more seats in Burnley. The party has moderated its public rhetoric in recent years, apparently in an effort to shake off its racist image and become more 'electable'.

LISTINGS

Bedford

28th September Chained procession to Yarl's Wood detention centre. Meet at 12 noon, John Howard memorial statue, St Paul's Square. Contact 07786 517379 or sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk

Bristol

27th September Peace vigil in the city centre from 3pm to 4pm, for those who can't make it to London for the national demo on that day.

Cardiff

16th September Stop the MRO Aviation Fair, welcome the arms traders outside the Cardiff International Arena at 10am.

Leeds

13th & 14th September Space Invaders, a theatrical spectacular based on events that took place at the Aspire social centre in November 2002. Wrangthorne Church Hall, Hyde Park Terrace (off Hyde Park Corner), at 8pm.

Leicester

7th October Leicester Anarchist Federation meet at 8pm, upstairs at the Ale Wagon pub, Charles Street.

London

13th September One-day conference on Palestine: What Future?, with Tony Benn, Dr Azmi Bishara, and many others, at SOAS, University of London. For info call Betty Hunter on 020 7700 6192 or email alayasas@hotmail.com

14th September Free party in Victoria Park, organised by CND, from 12 noon to 7.30pm. See www.cnduk.org or call 0207 700 2393

14th September ISM training for the olive harvest in Palestine, from 11am to 5pm at The Youth Club, basement of Edgson House, Ebury Bridge Road, SW1 (tube Victoria or Sloane Square). To book contact rachel@london-ism.org. For more info see www.pal-solidarity.org or www.ism-london.org

15th September No More War Lies: public meeting on Blair, the BBC and Iraq at Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research, Stanhope Place, W2 (Marble Arch tube). For details call 07801 789297

15th September Indymedia screening at Spitz Gallery/Venue, 109 Commercial Street, E1, 7pm. Showing Hidden War

documentary and two shorts from Guerilla News Network.

16th September Performance Club North, downstairs at the King's Head, Crouch End Broadway, N8. Doors open 8.15pm, show 9pm, bar until midnight. Featuring top comedian Nick Revell, Den and the Ligger, Kai Eikerman, and mixed-ability shaman Tony Allen. Adm £6/£5.

16th September Paradise Press at Gay's the Word, 66 Marchmont Street, WC1. Queer readings and meet the authors, from 7pm.

18th September Performance Club West, Ginglik, 1 Shepherds Bush Green, W12. Doors open 5pm, show 8.30pm, bar until midnight. Featuring Dan Antopolski, Nick Revell, Tony Allen, Kai Eikerman, Den and the Ligger, Whatsername. Adm £8/£5.

18th September Power and Politics in Cancun, reactions to the fifth WTO ministerial at Friends House, 173 Euston Road, NW1 from 7.30 to 9pm. Speakers include George Monbiot, Carmen Diaz (Jalisco Ecologist Collective, Mexico), prof Yash Tandon (African delegate to WTO), and others.

19th September Kabaret and Kareoke in aid of political prisoners, at The Eaton Mission, 91 Eastway, Hackney Wick, from 8pm until late, entry £3.

19th September A memorial for those killed in the invasion of Iraq, 6.30 to 8pm in Parliament Square, bring flowers. See www.voicesuk.org or contact voices@viwuk.freemove.co.uk or 0845 4582564

20th September Peace One Day: The Celebration 2003 at Brixton Academy. Doors open at 7pm, show from 8pm to 3am. See www.peaceday.org (adm £25).

20th September A.L. Morton Memorial Lecture from 2pm given by Paul Foot on Shelley: Poet, Romantic and Revolutionary, at Marx Memorial Library, Clerkenwell Green. Contact David on 020 8446 3037 or Mike on 020 8673 8283.

26-27th September Conference on Dissent and the State Since 1945 at Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, Malet Street, WC1. For details contact morganshs@hotmail.com, w.thompson@newpolitics.org.uk, mikesquires70@hotmail.com. Fee £18/£12.

26th September The Baku-Ceyhan

Campaign and People & Planet are calling for a mass demo outside the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, One Exchange Square, Bishopsgate, from midday. See www.baku.org.uk or contact 01865 200550.

27th September Anarchist Workers Network organising meeting at the Autonomy Club, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1 (Aldgate East tube) at 7pm.

1st October Anarchist Reading Club, reading *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, at the Autonomy Club, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1 (Aldgate East tube), 7pm.

4th October First London Social Forum from 10.30am to 6pm at the LSE, Houghton Street, WC2.

7th October How do we stop the next war? discussion meeting at the Autonomy Club, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1 (Aldgate East tube), 7pm.

11th October Oil War and Climate Change 'Gatherance', one-day event by Rising Tide with talks, workshops, inspiration, from 10.30am to 6pm. See www.risingtide.org.uk or contact 01865 241097.

14th October Causes of War: role of the media, discussion meeting with Robert Fox. Contact Pugwash Office, 63a Great Russell Street, WC1B 3BJ, 0207 405 6661 or pugwash@mac.com

18th October London Anarchist Forum talk on William Morris: socialism and anarchism, by Terry Liddle, followed by open discussion. From 2.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn.

25th October Anarchist Bookfair 2003 from 10am to 7pm, ULU, Malet Street, WC1. See www.anarchistbookfair.org

25th October National demo against deaths in police custody. Assemble Trafalgar Square at 1pm for march to Downing Street. Please wear black.

Manchester

1st October Manchester Discussion Group meeting at the Hare and Hounds, Shude Hill (nr Arndale Centre) at 7pm.

4th October Second Manchester People's Assembly from 10.30am to 5.30pm at the Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, city centre. Contact manpeoplesassembly@riseup.net

Newcastle

13th September North East Campaign

for Asylum Rights 'Media Myth Busters' training from 9.30am to 1pm at Books for Amnesty, Westgate Road. See www.necfar.org.uk.

16th September What is happening in Burma? A multi-media presentation by Bob Anderson of the Karen Education Partnership, 7pm at Books for Amnesty, Westgate Road.

23rd September Why Don't You? A gathering of people who want to take direct action to stop injustice in creative, fun and effective ways. See www.sidecinema.com/whydontyou.htm or contact whydontyou@post.com.

28th October Mad Film Night at the Side Cinema (near the Crown Posada pub on Dean Street on the quayside). Films on mental health from 7.30pm. See www.sidecinema.com.

North Yorkshire

11th October Don't Take the Peace out of Space! demo at Menwith Hill, come dressed as a 'celestial body' (star, comet, planet, galaxy, etc.), 12 noon to 4pm. See www.takethepeace.com

Oxford

27th September Close Campsfield refugee detention centre demo at main gates, Langford Lane, Kidlington, 12 noon. See www.closecampsfield.org.uk

Plymouth

1st-5th October Six days of disarmament activity at Devonport Camp. Contact Claire on 08454 588363, Matt on 01823 601346, tp2000@gn.apc.org or see www.tridentploughshares.org.

Suffolk

5th-6th October Lakenheath demo and trespass day from 12 noon to 4pm on 5th, 6am to midnight on 6th. Contact dwhiggin@dhiggin.fsnet.co.uk

Worthing

16th September Felicity Arbuthnot speaking about Guantanamo Bay at Downview pub (opposite West Worthing station) at 7.45pm.

7th October Eco-action meeting at Downview pub (opposite West Worthing station) at 7.45pm. See <http://www.worthinganarchists.cjb.net>

25th October Animal Aid Autumn Fair, from 10am to 12.30pm at Heene Community Centre, 122 Heene Road.

Britain

Beyond the watershed

Anarchism and Marxism need to resolve their differences, says Red Pepper's David Osler

The left in Britain is at a watershed. There are signs that anarchists are getting better organised, though there's much to do. The authoritarian left is splintering and it's far from clear what the fall out from this will be. Dave Osler writes for radical monthly magazine Red Pepper. He's also been actively involved in the Socialist Alliance. In this Freedom interview he charts the current problems facing the revolutionary authoritarian left in England. While readers of Freedom won't agree with all Dave says, he raises important issues for the anarchist movement and the wider left.

Freedom: *The English authoritarian left and particularly the Socialist Alliance (SA) seems to be in crisis at the moment. Do you think this is a fair assessment?*
Dave Osler: The Socialist Alliance is acting like a miniaturised model Titanic in search of its very own pocket iceberg. I haven't seen such a wanton display of self-destructive behaviour since Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen checked into the Chelsea Hotel. I very much doubt that the organisation will exist even six months from now, at least in its current form.

The British far left has been in a state of flux since 1995, when Arthur Scargill floated the idea of a new workers' party. Although the Socialist Labour Party rapidly degenerated into an Uncle Joe nostalgia cult, the Socialist Alliance seemed its logical successor, at least as a vehicle for regroupment. But the actions of the Socialist Workers Party have now pushed it to the edge of collapse.

Outside England, things look considerably better. The successes of the Scottish Socialist Party and the possibility of a similar formation in Wales point to what would be possible if the bulk of the Trotskyist left wasn't politically brain dead.

Freedom: *What are the roots of this crisis and what is its significance for the left as a whole?*

Dave Osler: The underlying problem can be summed up in two words – democratic centralism. Nobody's buying that shit any more. As long as the far left remains addicted to this form of organisation, the groups are condemned to remain divided.

More immediately, the current crisis has been sparked by the SWP's decision to seek an electoral bloc with Birmingham mosque in time for next year's euro-elections. Now, I'm not against electoral blocs with religious groups on principle. There are plenty of precedents, especially when it comes to pacts with religiously-based workers' organisations.

What's decisive is the politics of any deal. And that's what we don't know, because the SWP has carried out the negotiations behind the backs of its ostensible Alliance partners.

But statements from SWP leaders

suggest that they're ready to let women's liberation or gay rights go hang in search of such a lash-up. It also seems the SWP is negotiating not with Muslim workers – either collectively organised or as individuals – but directly with the leadership of the central mosque. The subsidiary danger here is that the far left could get entwined in communalist politics.

The whole episode has also brought the issue of democracy into the forefront. The SWP's conception of democratic centralism means that open debate can't be tolerated, either among its own membership or the Alliance as a whole. Minority viewpoints – especially those questioning what's now dubbed 'the turn to the mosques' – have been stomped on, both nationally and in important local branches. Tactics have ranged from denying dissidents committee positions to packing meetings and pushing through expulsions. Put together, what's going on is simply unacceptable as far as many of us are concerned.

Freedom: *Anarchists reject participation in elections, concentrating instead on community activity and direct action. In contrast most of the groups on the socialist left seem wedded to elections. The Communist Party of Britain wants to reclaim the Labour Party. The CPGB, Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) and Workers Power want an independent SA. The SWP are pushing their Peace and Justice alliances through the SA. How do you assess these various approaches?*

Dave Osler: The Scottish Socialist Party shows the advantages of leftist participation in elections, if only in terms of generating media coverage, and even the ability to secure small reforms through the Scottish parliament. But I wouldn't agree that socialists are 'wedded to elections'. Fewer socialists than ever before think in terms of a parliamentary road.

The point is, radical politics isn't about 'either/or'. Why should electoral work be counterposed to community activism or direct action? And why don't you mention trade union work or activity in the women's movement, for instance? Revolutionary socialists need to take a multi-pronged approach.

I'm sceptical about the fledgling campaign to 'reclaim the Labour Party'. First, I don't think the union leaders who are talking the talk, probably in an effort to appeal to their activists, are serious. Second, even if they were, there's little chance they'd succeed. The Labour Party is even less democratic than the Socialist Alliance. Third, suppose I'm wrong on both counts? Replacing Blair with Brown or even Cook won't amount to much.

Any independent Socialist Alliance would need to draw in significantly wider layers right from the start, or suffer instant irrelevance. In case you're not up to speed with the soap opera,



Workers' Power has waltzed out of the Socialist Alliance into splendid isolation, while the CPGB and AWL are barely on speaking terms because of their different analyses of what happened in Afghanistan in 1979. I bet you think I'm making this up, don't you? But even if those two groups buried the hatchet and drew in existing non-aligned Socialist Alliance members, we'd only be talking about a loose group of 200 people tops.

It's not as if the SWP's Peace and Justice Party gambit has much chance of paying off either. Two such completely divergent outlooks can't possibly sustain a stable political formation. Apart from anything else, if the Muslim community does decide to mobilise its latent electoral potential, thanks to its concentration in certain constituencies it will realise soon enough that the Trots aren't bringing very much to the party.

Freedom: *What effects do you think the anti-capitalist and more recently the anti-war movement have had on the left?*

Dave Osler: The anti-capitalist and anti-war movements have led some Trotskyist groups to fantasise about a re-run of the late sixties, with large numbers of youth suddenly attracted to revolutionary ideas. Globalise Resistance [the SWP front group] and Revolution [Workers Power] both seem designed with this scenario in mind.

But unless the young people I know are particularly sad, any such radicalisation is very much a minority affair. There hasn't been any significant influx of youth into the organised left. I guess that confirms how unattractive this brand of politics has become.

Freedom: *Signals from the labour movement seem confusing at the moment. On the one hand industrial*

action is on the rise and we've seen the election of a number of leftwing general secretaries, but we've also seen the FBU defeated, overall union membership seems stagnant and Mick Rix has just been ousted. How do you assess the state and importance of the union movement?

Dave Osler: Trade unionism is an important front in the class struggle. The workplace is where labour directly confronts capital. So naturally I think it's extremely positive to see a revival of militancy after decades of defeat, though it's important not to overestimate its extent. As ever, the task for union activists is to organise at the base rather than to rely on capturing positions in the union machine.

Freedom: *As an outsider how do you perceive the anarchist movement in Britain? Do you see any prospects for dialogue between the libertarian and socialist left?*

Dave Osler: What is socialism if it isn't informed with a libertarian sensibility? All too often a state-controlled economy that generates a lower standard of living and fewer freedoms than capitalist democracy. But what is libertarianism that isn't socialist? A doctrine of unrestrained free markets that would sweep away even the minimal protections afforded by the welfare state. Somehow, libertarian Marxism should resolve its on-going border dispute with class struggle anarchism.

Anarchism strikes me as almost a closed shop, a private club of some sort. I've been trying to find out a bit more about it in recent months and it hasn't been easy. Most of the available literature tends to be the works of the classic writers, with little geared to current or recent struggles.

I've met extremely few anarchists through political activity. Most of them have been hostile and they've tended to harangue. You're not a very friendly

bunch, are you?

The desire to avoid the sort of recruitment tactics used by Trot groups is understandable. But anarchists seem to take it too far the other way.

Freedom: *George Monbiot in his book, The Age of Consent, says that anarchism is a nice idea in theory but impractical as a political project because a world without states would be unable to deal with global issues. As a non-anarchist what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of anarchism?*

Dave Osler: It's difficult for me to judge the strengths and weaknesses of anarchism, or at least its contemporary practice in Britain, because as an organised political current it seems almost invisible. Or perhaps most of its political activity takes place in a parallel universe that rarely overlaps with the fields Marxists are involved in.

Remember that a world without states is ostensibly the goal of the Marxism and anarchism alike, whatever the differences over how we get there. So I guess Monbiot's critique applies to both trends. To me, it seems barely credible to argue that the worldwide classless society of the future won't be able to devise democratic mechanisms to address global concerns. Come to think of it, international co-operation will play such a vital part in the struggle to achieve communism – small 'c', let me stress – that such mechanisms are likely to be generated by the struggle itself.

David Osler has been active in far left politics for over 20 years. He's a former journalist on the Trotskyist paper Socialist Outlook and the Labour weekly, Tribune. His latest book, Labour Party plc: New Labour as a Party of Business, dissects the relationship between Labour and business over the past decade.

George Monbiot's book, The Age of Consent, is reviewed on page 5.

International

Nowhere can like Cancun can

Anti-capitalists are doing their best to ensure that the latest WTO jamboree falls flat on its face

Thousands of anti-capitalists were due to gather in Mexico this week as delegates of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) descended on the resort of Cancun for a ministerial summit. Its organisers hoped the summit, which began on 10th September, would open developing countries' economies to multinational corporations. Here American activist Starhawk explains why she rejects their neo-liberal programme of 'globalisation'.

The WTO is the most ambitious and far-reaching of the various trade agreements and institutions that have codified and imposed corporate globalisation on a reluctant world. The WTO's reach is global and its power immense. It is, in a sense, an institution of global governance.

Its agreements are hammered out in meetings which aren't open to the public and in which the rich and industrialised countries hold inordinate power, while its rulings on disputes are made in secret tribunals by trade bureaucrats who aren't accountable to the public and who provide no public record of their deliberations.

On the agenda for this summit are some of the basic issues of life: food, agriculture, services. To simplify the complexities of tariffs and subsidies and all the rest of it, the vision put forth by the corporate globalisers is like a bad science-fiction film. In their version of

the world, no country will produce its own food, devote common resources to provide for human needs or the nurturing of the next generation. All food will be grown in large, industrialised farms for export, using chemicals and herbicides on patented, genetically engineered crops that are further packaged, irradiated, branded, and shrink-wrapped before being sold to you at your large corporate supermarket.

Profit, not health or sustainability, will be the determining factor in agriculture as in every area of human endeavour. Should you get sick from the chemicals, a privatised medical establishment will minister to your every need as long as you can pay, just as you will pay for your drinking water and your children's private school. An elite will hold all the power and the bulk of the world's wealth, and for the rest of us, the maquiladora, the prison or a fine career in the military await.

The vast majority of us don't see that world as desirable. We hold another vision, one that has something to do with community, with valuing human relationships, with a love for nature and the diversity and wonder of life. We want a world where everybody has enough: healthy, organic, locally grown food, clean water, comfortable shelter, opportunities to express our creativity and realise our dreams. We know that world is possible. We'd like to get on with creating it, with healing the planet, raising our kids, and planting our gardens. But in order to do even these



simple things we need to stand up and fight. And one place to do that is Cancun.

The Cancun ministerial meeting has every chance of failing. The project of American global hegemony has become so blatant and aggressive that it's alarmed even our allies. The US is at odds with the European Union on agriculture and other issues. The less developed countries are tired of being dictated to by both. There's rebellion in

the ranks, and we can further that with a massive presence in the streets.

Moreover, there's currently a rift in the ruling classes, a subtle but real difference between the corporatists who want to see corporate rule backed by US military power, and the militarists who want to see American military hegemony backed by corporate wealth.

It's time for the world's second superpower, the ordinary people of the planet, to raise our voices again. This

summit could become the third failure in a row. The 2000 Seattle summit dissolved in dissension and the meeting two years ago in Qatar was merely a holding action. A third failure in Cancun would be a serious and possibly fatal setback for the WTO as an institution and for the entire project of global corporate rule. This is a crucial moment in history, when the tide could turn. And the moon is rising. Come dance on the shore!

Obituary

The noted Italian painter Enrico Baj died in Nice on 16th June 2003.

Well known in Italy, he was finally beginning to become known in France as well. His name had never really become known in Britain.

Baj was devoted to anarchism and this expressed itself in his works. His vast canvases were beautiful and often funny. When it was exhibited in Italy in 1972, his *Funeral of the Anarchist Pinelli* led to police commissioners marching in and closing down the gallery.

Born into a well-to-do family in Milan on 31st October 1924, he exhibited a rebellious streak early on when, as a boy, he stood to mock attention in front of a fascist parade. He quit Italy to take refuge in Geneva in 1944 to avoid conscription into Mussolini's army.

A good part of CIRA, the anarchist library in Lausanne, was constructed

thanks to his generosity. He financed the first Russian translation and printing of Voline's *Unknown Revolution*. Like other anarchist artists – the Pissarros, Signac and Vlaminck – he gave away lithographs, objects and texts to comrades and allowed the free use of his works by them, as well as the use of his table and wine cellar!

He created the work *Monument to Bakunin* at a collective exhibition in Berlin in the mid 1990s. This was exhibited at Monte Verita in Italian Switzerland where anarchists had set up an artists' colony many years before.

Baj was 'Satrap' of the College of Pataphysics (in honour of Alfred Jarry, the writer of the *Ubu* plays) and as such was often the victim of state censors. He was attracted to Jarry's sarcastic and absurdist writings and founded the *Pataphysics Institute* with Man Ray in 1963. He also collaborated with another stalwart from the Dada and

Surrealist movements, Marcel Duchamp.

With Duchamp, Baj produced a parody of the *Mona Lisa*. Among his other works are *Nixon Parade*, *Berluskaiser* (a reference to the politician-crook Berlusconi), *Apocalypse and the Generals* – all works suffused with anarchism and anti-militarism. In addition he wrote a dozen books, all biting satirical.

Among them are *Automitobiografia*, written in 1983, and *Kiss Me, I'm Italian* from 1997. Connected with the radical COBRA art movement in the post-war years, his work became more fertile in later years and, like many great artists, he continued to enrich it. He founded the *arte nucleare* movement in 1951 with Sergio Dangelo. An obituary of Baj appeared in the *Guardian*, which studiously avoided mentioning his anarchism.

Nick Heath

Jailed

The webmaster of a Californian anarchist website was jailed for a year in August, after he was found guilty of distributing information that incited readers to commit 'a federal crime of violence'. Sherman Austin was arrested nearly two years ago, after cops said his *raisethefist.com* site contained information on how to make Molotov cocktails and Drano bombs.

The material which cops said had broken the law was contained in an essay written by somebody else, but to which Sherman had given free hosting. This contained information on how to build primitive bombs which is widely available on the web.

FBI agents raided his home in Sherman Oaks, California, in January 2002. He was released after questioning. But when he joined mass protests in New York later that month against a meeting of the World Economic Forum, he was arrested again.

In late 2002, federal prosecutors formally charged Sherman with distributing information on explosives with the knowledge that some readers would use such information to commit a federal violent crime.

Sherman's supporters say that similar information has been freely available for years on other sites and in libraries. There's also a mirror of *raisethefist.com* run by a computer science professor at the Carnegie Mellon University.

Last month, Sherman pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a year in jail and three years probation. If he'd contested the charges, he was warned that he faced 20 years inside under the provisions of the USA Patriot Act.

Although prosecutors asked for a four-month sentence, the judge insisted that this wouldn't be sufficient. "What kind of a message would four months in jail send to other revolutionaries?", he demanded.

Kingdom of Micomicon

The state we're in

The form of social organisation we have today is a relatively recent phenomenon, says Harold Barclay

Absolute monarchs buttressed their position by closely identifying themselves with divinity, although they did not profess to be gods. Some came close to assuming they were his divine agents, however. In Europe there developed the notion of the divine right of kings, the ruler was divinely ordained to assume the position of head of state.

Today the absolute monarchy is extremely rare. Saudi Arabia is the largest of those which remain. Five hundred years ago the majority of all states were of this type.

The Renaissance and Reformation in Europe sparked the emergence of democratic governments, although the first such were apparently those in ancient Greece. The Athenian democracy is much referred to, but one may wonder to what extent it was actually more of an oligarchy ruled by an elite of the educated freemen. In any case, like many democracies after it, the majority of the population being slaves or women had no say in the administration of affairs. Technically, a democracy entails the rule by the majority (presumably of adults) and what this has meant is the election of lawmakers – representatives from the electorate – by the populace. Direct democracy in which the populace are invited to assemble and vote on issues is a rare phenomenon limited entirely to a few cases of administration of local village or town affairs.

After Greece, Iceland and Switzerland can claim to be the oldest European democracies. The American Republic was the first state in most recent times to embark on a political system which professed democratic principles, although the British were also clearly moving towards the same end.

The most recent form of polity is the totalitarian state, e.g. Nazi Germany or Stalinist USSR. The reason this type is very modern is that for any kind of total control of the citizenry to occur requires technology which has been invented this century. A proper totalitarian state requires the most sophisticated surveillance devices; with new technologies and the application of psychology, the most exquisite forms of torture are introduced. More jails and concentration camps are required; police, especially secret police and informants, must be added. All citizens and children are encouraged to be informants so that witch-hunts are perpetual. As in all states, the young are trained to be loyal and obedient servants of the state and its leader, but in the totalitarian state this becomes an obsession. There are periodic puges as 'disloyal' state officials are marched off to execution. The press, radio, television, motion pictures – all forms

of communication – fall under strict state management. Paranoia and terror reign. The state is all.

In the evolution of the state over its five to six thousand year history there have been two clear trends. One has been a movement from authoritarian theocracies and absolute monarchies to the appearance of liberal democracy. The second trend has been a movement towards ever more authoritarian governments, culminating in the totalitarian state. With modern technology it is at last possible to create a truly absolute totalitarian state.

I would argue that the long sweep of history demonstrates that the state is an inherently despotic institution. The vast majority of states have been tyrannies according to anyone's criteria. It will be pointed out, however, that today we have more democracies than ever before, that perhaps half of modern states would fit somehow into such a category. Therefore, it is held things are looking up; the world is becoming more liberal, more free.

But consider the reality of the democratic ideal: the sanctity of majority vote. While the absolute monarchy and the totalitarian state place their trust in a single leader, democracy elevates the majority decision of the populace to a divine status, even though it rarely ever actually implements it. In the democratic state the election of rulers by alleged majority vote is a subterfuge which helps individuals to believe that they control the situation. They are

“Paranoia and terror reign. The state is all.”

selecting persons to do a task for them, and they have no guarantee that it will be carried out as they desired. They are abdicating to these persons, granting them the right to impose their own wills by threat of force. Electing individuals to public office is like being given a limited choice of your oppressors.

We frequently hear the refrain: if you don't vote you have no right to complain. Such an argument makes the false assumption that an election provides real choices. But more so, it falsely assumes the legitimacy of the process itself: that an individual is required to delegate authority to an arbitrarily chosen few, or that an individual is required to elect his or her own jailers. Above all, there is the fundamental



moral question about the sanctity of the majority. Democracy, in its advocacy of majority rule, attempts to provide an alternative to the rule of one, but it often replaces that kind of dictatorship by one of the majority or, most commonly, of the plurality. It assumes that right and wrong, that morality, can be determined by a majority of those who bother to vote. Ibsen's *Enemy of the People* is a vivid dramatisation of some of the consequences of relying upon majorities. Yet even aside from the fact that minorities might know better, or have right on their side, there remains the truth that the majority compels the minority to conform.

No democracy has freed itself from rule by the well-to-do any more than it has freed itself from the division between the ruler and the ruled. Marx's remark that the state is the executive committee of the capitalist class has relevance for the democratic state. That is, at the very least, no democracy has jeopardised the role of business enterprise. Only the wealthy and well off can afford to launch viable campaigns for public office and to assume such positions. Change in government in a democracy is a circulation from one elite group to another. Parliamentary democracies are essentially oligarchies in which the populace is led to believe that it delegates all its authority to members of parliament to do as they think best. In a democracy, just as in a totalitarian state, it is not possible to withhold from a decision of the state. Whether you like it or not, you are a subject of the state. As the American Civil War demonstrated, no segment

may secede. Democracies are no less enthusiasts of nationalist flag waving, patriotic mumbo jumbo, and militarism, than any other kind of state. Further, the judiciary is such that a judge has few limits to his authority. Democracy provides a more benign and subtle form of despotism, the totalitarian state is more crass, more monstrous – more frank.

Archaic and modern

Whether democratic, theocratic or totalitarian, all states share basic common features. At the same time it has been suggested that there are significant differences between the modern state and those of an earlier time. The dividing line between archaic and modern states seems to be in the late medieval period in Europe.

In the modern state there is a strong nationalistic spirit, a glorification of the nation. This does not occur in the archaic state where much of the populace is at most hardly aware of their belonging to a nation, identifying rather with a local village or at best a province or tribe.

The modern state maintains numerous ministries and an enormous bureaucracy. Up to ten percent of the working population may be employed by the state in one form or another. The archaic state has few ministries and the bureaucracy is minimal, even non-existent in some cases. Considerably less than one percent of workers would be employed by the state.

The modern state devotes a considerable amount of its expenditure and its bureaucracy to the provision of social services. Modern states tend to become

welfare states. The archaic state provides no social services; expenditures are divided between those for a military establishment and war and those for the maintenance of a royal entourage.

There is a strong tendency for modern states to build large standing armies and to institute compulsory military training for all young men. In the archaic state standing armies are minimal and, when the state is in need of cannon fodder, villages are raided to impress young men into the military.

Boundaries between modern states are clear and unambiguous and within the last century they have been increasingly more difficult to cross. This contrasts with the archaic state.

The modern state is more effective in its control of the populace. Here there is a direct correlation with increasing technological sophistication which brings with it more efficient methods for surveillance and data collection. While the archaic state might claim a monopoly on the use of violence within its sovereign borders, in fact it finds itself faced with continual, often successful, challenges to this claim. Sometimes the opposition is in the form of another institution. Thus, early Medieval Europe states found a formidable opponent in the church. Nobles frequently challenged the power of the king.

This is an edited extract from Harold Barclay's new book, *The State*, which Freedom has just published. To get a copy send a cheque/PO for £5.50 made out to Freedom Press (post free in the UK, £1 elsewhere). Our address is 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

Editorial

The government wants immigrants to pass an English test and show 'sufficient knowledge of life in the UK' before they're allowed to become British citizens. They'll also have to attend a ceremony where they'll be forced to take the following oath: "On becoming a British citizen I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and successors according to law. I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will obey its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen."

This 'oath' is contradictory, not to say daft. It asks those who take it to 'uphold' democratic 'values' while pledging allegiance to the monarchy. And what does it mean to swear 'loyalty to the United Kingdom'? Is that loyalty to the decisions of the state? What happens if the laws violate these 'democratic values'? Which takes precedence, the faithful observation of the law or the steadfast upholding of its 'values'? And if an oath-taker has to 'fulfil duties and obligations as a British citizen' and also 'be faithful and bear true allegiance' to the monarch, it seems that obeying the state is more important than upholding 'democratic values' (particularly as the oath itself shows contempt for such things).

There are tens of thousands of British people who'd refuse to take this oath themselves. After all, it's based on the premise that we're all subjects of the monarch and not citizens to begin with (even though it uses the word). It also assumes we live in a 'democratic' country yet, by any sensible definition of the word, this isn't the case. Increasing the extent and scope of our 'democratic values' almost always involves coming into conflict with the state which claims to govern the 'United Kingdom' and ensure that the laws it passes are enforced.

How democratic is a state whose government lies to its people when it wants to invade another country? Surely, if the rhetoric of citizens in a democratic society were true, then 'loyalty to the United Kingdom' should depend on the legitimacy of the state's activities.

Libertarians say that the important struggle in society is between subjects and state, workers and bosses, in order to increase freedom and 'democratic values' by eliminating concentrations of power. But how can we 'uphold democratic values' by pledging our allegiance to a system which disempowers the many in favour of the few?

Quiz answers

1. For wearing a badge that said 'suspected terrorist'. The captain claimed it "endangered the aircraft".
2. The anti-German communists regard him as a hero, as they think Dresden was so irredeemably Nazi it was a good thing that so many died. No, we're not making this up.
3. Paul Simonon, the band's bassist, adding "I didn't even know who the Prime Minister was until a few weeks ago!"
4. US Congressional hearings in 1973 estimated roughly 3% of officer and non-com deaths in Vietnam between 1961 and 1972 were a result of fraggings, so-called because the enlisted soldiers threw a fragmentation grenade at particularly authoritarian officers. But these figures didn't include officer deaths from automatic weapons fire, handguns and knives.

Commentary

Too simple

Paul Maguire's article ('Romantic view obscures the truth', 9th August) reminded me of a cartoon in Donald Rooum's Wildcat ABC of Bosses. In a hierarchy, each person is bullied by the person above, right the way down to the cat at the bottom. This image has a lot to tell us about working class racism. White workers, themselves fairly low in the hierarchy, take out their frustration by kicking refugees, who are a step lower. Part of this 'kicking' takes the form of an assertion of binaries of the kind Paul endorses: truth versus romanticism, fixed working class reality versus cosmopolitan unreality.

The problem isn't simply, as Paul claims, that capitalism runs an effective divide-and-rule strategy in relation to workers. It's also that many workers have become attached to their positions in the existing system. If white workers see themselves as having 'nowhere to go', perhaps one can ask why they're not the ones 'clinging to aeroplane undercarriages and suffocating in lorries' so as to escape their present life. White workers in Britain, however poor, are nonetheless relatively privileged on a global scale. They have no right to put their 'standard of living' above other people's right to flee persecution and famine.

What's worse is the way in which white working class identity is often formed in a fashion which makes a cult of workers' social position. I often meet people who have an unthought-out belief that they belong to the 'decent people' and that the 'decent people' intuitively know right from wrong. It's these people who are likely to be prejudiced towards immigrants, benefit claimants and people with alternative lifestyles. Simply treating their concerns as an expression of 'the realities of working class life' covers up the ways in which these realities stultify their ways of thinking, breeding resentment and petty-mindedness.

The resultant spread of insidiously conservative ideas among the worst-off is confirmed, not only by my own experience, but by a large body of social research. It's not just a question of focusing on class instead of ethnicity: class identity itself needs to be reshaped and present 'common sense' beliefs overcome. Any orientation to the working class must be an orientation to changing it, to what Deleuze and Guattari term 'becoming other' and Spivak calls 'unlearning privilege'.

In the process of constructing new ways of thinking and living, a struggle against such beliefs is inescapable. The ideas poststructuralists refer to as 'fixity' and 'ontological privilege' – such as the idea that white workers have direct access to 'reality' and should never lose out on anything for the benefit of migrants – are disturbingly pervasive and won't easily go away. Most people are ignorant of global oppression and have oversimplified ways of thinking about ethics and politics. A prerequisite for effective transformative politics is the development of forms of mobility and 'nomadism' – figurative and literal.

As long as space remains a part of capitalist territory, it exerts pressure for conformity. For radicals to submerge themselves in the most thoroughly ruined hellholes of the capitalist architectural environment isn't in itself a step forwards. Rather, we need to find ways of reconstructing our relations to spaces, whether through

literal migrant activities such as 'New Age' travelling, or through figurative reterritorialisations such as street parties, squatting and graffiti. The demand for 'no borders' shouldn't be rendered secondary to 'who pays?', but should be extended into social life in such a way as to weaken the control of the commodity system over our lives.

To portray such an emphasis as somehow unreal or ivory-towered is to submerge oneself hopelessly in the limited and limiting effects of 'common sense'. Of course there's room in such a strategy for some of the tactics Paul suggests, though I'd rather we reclaim our own communities than 'demand' reforms from the state. But these tactics should be part of a strategy which challenges the prejudices and illusions of working class 'common sense'. Consistent anarchism is a challenge to all hierarchies and oppressive fixities, not only those which happen to affect a particular existing group.

A.R.

Alternatives

Steve Booth's article was very thought-provoking for all those who really want to see the anarchist movement get somewhere in the UK ('Seven principles towards change', 9th August). The idea of a national anarchist campaign would really give us a higher political profile. But as far as standing in elections goes, I'd disagree. If we stood in elections, people would regard us as yet another bunch of power-seekers. Most of us would get corrupted by power too.

It isn't enough just to say don't vote. We need to formulate an alternative political programme to put to the people. And we need to disseminate it in our communities and workplaces. At the moment we have a number of publications produced by different anarchist organisations. What about a weekly national anarchist paper? If all the national organisations and local groups got together, we could come up with the money to launch it. We'd also need a core group of full-time people to produce it. What I've got in mind is something like France's *Le Monde Libertaire*, which I think can be bought from any kiosk or newsagent there.

Paul Pritchard

Dichotomies?

It's getting rather tiresome to read, in anarchist journals and magazines (of all places), people slagging off an earlier generation of anarchists, particularly Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and Rocker. The ideas of such anarchists, we're fervently told, are 'obsolete' or 'outmoded', or they're interpreted as misguided 'leftists' or just plum stupid. In a recent academic journal, for example, *Anarchist Studies*, Bakunin and Kropotkin are both described as believing that humans have a 'fixed benign nature', and so failed to recognise that humans are social beings with fluid, diverse identities.

One wonders if these academic philosophers have ever actually read Bakunin and Kropotkin who, along with Marx, offered harsh critiques of the Cartesian unitary subject and bourgeois individualism a century before their postmodern critics. Sociobiologists, evolutionary psychologists and the likes of Peter Gibson ('Readers' views', 9th August) may believe in a 'fixed' human nature, laid down by our legacy as hunter-

gatherers, but neither Bakunin nor Kropotkin, both fundamentally sociological thinkers, thought of humans in this way (though neither denied the importance of biology).

Of course, the present era of global capitalism, with its missiles and computers, and with US imperialism stalking the world in the most aggressive fashion, is very different from the society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Do anarchists really need the likes of Peter Gibson to make us aware of this obvious fact? But to blame the low profile of anarchism at the present time on the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin is facile. While we need to avoid engaging in ancestor-worship, we also have to recognise that we anarchists are social and cultural beings, not simply machines driven by selfish genes. Most of our basic ideas are derived from our forebears.

There are three basic tenets which all contemporary anarchists tend to sustain, and which are essentially derived from the likes of Bakunin, Reclus, Kropotkin, Goldman, Malatesta, Landauer, De Cleyre and Rocker, and which have been developed and elaborated upon over the last fifty years (for anarchism is, as Albert Meltzer wrote, both a political tradition and a social movement).

The first is the repudiation of the capitalist market economy, along with its competitive ethos and its possessive individualism. This means recognising that sociobiology, rather than being a 'useful perspective' to anarchism, is one of the ideological supports of capitalism as well as being questionable on purely scientific grounds. The present 'system', Peter Gibson informs us, needs to be made 'more effective'. He sounds like Murray Rothbard, an anti-statist supporter of competitive capitalism who masqueraded as an anarchist.

Donald Rooum rightly draws our attention ('Readers' views', same issue) to the book, *Alas, Poor Darwin*, which includes critiques of sociobiology from the likes of Steven Rose and Stephen Jay Gould. The latter scholar, it's worth noting, thought Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* much more enlightening than the sociobiology of Edward O. Wilson. The studies of Lynn Margulis and Brian Goodwin have confirmed this. The important point is that all contemporary anarchists share with the 'Good Ol' Boys' – as Peter dismissively describes them (as well, of course, with women like Goldman, De Cleyre and Marie Ganz) – a repudiation of the capitalist economy.

The second tenet, in which all anarchists follow Bakunin, Kropotkin and their ilk, is the repudiation of the modern state and all forms of domination and hierarchy. This means, of course, that they're critical of all forms of politics which consolidate state power, whether social democracy or Marxism, with its notion of a revolutionary vanguard party. 'Reclaiming the state', as the Freedom editorial emphasised in salutary fashion, is a strategy alien to anarchism, which doesn't want to reclaim government but to abolish it. So, like their forebears, all genuine anarchists repudiate state power and all social hierarchies and exploitative systems.

Finally, all contemporary anarchists share with Bakunin and Kropotkin a vision of a society based solely on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation, involving the fullest expression of human liberty. They try in various ways to initiate, support and develop such voluntary associations. Contributions in recent issues from such people as Steve

Booth, Richard Griffin and Jonathan Simcock only illustrate the continuing relevance, not the obsolescence, of the ideas of the early anarchists. We need to adapt, build on, develop and, above all, put into practice these basic ideas.

This in turn often involves political struggles: little is to be gained by arrogantly dismissing an earlier generation, particularly when these negative dismissals are often accompanied by the uncritical and often obsequious embrace of the latest academic fashion, like postmodern philosophy (which declares that everything is a social construct, that state and capitalism have no reality!) or, at the other extreme, sociobiology (which virtually reduces everything to genetics and kowtows to the authority of the scientific 'experts'). Bakunin, where art thou?

There's also a tendency now, mostly amongst academics, to set up a false dichotomy between a past generation of 'classical' or 'leftist' anarchists, concerned with production and class struggles, and 'postmodern' anarchists concerned with cultural issues and mutual aid. This dichotomy, derived from liberal academics or disillusioned Marxists, is simplistic: presenting a 'two-stage' theory of anarchist history, from 'class struggle' to 'postmodernism' (or sociobiology).

It indicates a very narrow perspective and a disregard for the rich and complex history of anarchism, both as a political tradition and as a social movement. The category of 'classical' anarchism in itself is vacuous and completely oblates the many strands of anarchism that have been around since the nineteenth century. These include the individualists who followed in the footsteps of Stirner and Nietzsche; the reformists who adopted the mutualism of Proudhon and Tucker; the avant-garde anarchism of many artists, poets and primitivists; the religious pacifist anarchism of Tolstoy and Berdyaev; the anarcho-syndicalists and class war advocates; and the communist anarchists or libertarian socialists who, as Kropotkin put it, see anarchism as the most radical form of socialism. Among our contemporaries, all these various strands have their theorists, adherents and activists, and all share the triad of ideas enumerated above.

To see past generations of so-called 'classical' anarchists or 'leftists' as simply being involved in 'riots' or 'class struggle', and contemporary anarchists as being ultra-radical postmodernists creating 'new ways of being' through mutual aid is both simplistic and stultifying. Many contemporary anarchists tell us that they've repudiated 'revolution' (by which they seem to mean the capturing of state power in Marxist fashion – like Bob Black they seem incapable of distinguishing libertarian socialism and class war anarchism from Marxism) and have ceased being anti-capitalist (i.e. being involved in class struggles), but are rather creating a 'truly new world' – as Richard Griffin puts it – a world based on mutual aid, co-operatives, voluntary associations and libertarian education. This 'new world' is hardly a novel idea, as class struggle anarchists – in fact all anarchists – were striving to achieve this a century ago.

Brian Morris

A typographic error in the last issue made the letter from Donald Rooum describe Edward O. Wilson as an 'eminent anti-behaviourist'. Wilson is an expert in the behaviour of ants. Apologies to him and to Donald.

REVIEW

George Monbiot sets himself ambitious goals but, as Paul Maguire finds, his new book comes nowhere near reaching them

George Monbiot describes his latest book, *The Age of Consent*, as a step towards "introducing a new world order, in which the world's institutions are run by and for the people", an alternative to a world where "everything has been globalised except our consent". It came about, he says, as a product of a re-examination of his own politics in light of the failings of what he calls the "vast and messy coalition to which I belong, which is now widely known as the 'Global Justice Movement'". He contends that the 'movement' has "misdiagnosed some aspects of the disease and, as a result, offered the wrong prescriptions".

Elements of the anti-capitalist movement, Monbiot contends, have come to recognise that to combat capitalist globalisation requires a coherent politics focused at the global level, while other elements "are concerned that a single set of universal prescriptions would threaten the diversity of dissent. A smaller faction has argued that all political programmes are oppressive; our task should not be to replace one form of power with another, but to replace all power with a magical essence called 'anti-power'."

If by this Monbiot means simply a plea to take 'the political' seriously – to ditch notions of 'politics as play' and engage in the business of winning ordinary people to a focused anti-capitalist politics which isn't rooted in a rehashed Situationism (obsessed with 'events' and disrupting any possibility of long-term political coherence) – then I'd be the first to agree.

But there's already a problem: those within Monbiot's 'movement' who are

likely to appear most in favour of what he suggests are groups such as the SWP (in their Globalise Resistance guise) who mean by 'the political' the dead weight of 'respectability' and following of the politics of others, be it the left of New Labour, local imams or whatever. All of this suggests the need for caution in separating friends from enemies within this 'movement'. Yet Monbiot's 'politics' take him further towards convergence with the politics of left social democracy than even the SWP has dared.

Monbiot prefaces his manifesto with a critique of "the two ideologies which, within the global justice movement, compete directly or indirectly with the package of political positions most people recognise as 'democracy' – Marxism and anarchism." The critique of Marxism is unexceptionable for the most part. Monbiot focuses on Marxism's centralisation of production "in the hands of the state" and the Marxist teleology which suggests that history comes to an end with the triumph of the proletariat (so all struggles against the New Boss are against history and against progress, not against corruption or oppression).

But there's also a warning of worse to come. According to Monbiot, "Marx's industrial proletariat ... turned out to be rather less inclined to revolt than the peasants or, for that matter, the petty-bourgeois, artisans, factory owners, aristocrats and educated middle classes." In one sentence, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the working class uprisings of Germany, Hungary, Poland, France in 1936 and 1968, the Teamsters in the US, the Winter of Discontent, the Miners' Strike – all these are consigned to Monbiot's personal dustbin of



history. Wait, though – it gets worse ...

Monbiot describes anarchism as "the political idea I find most attractive, and to which, almost instinctively ... I keep returning." He goes on, "every atrocity committed by the state is a standing advertisement for self-government." He then advances the most confused, contradictory indictment of anarchism I've read in years. "The history of the past century ... is hardly an advertisement for statelessness either." Apparently, the atrocities in Sierra Leone, the rise of the mafocracy in the

former USSR, the bloodbath in eastern Congo, all go to prove that anarchism's a dead end.

"The outcome of both market fundamentalism and anarchism, if applied universally, is identical," Monbiot insists. "The anarchists associate with the oppressed, the market fundamentalists with the oppressors, but by eliminating the state ... both simply remove such restraints as prevent the strong from crushing the weak. For the majority of human kind to be free, we must restrain the freedom

of those who would oppress us."

For Monbiot, the only political philosopher who now makes sense of the world seems to be Thomas Hobbes! So much for the instinctive anarchist. The would-be prophet of the political appears to have forgotten that anarchism is a political idea, that an anarchist society isn't only one where there's the absence of the state. It's also one where those oppressed by the state (as guarantor of exploitation) elect – through a process of struggle,

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BOOKS

Albania: Laboratory of Subversion

by Anon
Elephant Editions, £1.50

The insurrection in Albania in 1997 pretty much passed me by. I knew there were rumblings there, but little more. This pamphlet, ably translated by Jean Weir, puts flesh on the bones of what I knew. Originally published four years ago in Italian, *Albania: Laboratory of Subversion* contains an annotated chronology of events followed by an article looking at Albania and the future of revolt. The terse descriptions of events in the chronology shows the scale of the unrest in Albania. The sheer speed of events is amazing.

"Incontestable in its spontaneous and destructive extension, the insurrection has taken everyone by surprise. Not least, the men and structures of power." It's another example of people's anger and rebellion sprinting beyond the ability of political parties to comprehend, leaving them trailing their constituents, and even more irrelevant than usual.

The sudden uprising was sparked by

the failure of an investment scheme. "Only those unaware of the incredible banality of the reasons for rebellions throughout history will be surprised that insurrection has broken out in response to a fraudulent financial operation." Widespread insolvency created the initial impetus of the anger, but the targets of this anger were all the institutions of the state. The rising of 1997 shows the clear class-consciousness of people confident in their own actions. With nary a Leninist in sight to guide them, the Albanians stormed their way to the verge of revolution. This pamphlet summarises that story.

I have one quibble with the pamphlet. There are a couple of places where sentences are unfinished, which is irritating. But as a brief introduction to the Albanian insurrection and a catalyst for new thinking about the nature of revolt I'd recommend it. Hopefully on reading this pamphlet someone will be inspired to write a longer work on the Albanian Spring of 1997.

Arch Stanton

Available from Freedom for £1.50 (post free in the UK, add £1 elsewhere).

Country Diary Drawings

by Clifford Harper
Graphia Press, £10

People who don't read the Guardian ('liberal rubbish') might not be aware that Clifford Harper has done a series of 31 black and white drawings for that newspaper's 'Country diary' column. This is a section most of us (even if we live in the country) rarely read, being the witterings of various correspondents writing something inconsequential about their local environment. The drawings are a different matter and they're gathered together here, along with five new items and a splendid introduction by Richard Boston.

Each of the vignettes Clifford provides shows an aspect of the countryside. Some are of animals, some of landscapes, some of buildings. The style varies, but the major theme running through most of them is movement. This is either indicated by the subject matter – animals running, roads, boats, planes, trains – or through the lines. The hills and rivers seem to be alive.

Clifford's countryside isn't a static place of repose and reflection. It's active, mostly, though as ever there are exceptions (the girl reading by a river, for example). The style is mainly a simplified cross-hatched one (not the totally blocked-out one favoured by Franz Masreel). This moves from the naturalistic – a broken down cottage near the end of the book is superbly detailed – to an almost cubist approach to landscape in some of the earlier drawings.

One also notices that the straight line has been banished. Tellingly, the two drawings with dominant straight lines are of a viaduct (with train) and the manicured lawns of a large country house garden. Two demonstrations of power.

Richard Alexander

Available from Freedom for £10 (add 50p postage in the UK, £1 elsewhere).

A word about The Raven

After careful thought we've decided to cease publication of *The Raven* immediately. Number 43 on Food,

published last year, will therefore be the end of the series. We hope that people with outstanding subscriptions will accept copies of our new books instead. The first of these, Harold Barclay's *The State*, will be despatched shortly.

Our intention is that changes in this newspaper will allow it to do some of the more reflective work that was previously *The Raven's* lot.

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Monbiot review

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consequent self-education and political identification with statelessness as a positive political outcome – to overthrow the state and replace it with direct democracy and collectivisation of resources. Anarchism is the politics of direct democracy, not simply a prayer for the absence of the state by whatever means.

In addition, Monbiot raises an argument which might trip up the proponents of anarchism-as-liberalism, but which oughtn't to trouble class struggle anarchists: how do we prevent the strong oppressing the weak? To answer this question with another question: how do the strong oppress the weak other than through the armed force of the state? In the process of bringing down the state itself, I think it's fair to say that "the freedom of those who would oppress us" would be more than a little restrained.

I don't want to be one of those who harks back to Spain in 1936 as a permanent example of anarchist politics in action; but it's fair to say that, in the midst of civil war, those areas of Spanish life which came under collective control didn't become mired in the blood of thousands, despite what Monbiot would apparently expect.

Harvests were distributed to those in need instead of stuffing the accounts of landowners. An equitable distribution of the land's produce was set in place. In the cities, supply committees were set up and equalisation funds were created to direct resources to poorer collectives. The war of all against all was ended, not by the intervention of the state, but by the political will of the majority of the oppressed to make solidarity the founding principle of a new society.

The fundamental premise of *The Age of Consent* is that "the absence of government is unworkable and intolerable." All that's left to hope for is a deepened democracy which is more likely "deliver justice than anarchism" because "it possesses the capacity for coercion; the rich and powerful can be restrained by the coercive measures of the state from oppressing the rest of us." Monbiot concedes that "a system capable of restraining the oppressor will also be capable of restraining the oppressed" but, in his counsel of despair, he believes it's the only game in town.

In arguing his corner, Monbiot usefully demolishes the arguments of others within the 'movement' who argue for 'localisation' and 'consumer democracy'. He advocates a politics based on solidarity with struggles at "the other end of the purchasing chain, the end at which exploitation takes place". But none of this, he says, is sufficient. And what's his alternative? Building a world parliament!

In arguing for an institution like this, Monbiot provides useful critiques of the inherently anti-democratic bias of the UN and demolishes a few myths

about the representative capacities of non-governmental organisations. He argues that only a world parliament would be able to tackle global issues and that democracy can't be impeded by borders. His new body would be instituted by the generation of debate around the idea; organising a consultation of as many of the world's people as possible, through randomly-selected samples; raising funds to establish an electoral commission and, finally, calling a global general election. This, Monbiot anticipates, would cost up to \$5 billion, but the money could be raised by a lottery, 'a World Parliament Draw'!

The new parliament would be "directly elected, owned by the people of the world [and would] possess the moral authority which all other bodies lack. And this alone, if effectively deployed, is a source of power." It would disinvest the United Nations Security Council and set up an alternative security system governed by its own General Assembly.

Monbiot goes on to raise the idea of reactivating John Maynard Keynes's International Clearing Union, to be brought about by organising a co-ordinated default of Third World debt. A Fair Trade Organisation would be established to "permit poorer nations, and poorer people within those nations, to deploy such measures as are necessary to escape from the poverty trap and, eventually, compete on equal terms with the rich."

I've not commented on any of this thus far. As comment it's tempting simply to smile and say something like "and they think anarchists are Utopian". It's certainly the case that Monbiot's ideas, if implemented, would lead to a deepening of democracy in the terms he describes. What isn't at all clear is why, save for fear of the World Parliament's 'moral authority' (don't all laugh at once) the rich and powerful (whose interests are protected by the states Monbiot appears to see as honest brokers) should stand back and let it all happen.

The exercise of the right to try and forge an alternative to the government by and for the rich has been tried in various Third World countries over the years, all of which have tried to alter the terms of exploitation effectively on the kind of broadly social democratic basis that Monbiot envisages – Brazil, Iran, Chile and Nicaragua all come to mind. The response of the rich and powerful has been to organise coups, counter-insurgencies and the suppression of democracy.

Capitalism functions through the illusion of democracy. We think we have the right to choose until we try to choose and the right is quickly taken away. Monbiot envisages a movement towards international suffrage which will exist alongside, and morally police, the institutions of exploitation. Its fair to say that, as soon as the institutions of exploitation feel their interests threatened, Monbiot's quiet revolution



– which "requires no tumbrils, guillotines, no unmarked graves" will find itself up against the wall. The history of struggle for freedom from oppression and exploitation suggests that "peaceful, democratic transformation" of a world based on a transfer of wealth from poor to rich is a pipe-dream.

A number of 'intellectuals', divorced from day-to-day social struggles and despairing of any obvious agency for social change, yet not wanting to join the rightwing bandwagon, have made a nice living from indulging in a 'what-if' game, dreaming up ways of 'deepening democracy' which they then try to sell to whoever wants to take them up. Jurgen Habermas and Roberto Unger come to mind. Sad to say, for all his useful detailing of the ways in which the UN, WTO, World Bank and so on police the exploitation of the poor and for all his genuine anger at what he unearths, Monbiot has joined this school.

You can dream up whatever Utopia you like but, in the end, the 'restraints' which Monbiot sees as means to 'prevent the strong crushing the weak' will be revealed as weapons of the strong against the weak. The parliamentary road to socialism is a blind alley, whether advocated by Tony Benn in relation to the national arena or by George Monbiot on an international scale.

But there's one qualification to all this. Those of us who believe that the means of revolutionary transformation will come from the struggles of working people against their own exploitation have a responsibility, in response to people like Monbiot, not simply to denounce works such as *The Age of Consent*, but to engage in rebuilding working class traditions of struggle and solidarity. We can't overcome poor theories if there's a void where our practice should be.

A sideways look

I recently started the excellent, if expensive, reprint of Gordon Carr's book on the Angry Brigade. The descriptions of young revolutionaries in France trying to create 'situations' struck a chord. I wondered if, in modern Britain, the weather was being a bit situationist.

A few days of heat and the trains stop running, tempers flare and the streets begin to smell like Bangkok. Mind you, any weather that varies from mild drizzle (so long as it's not autumnal) seems to stop trains running.

Anyone unfortunate enough to have to use the infrastructure around us (transport, power, public buildings) knows they are crumbling. The necessary investment doesn't happen because capital is there only for shareholders' profits. Merely suggesting that investment is 'a good thing' in itself is how Ken Livingstone and the Scottish Socialists can appear more radical than the rest of the capitalists.

But back to our situationist weather. The original situationists in the 1960s (well, the revolutionaries inspired by them at least) tried to puncture the boredom and sterility of everyday life with stunts and outrageous behaviour that were designed both to ridicule and undermine the authorities.

The stunts of the students found an echo among young workers who despaired of the boredom of the production line and the unimaginative dreariness of traditional unions and leftist parties. For a moment in May 1968 in France, anything seemed possible. Of course, the dead hand of authority, personified by De Gaulle on the one hand and the Communist Party on the other, re-asserted itself, but only after De Gaulle was sure the military would stay loyal.

If we look at modern capitalism, we see that its demands for ever-lower costs, reflected in the process of globalisation, means dispersed production and intense management of the supply chain. There are no big stores any more, and a strike by engine makers in one country will usually shut another's assembly plants in four or five days. Whether it's of goods or services, this is the circulation of capital that is so much more desirable in the eyes of the rulers than the circulation of labour.

Capital, or rather the lack of it, can bring a country to a halt. But it's not the only economic force that can. A couple of years ago, various disgruntled Tories and foxhunters got together with farmers and tanker drivers, and did the same by blockading fuel depots. Three things need to be said; if they'd been miners they'd have had their skulls cracked. Many on the left misguidedly

condemned them, presumably because they thought taxes were a good thing (as if the petrol tax goes exclusively on hospitals and roads and none of it goes on bombing Iraq or subsidising Virgin Trains). And if they hadn't bottled it, things could have been very different.

After a couple of weeks of 'fuel protests', depots in some parts of the country were having to decide who to let have fuel. Emergency services, healthworkers and so on could call on them and they'd be happy to let them have it. But who else, and who should decide? The overt sympathy of the mass media and the softly-softly approach of the police had allowed the situation to develop to a point where Britain was almost shut down.

A couple more days and the people doing it would have had to work out how to make decisions that affected peoples' lives, and how to involve people in them. It could only have been a radicalising experience. In France, where situationism developed, people of all political persuasions regularly create 'situations' by blocking highways with tractors. It's a shame that the tactic isn't used more widely here.

Svartfrosk

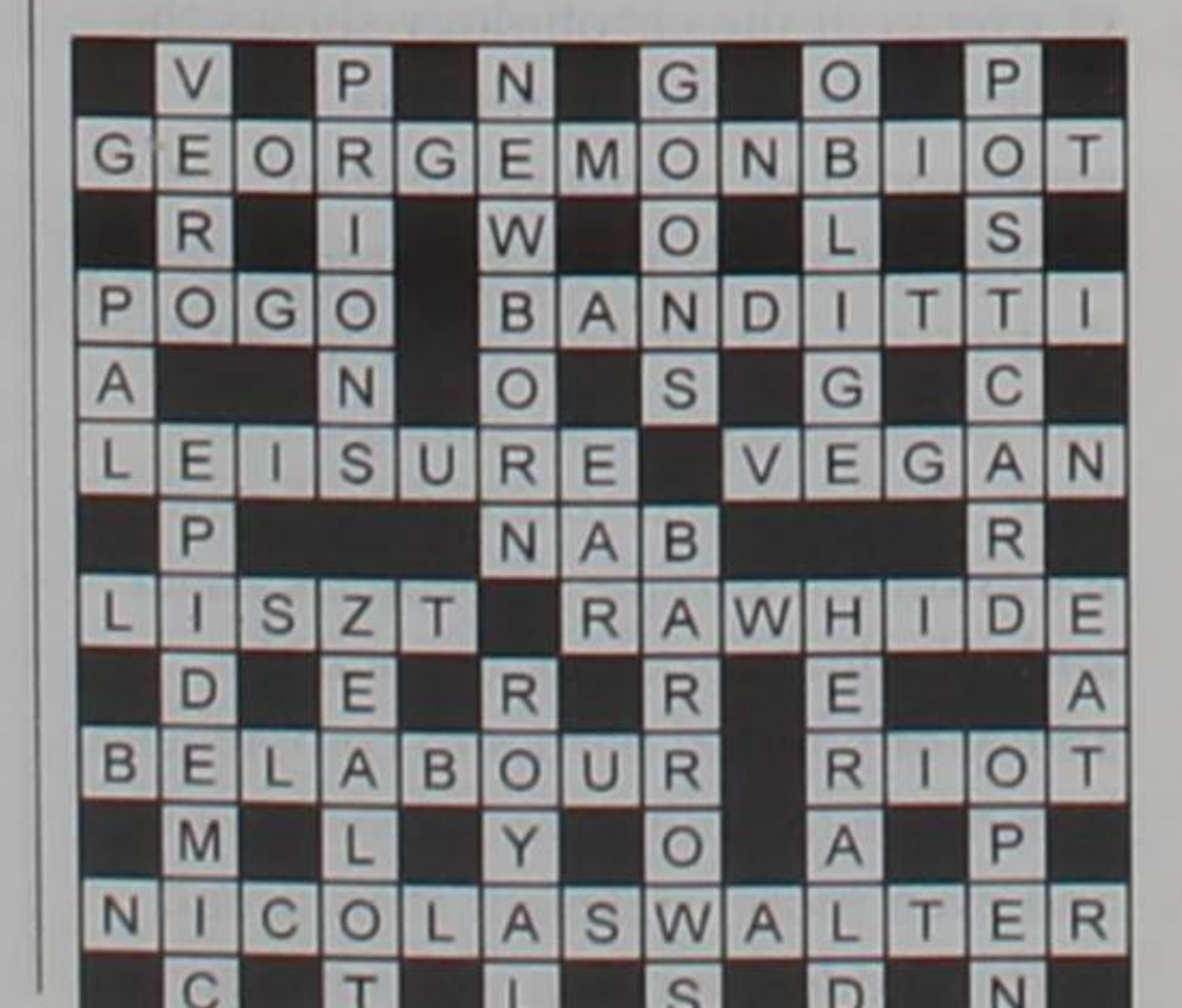
The quiz

1. For what reason was John Gilmore thrown off a British Airways flight in July?
2. Anarchists usually regard wartime RAF commander Arthur 'Bomber' Harris as a criminal, particularly for his fire-bombing of Dresden. How does a section of the German left view him?
3. Who told the *New Musical Express* in 1977 that the Clash shouldn't be labelled a political band?
4. What proportion of US officers and NCOs were killed by their own side in the Vietnam War?

Answers on page 6

Crossword answers

The winner of the prize crossword last issue was BB of Glasgow. A prize is on its way.



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