

THE KILLING SEASON

Last month, the decaying bodies of elderly couple George and Gertrude Bates were found at their home in Tooting, London. Two months previously their gas was cut off as they had failed to pay a bill of £140.

Each winter brings a new crop of deaths from hypothermia where many thousands of people die needlessly. Sometimes these deaths are reported, but more often pensioners die in a lonely flat swaddled in blankets in front of an electric fire which failed to keep them alive. Their solitary death is noted by few, and may not be discovered for weeks after it occurred.

No one knows – and few in government care – how many people are needlessly killed each winter. In just the third week of December last year, an estimated 2,500 died because of the cold:

Estimated deaths, 15th to 22nd December 2003 (Source: Faculty of Public Health)
North East – 145
North West – 320
Yorkshire and Humberside – 252
East Midlands – 198
West Midlands – 272
East – 268
London – 302
South East – 410
South West – 245
Wales – 148

Professor Sian Griffiths, President of the Faculty of Public Health, said as many as 50,000 people could die “unnecessarily” in the UK this winter.

This is not only a disgrace, but also highlights the madness of capitalism. It is cheaper to let these thousands die than to provide them with the necessities of life. The skewed priorities of our society see this as an acceptable level of death. Despite an annual outcry against these avoidable deaths, nothing is done and all the only government is a mouthing of pious platitudes about the regrettable nature of the mortality rate.

The numbers dying each year vary vastly. Winter 2000/01 saw ‘an excess’ 48,440 deaths; the following winter saw 27,230 die needlessly; and last winter an estimated 24,000 died avoidably. Any reasonably organised society would tackle this disgrace as a matter of urgency! Countries where winters are routinely colder than those in the UK – such as Finland and Russia – have fewer such deaths each year. Yet in Tony Blair’s brave new world we see these vast body counts year in, year out, without this scandal being ended.

Capitalism provides no solution to this annual catastrophe. A system which sees profit as more important than human life can’t remedy this appalling situation. Although other countries may see lower mortality rates than the British each year doesn’t mean they’ve any less of a problem: one pensioner dying from cold is one too many. A partial solution would be increasing the pension. A better society, though, would put its most vulnerable first, and see that those who have spent all their lives working can



spend their twilight years without fear of freezing to death.

In today’s atomised, anomie-filled society, the safety net of community has all but disappeared in British urban society. Few today have more than a nodding acquaintance with their neighbours. The absence of any meaningful community spirit in many parts of the

country is shown in its most distressing form at this time of year. Premature death in any form is intensely sad. Premature death which is easily avoidable is more than sad. It is a crime.

The danger of death elderly people face each winter is purely a danger to poor and working class people. There are sufficient resources to prevent every

single one of these tragedies. The madness inherent in capitalism, though, is that these resources are not available to those who need them without payment. When the most vulnerable in society are allowed to die for want of a few pounds one may truly say that that society is insane.

(Statistics and quotes from BBC reports)

NEW YEAR HEATS UP

The growing tide of industrial militancy shows no sign of abating as we enter the New Year. As 2003 was drawing to a close it was announced that more than 100,000 civil servants had voted to take strike action in protest against a below inflation pay offer. This will be the biggest dispute in the civil service for over a decade. Five government departments are affected. Members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) will strike for two days at the end of January. Action will affect immigration offices, job centres, county courts and the Royal Court of Justice. The official ballot follows a series of wildcat strikes that hit benefit offices at the end of November.

The civil service ballot result followed a decision last month by the lecturer’s union the AUT to also ballot their members in universities in another dispute over pay. The ballot follows the collapse of discussions to introduce a new pay system to Britain’s higher education (HE) sector. The union is opposed to performance pay and fears that academic related staff like librarians

will lose out. The AUT which represents 43,000 staff estimate that some members could be £17,000 worse off under the deal. Unions in HE though are not united. While the AUT have walked from the pay deal, five other unions including Unison and the GMB support it. The result of the AUT ballot is scheduled to be announced at the start of February.

Rank and file members in both unions though are fearful that union leaders will throw away the opportunity to make real gains. The PCS and AUT are hoping that the ballots will force employers to yield concessions. PCS general secretary and so-called ‘awkward squad’ member Mark Serwotka said “we still hope there is an opportunity to sort out the deepening pay crisis”. The PCS is calling for just two days of action, rather than an all-out dispute. The AUT is not even going that far calling instead for action, such as refusing to cover for absent colleagues, short of strike.

This is a mistake. The state employs nearly a quarter of Britain’s workforce. Chancellor Gordon Brown told them in November that pay rises should be just

two per cent this year so taxes do not need to rise. While public sector workers have been told to tighten their belts to help Gordon and New Labour win the next election, City workers have been enjoying a pay bonanza. As civil servants and university staff face below inflation pay rises, it was revealed that thousands of City workers received Christmas bonuses 20% higher than last year, some worth as much as £300,000! As ever it is one rule for them and another one for us.

Industrial militancy is on the rise. Last year saw four significant wildcat actions: at Heathrow, in the Post Office, fire fighters and civil servants. Although no official figures are yet available it is clear that a growing number of workplaces have been hit by industrial action. This is no surprise. Workers are fed up with crap pay, the threat of job losses, the closing of their pension schemes and pressure to work

harder and harder. Union leaders only want militancy to go so far though. They are not really interested in rocking the boat. Hence the talk of compromise and deals. This was clearly seen in the reaction of the FBU’s leadership to the fire services refusal to implement fully the second pay element of the deal agreed after the FBU dispute. While militants walked out the leadership called for restraint.

Things are hotting up on the industrial front, but we need to make sure we are not sold out.

• The Anarchist Workers Network (AWN) is calling for an anarchist bloc on this year’s trade union May Day march in London. A member said “May Day is workers’ day. While there is likely to be a lot going on AWN think it important that there is an anarchist presence on the trade union march. The modern

origins of May Day are after all the execution of anarchists in Chicago. We need to get our message over to trade unionists.” AWN will be producing a May Day Bulletin for the day. Further details will be available in Freedom.

• AWN is also planning a presence at the Convention of the Trade Union Left being held in London on 7th February, being held at Friends Meeting House. A stall and paper sale is being organised, as well as attendance at the meeting itself. “It looks like the Convention is an attempt to swing union money behind Galloway’s and the SWP’s Respect Coalition. It is vital that anarchists argue against this and call instead for union member’s subs to be used to support the rank and file and not the careers of people like Galloway” AWN said.

Anarchist Workers Network

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Home and away

FREEDOM

Volume 65 Number 01

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. Freedom's editors wish to present a broad range of anarchist thought, and as such the views expressed in the paper are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.

Obituary

Mary Quintana, writer, who has died at the age of 58, was the daughter of a Northumberland coalminer. She came to London and acquired her street learning of anarchism at Speakers' Corner and a degree in philosophy. Although she was an 'individualist' anarchist, she sometimes took part in London Anarchist Forum gatherings, where her views were expressed in an assured, fair manner. She cancelled her subscription to Freedom in 2001 when the paper printed what she considered to be a 'pro-abortion' article.

She took part in many demonstrations even when, in recent years, walking became difficult for her. It was a delight to hear her trouncing all opponents at an open air meeting in Hyde Park (using a borrowed ladder) following the Parliament Square demo last February. She cared deeply about the present state of and future prospects for the planet.

Mary lived and died alone in her Gospel Oak council flat. Some of us are making a bronze container for her ashes in the workshop next to Freedom. Anyone who would like to help out please call 020 7247 2039 or 020 8692 5891 for more information.

John Rety

Circulation

We would like to increase the readership of Freedom, and an important part of this is getting better circulation. If you would like to help by selling Freedom or asking bookshops, libraries or newsagents to stock it please write to us or email circ@freedompress.org.uk

Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 10th January 2004 and the last day for getting copy to us will be Thursday 1st January. You can send articles/letters to us at FreedomCopy@aol.com or by snail mail to 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

If you are interested in writing regularly for Freedom we want to hear from you!

News from inside

Prison visitors

"Visitors are sniffed at by dogs of both two-legged and four-legged varieties, and are constantly barked at by the former if not the latter."

There was a piece in The Guardian not long before my release last year claiming that there had been a 70% decrease in prison visits during the past five years. This should come as no surprise to anyone.

Visiting days are increasingly restricted to two or three per week, visits have to be booked for no good reason, phone calls are ignored, and prison staff are the ill-mannered scumbags they have always been.

Visitors are sniffed at by dogs of both two-legged and four-legged varieties, and are constantly barked at by the former if not the latter.

They face molestation at the hands of screws, having their fingerprints taken, along with their photos (which are added to the Mandrake Facial Recognition database).

The whole unpleasant process takes hours. Then when they get into the visiting room they generally face a hard seat and a grim atmosphere, constantly spied on by CCTV and sour-faced screws, under the threat of violence the whole time, it is hardly surprising that many people can't face this ordeal.

In the eight years I was inside as a hostage I was moved 22 times, all around the country, in 2000 alone I was moved from Yorkshire to Worcestershire, to Wales, to Milton Keynes, to the Isle of Wight, back to Milton Keynes, then Yorkshire again, and then Durham.

I spent around two years in solitary, with my visits deliberately obstructed, and often taking place behind glass. This did not happen because I was a drug-dealer or because I was violent, but because I was protesting my wrongful conviction and because I had given evidence for the Defence in the 1999 Full Sutton riot trial.

It was done with the full complicity of

the highest ranks of the Prison Service, and that of ex-Prisons Minister Paul Boateng.

My family, my three young children, were not given a moment's consideration by these moral degenerates, anymore than I was myself.

You can tell a Prison Service official is lying every time they move their lips.

Mark Barnsley

Roof top protest at youth prison

Disturbances broke out at Feltham Young Offenders Institution (YOI) in West London. Three inmates got onto the roof and earlier other inmates started fires in their cells which had to be put out by screws.

Feltham had been described as being "rotten to the core" by a former chief prisons inspector, although recently it has apparently improved from the days when Asian teenager Zahid Mubarek was murdered by his racist cellmate.

Feltham can hold 922 prisoners, and is split into two sections, one for juveniles (kids under 17), and one for prisoners aged 18-21.

Mystery of the Missing Visitors

The BBC had a recent report about the puzzling mystery of the missing prison visitors. More people than ever before are in prison in the UK. Yet the number of family members and friends visiting prisoners has dropped by a third in five years. The Home Office is worried, but no-one is quite sure why it has happened ... However to those used to dealing with an inhumane and kafakesque system the missing visitors are no mystery, as the Miscarriages of Justice UK campaign points out to the hapless hacks: "The Home Office is concerned about the falling number of prison visitors and claim they don't know why. Well they are either bloody fools or lying in their teeth. MOJUK has been visiting and arranging visits to prisons for a long number of years. Over the last five years the number of visits

to HMP Birmingham have been whittled down by administrative decisions and obstructiveness by the Prison Service itself. There used to be two very large visiting rooms at HMP Birmingham, now there is only one. Both of them used to be jam packed from first visit in the morning to last visit in the afternoon. Even when they reduced it to one room, this room too was packed. But over the last two years they have restructured the room to where capacity has been reduced by 60%. Now you would think this room would be packed for every visiting session but not so, because getting through to the prison visits line is almost impossible. Only the most persistent visitors who keep trying get through. A survey of visitors to HMP Birmingham by MOJUK at the start of this year, found that on average it took three days to book a visit.

The above could be applied to any prison in the land. MOJUK have received countless numbers of emails complaining about access to prisons from all round the UK. All the complaints were of obstructions by the prisons themselves."

Injustice Film Wins Award

The feature length documentary about struggles for justice by the families of people who have died in police custody, has won a National Social Justice Award. The award had been given for leading the way in implementing change through the media. The award was presented by the independent Citizen Organising Foundation. The Injustice film was subject to an attempted campaign of censorship by the Police Federation. However a showing in Bristol, at Easton Community Centre organised with the Kebele Collective in September 2001, was one of those defiant screenings that helped to face down the police intimidation clearing it to be shown in other venues nationally and locally.

For more info see

<http://www.injusticefilm.co.uk>



Tennessee Blues

The Tennessee Department of Corrections has removed typewriters and word processors from the authorised prisoners property list, which means that they will not be able to have them repaired or substituted if they break down. This has stopped inmates from conducting legal work since no court in the US accepts handwritten documents. It is obvious that this measure was invented to prevent inmates from enjoying the autonomy they used to have to manage their trials, in other words, to make the prisoners still more imprisoned. You can help by signing the petition at www.PetitionOnline.com/restype/ Or send a letter to complain (sample letter at www.anarchistsps.org/pa/harold/letter.html)

Dublin & Hull, Anarchist Prisoner Support

LISTINGS

Glasgow

9th to 11th January Street medic training, learn to provide essential first aid at mass demonstrations and direct actions. See <http://tramping.org.uk/streetmedictraining> or contact fleabite@riseup.net

London

16th January London Anarchist Forum 'Pagan Anarchy 2' talk and debate, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, from 8pm onwards
17th January Class War South East Conference, email classwaruk@hotmail.com for details
18th January Mayday 2004 planning meeting from 2pm to 5pm at London Activist Resource Centre (LARC), 62 Fieldgate Street, E1.

18th January Disarm DSEi 2005 Open Meeting, to target Spearhead - the company who organise Europe's biggest arms fair. From 2pm at London Action Resource Centre, Fieldgate Street, London. www.dsei.org
22nd January Discussion meeting on

workplace struggles, organised by London AF and other anarchists. From 7pm at the Autonomy Club, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX
27th January Indie Spin present The High Priests of Hell plus guests at The Rhythm Factory, 16-18 Whitechapel Road, E1, from 8pm til late
Every Wednesday the LARC Library from 1pm at 62 Fieldgate Street, E1.

Manchester

24th January Northern Anarchist Network Conference at Bridge 5 Mill from 10am to 5pm. Contact 01422 842558 for more info

Military Bases

17th to 18th January Reclaim the bases weekend of anti-militarist action. A weekend of non-violent action at military bases - from vigils to NVDA. Start organising an event at a base close to you. Networking via www.reclaimthebases.org.uk
reclaimbases-discuss@yahoo.com

Groups

Anarchist Federation
c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
info@afed.org.uk
www.afed.org.uk
Industrial Workers of the World
PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ
info@iww.org.uk
www.iww.org.uk
Solidarity Federation
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
solfed@solfed.org.uk
www.solfed.org.uk
For details of smaller and local groups see www.enrager.net/britain

Social Centres

Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE)
17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh
www.autonomous.org.uk
The Cowley Club
12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA
www.cowleyclub.org.uk
Freedom
84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1

Kebele

14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY
www.kebele.org
Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)
The Basement, 78a Penny Street, Lancaster
www.eco-action.org/lancaster
London Action Resource Centre (LARC)
62 Fieldgate Street, London E1
www.londonarc.org
SUMAC Centre
245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX
www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/
Use Your Loaf
227 Deptford High Street, London SE8
www.squat.freeserve.co.uk/useyourloaf.html
1in12 Club
21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 2LY
www.1in12.com
56a Infoshop
56 Crampton Street, London SE17
www.safetycat.org/56a/

Britain

Poverty in the UK

The rich are getting richer while one in five people live in poverty, writes Iain McKay

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported this month that there were 12.5 million people in 2001-02 living in homes with incomes below the poverty line. This meant that, in total, 22% of the population were officially living in poverty. This included 3.8 million children, 2.2 million pensioners and 6.6 million adults of working age. Poverty continued to affect a large number of low-income households with someone in paid work. About 3.5 million people experienced 'in-work poverty' between 1999 and 2002.

There was some good news in these disgraceful figures, of course. It was lower than the peak of 13.4 million in the mid-90s, and was lower than at any time during the 1990s. It would, however, be churlish to note that before Thatcher got in the figure was less than 10%. So we now live in a society that, perhaps, has started to move away from the bottom of the EU poverty league (which we shared four years ago with such advanced industrial nations as Portugal, Greece, Spain, Italy and Ireland). Wow.

With the Thatcherite 'trickle-down' theory of poverty elimination now firmly at home in New Labour, it is worthwhile to note that inner London was the most unequal part of the country. Given that 29% of people in the richest fifth of the population and 32% in the poorest fifth live there, it seems hard to take the notion that inequality reduces poverty seriously (particularly when homelessness is also higher in the capital than elsewhere).

But why should New Labour waste money on working class people when it can invest billions invading small third world countries? We need to get our priorities right. We cannot have people like Saddam around, people who think nothing of wasting money on weapons and palaces while their fellow citizens live in poverty ...

Given this, perhaps Blair abandoning his flagship pledge to 'eradicate' child poverty by 2020 is not surprising. Like the Tories with unemployment, he simply rewrote the definition of low income. Now Blair aims for Britain to be merely "among the best in Europe" on child poverty. He has far to go. Denmark has the best record in the EU, with 5% of its youngsters in families on less than 60% of median household income, compared to 24% in the UK. Rather than do better than the Danes, New Labour just moved the statistical goalposts by changing the definition of poverty. Impressive. Blair is selling Thatcherite principles far better than the evil old bag herself managed.

Such a message can only be a mantra to those in power. After all, atomised individuals hardly present much of a threat. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the income gap between the rich and poor is the widest it has been since studies began. The poorest 10% has just 3% of the country's income while the richest 10% more 25%.

Fortunately, people are not in favour of such levels of social inequality. More

than four in five of people surveyed said the gap between rich and poor was 'too large'. A popular solution to the wage gap was a dramatic lowering of salaries for higher income earners, rather than a large increase for lower earners. Obviously the recent spate of multimillion pound boardroom deals has had its effect. Yet even Labour supporters have been persuaded against the merits of income redistribution since Blair came to office. In 1996, 58% of Labour supporters backed income redistribution; six years later that had dropped to 49%.

Yet the income of the mega-rich comes from the relative poverty of the lower paid.

Which brings me to unions. According to a member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, one in five workers has suffered a pay cut in the past ten years. When inflation peaked at about 20% in the 1970s, only one in twenty workers suffered a drop in nominal pay. Looking at real wage growth, workers saw either a real drop in pay or an increase less than 0.1% in three of the five years leading up to 1999. Significantly, unionised workers did not suffer a pay cut in the six years up to 2000. Only a third of all workers are unionised, mostly in the public sector.

So it is a good job that Thatcher saved the average worker from exploitation by the unions otherwise they, too, would be subject to the tyranny of wage growth! Which shows the real nature of the 'individualism' of the right. It benefits the powerful, the capitalist. Domination, oppression and exploitation flow from inequalities of economic power.

We need only look at the US to see the self-defeating results of the Thatcherite and New Labour 'individualism'. As Proudhon succinctly put it, property is not only 'theft', it is also 'despotism'. In the 'land of the free', the basic right of freedom of association has been dramatically eroded. There the employer is king, literally and figuratively. They can refuse to negotiate for years with a union even after it is recognised, effectively negating their legal obligation to bargain. And while they cannot legally fire workers for striking, they can hire 'permanent replacements' - which is pretty much the same thing.

Across the employment spectrum, Human Rights Watch found that workers' rights to organise and bargain collectively were routinely denied. Whether it was computer programmers or minimum wage cleaners, workers were denied the right to associate with their fellows as they choose. Abandoning this basic right to freedom of association has had enormous economic and social consequences. It is surely no coincidence that the US, with one of the lowest rates of unionisation in the developed world, is the only high-income country without a national health insurance system. Or that Europeans, on average, enjoy five weeks of holiday while Americans have less than three? Or that



American families, on average, work 247 more hours per year in 2000 than they did in 1989?

A study by a Cornell University professor Kate Bronfenbrenner, found that when faced with employees who want to join a union, 92% of private employers force workers to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union propaganda; 78% require that supervisors deliver anti-union messages to workers they oversee; and 75% hire outside consultants to run anti-union campaigns. Half of employers threaten to shut down if employees unionise and that in a quarter of organising campaigns, employers illegally fire workers because they want to form a union. She also discovered why these tactics are so common - they are effective. They increase employee insecurity and apply downward pressure on real wages and benefits.

The decline of organised labour - from 30% of workers in the 1960s to

13% today - has contributed greatly to the most massive upward redistribution of income in American history. The majority of the US labour force has barely seen any of the enormous productivity gains of the last thirty years reflected in their wages. This is in sharp contrast to the period between 1946 and 1973, when productivity gains were broadly shared and the median wage rose by nearly 80%. The United States is each year becoming more like Latin America in its economic and social division into haves and have-nots. Looks like the UK is well on its way to this utopia of capitalism.

There is hope. A recent Peter Hart poll found that 47% of non-union workers - about fifty million people - would opt for a union in their workplace if they could. Tens of thousands of US workers are fired each year for joining or attempting to organise a union, in violation of US law. But the penalties

for employers are so slight that they have what Human Rights Watch calls "a culture of near impunity."

The right to freedom of association is a fundamental human right, and it is an embarrassment that our society and legal system do not recognise this right for workers. But what can you expect from capitalism? It is, rhetoric aside, not interested in freedom, only property. The facts are clear. Workers and bosses do not have interests in common. Only when we organise together and practice solidarity and direct action can we improve our conditions and, more importantly, start to see that it does not have to be like this. Only a global labour movement that knows this stands a chance in our neo-liberal world.

Time we started to discuss how we can create such a movement and how we relate to the workers in existing trade unions and the unorganised. We have a taste of what to expect if we don't!

On the picket line

Strike action highlights from December 2003

- On the 6th December, around 300 St Helena school kids walked out of lessons, demonstrated, ran amok and caused general mayhem. The protests have been a reaction to plans by the school to split up classes (and class mates) into divided houses. With shouts of 'strike, strike, strike' and 'we will not be moved' the kids rushed round their teachers who helplessly looked on and tried to gain some sort of command. Burning school ties and blocking the road the best of these protesters were not going to be moved and were learning strategy

and tactics as they marched, blockaded and sang.

- Workers at a Stoke-on-Trent security company staged a wildcat strike in a dispute over pay. On the 17th December, about ten staff at Security Plus' Hanley depot staged the unofficial action after bosses at the Uttoxeter-based company turned down pleas for a pay rise. The employees, who all work in the packing department at the Samson Street depot, said they were angry because drivers at the company had already received a wage increase.

- Plymouth City Council planners stopped

answering their phones on the 18th December because they were unable to cope with a burgeoning workload.

- Neath Hospital cleaning and catering staff took 24-hour strike action on the 22nd December over the refusal by private cleaning contractor OCS to increase staffing.

- Hundreds of workers at a Sainsbury's distribution centre, which supplies most of its Northern branches, staged a 24-hour strike in a row over pay. The walkout took place at the centre in Haydock on Merseyside, which employs around 750 warehouse workers.

International

Tropical Blairism

History repeats itself as leftwing Lula sells out Brazil to the International Monetary Fund

Libertarians are sometimes accused of being cynical, not seeing the real differences between political parties when they advocate anti-parliamentarianism as the only means of real change.

Time and again, we are urged to be 'practical' and vote for the leftwing party. We simply point to the long history of leftwing parties becoming deradicalised and just as bad as the 'nasty' parties of the right and centre. Instead, we concentrate on building a real alternative to the electoral farce.

You would think that Tony Blair would have disabused the left of such illusions, but no, far from it. Recently, the left have been wetting themselves about various election 'breakthroughs'. Many self-proclaimed Marxist revolutionaries have waxed lyrical about the victories of the Scottish Socialist Party, wishing they were north of the border so that they, too, could vote for the SSP's old labour-style politics wrapped in some libertarian sounding rhetoric.

Internationally, the victory of Lula in Brazil was held up as another sign of the possibilities of left-wing electioneering. Great hopes were placed in him. It is good to have hope. It is stupid to forget the lessons of history.

We are only as strong as our own grassroots, self-managed, class conscious organisation. If you put bureaucrats, politicians or others in the driver's seat, they're sure to take you for a ride to their destination of choice and perhaps even sell you down the river.

Lula confirmed this. His practice quickly failed to live up to the hopes, unsurprising given that, like Blair, he had made it clear where he stood long before he was anywhere near office. Now his Workers' Party has gone one stage further and expelled four dissident members from the Brazilian Congress.

This action confirms the recent shift of Lula and his government away from their leftist roots. The four were purged by the directorate of the Workers' Party in a secret ballot in a closed-door session in Brasilia. The party leaders accused the so-called radicals of taking part in a campaign to 'demoralise' the government and Lula.

Supposedly, the ouster of the legislators was punishment for their failure to vote in favour of Lula's proposal to reduce pension benefits, which was approved by Congress in December. However, it reflects the growing dissatisfaction of the left wing of the party with the abandonment of traditional party positions and his

determination to enforce party discipline despite that discontent.

Lula, let us not forget, was a former lathe operator and labour union leader and Brazil's first working-class president. He was elected a little over a year ago, on a platform that promised a sweeping social transformation and increased investment in education and health. Unsurprisingly, he has followed the demands of the markets, piling up record budget surpluses to obtain a stamp of approval from the IMF. This policy has stunted growth and contributed to high unemployment. Surprisingly, he recently denied that he had ever been a leftist.

One of the Workers' Party long term main theoreticians has called this switch 'tropical Blairism'. A switch which has been well received by foreign investors, alarmed in the past by Lula's fiery radical rhetoric. A founder of the party complained that this was "not the first year of the Workers' Party government" but rather than "the ninth year" of the previous government. Shades of Blair, indeed!

Threats of resignations by several prominent party figures failed to stop the party leadership expelling the radicals. Dissidents object to what they describe as the Stalinist attitude of the leadership and not only to the economic policies. Dissidence is not limited to within the



party. Another party that had been a part of Lula's multiparty governing coalition formally broke with the president, accusing the Workers' Party leaders of abandoning their principles and selling out to international capitalism.

But in spite of history repeating itself (yet again!) in Brazil, the left will be standing candidates in the forthcoming

elections and urging us to vote for the 'progressive' candidate. We can be sure that this time it will be different, honest. This time, for the first time in history, the personalities elected will be up to the task and overcome the pressures from the state bureaucracy and big business and implement their programme. And they call anarchists utopians!

Fight global war

FedConAction – this is a call to the demo and action against the Nato Security conference being held on the 6th and 7th of February in Munich, Germany.

On Friday 6th February 2004 at 4pm: The streets leading to the Hotel Bayerischer Hof will be filled with people. The traffic will be stopped. General Naumann will be under pressure as he remembers the warning given by Horst Telschik, "This year the mob is intending to shut the conference down ..."

This is how we expect the situation to look in Munich on this Friday afternoon. Many different groups having already called for demonstrations on Saturday have also called for a massive presence around the Nato-security conference on Friday. This conference has for the last forty years, provided a meeting place for the military, politicians, weapons experts, who have been invited by Horst Telschik.

The globalisation of war
With the fall of the Soviet block, capitalism has become the uncontended global economic system. Capitalism

promised prosperity and security but has in fact lead to a decline in living standards for most people and to the collapse of economies of whole regions.

For a long time now the leftist liberal powers have been calling for political regulation of economic globalisation. In the meantime the problem has undergone a cynical transformation: the global capitalistic exploitation is now accompanied by global war, in which the rich northern states and their allies maintain unlimited military control. War has gone from being the exception to the norm. War is ubiquitous, springing up in the discussions and practices throughout our society. War enables the concentration of power and gives rise to patriarchal oppression, racial exclusion and capitalistic exploitation. The racist discourse against everything 'foreign' and 'different' results in more power accruing to the traditionally dominant forces in society. It has, for example, resulted in the militarisation of Europe's borders and in the racist immigration laws of the EU. War creates its own priorities. Social services have been cut back, while at the same

time a 50,000 person European interventions army has been assembled and a globally ready police force created.

When war is permanent, that is when it becomes an integral part of the organisation of our nations and societies, the line between war and peace becomes blurred. When war is no longer called war, but instead 'peaceful measures', and the next war is discussed as if it was normal to use military force to carry through imperial interests, then we really have arrived at the point which was so eloquently described by Orwell in 1984, "war is peace".

What security and for who?

In the last few years, 'security' has become a central propaganda call for politicians, economists and the media. It has been the justification for new international wars and greatly strengthened internal repression. Under our current system, economic security and stability are only created for those very few on the winning side: the ruling class. The logic of the world market treats most people as superfluous,

especially in the so called third world, where more and more people have been reduced to a state of abject poverty and misery. At the same time the governments of the rich countries are outbidding themselves in a race to the bottom, destroying the rights of workers and the unemployed. The employer-employee relationship is becoming more and more precarious, while the social divide is widening. In the name of 'domestic security' ever more laws are pushed through, the purpose of which is to exclude and control people who have been deemed unworthy of a place in the society. In this process the US and Europe are not always acting in concert. In fact their respective politics reflect in part massive contradictions, resulting from competition for international markets and influence. For us it is very clear that the situation is not that of 'evil doers' against whom the good and free peoples of the world must fight, but rather that of NATO states and their allies militarising the world.

War is not invincible

War is entwined in everyday lives,

which ironically is exactly what makes it vulnerable to attack. Its points of vulnerability are all around us. Take the case the war on Iraq; the military bases, train stations, and ports, which were used in the deployment of soldiers and supplies, and those which are still being used to keep supplies going to Iraq. And there exists of course the production zones of the weapons manufacturers. And there are also the places at which politicians, the military and their advisors gather to make their plans and strategic decisions. If you want to live in a world without war, then you must come to such places, where war is bought and sold as a normal part of life. You must come to the meetings of the global war planners, to the think tanks and events that bathe the face of war in a light of legitimacy. You must come to the streets and the train tracks over which the machinery of war runs.

Friday 6th February 2004, at 4pm: Actions around the Hotel 'Bayerischer Hof'.
Saturday 7th February 2004, at 12 noon: Marienplatz – International Demonstration against the NATO-Security-Conference

Kingdom of Micomicon

Syndicalism

Alan MacSimóin of Ireland's Workers' Solidarity Movement takes a critical look at anarchism's strongest current

Syndicalism is the largest organised tendency in the libertarian movement today. It has built large workers' unions, led major struggles, been the popular expression of anarchism in many countries. To understand the anarchist-communist view of syndicalism we have to look at its roots, its core beliefs and its record.

The basic idea

Its basic ideas revolve around organising all workers into 'one big union', keeping control in the hands of the rank and file, and opposing all attempts to create a bureaucracy of unaccountable full-time officials. Unlike other unions their belief is that the union can be used not only to win reforms from the bosses but also to overthrow the capitalist system. They hold that most workers are not revolutionaries because the structure of their unions is such that it takes the initiative away from the rank and file. Their alternative is to organise all workers into the 'one big union' in preparation for a revolutionary general strike.

They established their own international organisation with the founding of the International Workers Association in Berlin in 1922. Present at that conference were the Argentine Workers Regional Organisation FORA, the Industrial Workers of the World in Chile, the Union for Syndicalist Propaganda in Denmark, the Free Workers Union of Germany FAUD, National Workers Secretariat of the Netherlands, the Italian Syndicalist Union, the General Confederation of Workers in Portugal, the Swedish Workers Central Organisation SAC, the Committee for the Defence of Revolutionary Syndicalism in France, the Federation du Battiment from Paris, all representing over 1.2 million members. The Spanish CNT was unable to send delegates due to the fierce class struggle being waged in their country under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. They did, however, join the following year.

During the 1920s the IWA expanded. More unions and propaganda groups entered into dialogue with the IWA secretariat. They were from Mexico, Uruguay, Bulgaria, Poland, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Paraguay and North Africa.

Syndicalist unions outside the IWA also existed in many countries such as the Brazilian Workers Regional Organisation and the Industrial Workers of the World in the USA (which soon spread to Canada, Sweden, Australia, South Africa, and Britain¹).

Decline

The success of the Bolsheviks did great harm to the workers movement outside Russia. Many were impressed by what was happening in Russia, Communist

Parties sprang up almost everywhere. The Bolshevik model appeared successful. Many sought to copy it. This was before the reality of the Soviet dictatorship became widely known.

Nevertheless the syndicalist movement still held on to most of its support. The real danger was the rise of fascism. With the rule of Mussolini, the Italian USI, the largest syndicalist union in the world, was driven underground and then out of existence. The German FAUD, Portuguese CGT, Dutch NSV, French CDSR and many more in Eastern Europe and Latin America were not able to survive the fascism and military dictatorships of the 1930s and '40s.²

It was at the same time that the Spanish revolution unfolded, which was to represent both the highest and lowest points of syndicalism. More about this below.

The Polish syndicalist union with 130,000 workers, the ZZZ, was crushed by the Nazi invasion. But, as with syndicalists elsewhere, they did not go down without a fight. They, along with the Polish Syndicalist Association, took up arms against the Nazis and in 1944 even managed to publish a paper called *Syndicalista*. In 1938, despite their country being under the Salazar dictatorship since the 1920s, the Portuguese CGT could still claim 50,000 members in their now completely illegal and underground union. In Germany, trials for high treason were carried out against militants of the FAUD. There were mass trials of members, many of whom didn't survive the concentration camps.

The rump

By the end of World War Two, the European syndicalist movement and the IWA was almost destroyed. The CNT was now an exile organisation. In 1951 the IWA held their first post-war congress in Toulouse. This time they were a much smaller organisation than the great movement that existed at their first congress. Nevertheless they still represented something. Delegates attended, though mostly representing very small organisations, from Cuba, Argentina, Spain, Sweden, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Britain, Bulgaria and Portugal. A message of support was received from Uruguay.

Things were not looking good for the re-emergence of anarcho-syndicalism. In Eastern Europe the Stalinists allowed no free discussion, strikes or free trade unions. Certainly not anarchist ones!

In the late 1950s the Swedish SAC withdrew from the IWA. There was now not a single functioning union in its ranks.

It staggered on as a collection of small propaganda groups and exile organisations like the Spanish and Bulgarian CNT's. Some wondered would it live much longer. But suddenly

in 1977 Franco died and his regime fell. The CNT blossomed. From a few hundred activists it split into two unions now with up to 50,000 members. The growth of the CNT put syndicalism back on the anarchist agenda. The IWA now claims organisations that function at least partly as unions (in Italy, France and Spain) and propaganda groups in about another dozen countries.

Outside the IWA are syndicalist unions and organisations like the 10,000-strong SAC in Sweden, the OVB in the Netherlands, the Spanish CGT, the Solidarity-Unity-Democracy union in the French post office, the CRT in Switzerland, and others. Some are less anarchist and more reformist than others. Say what we will about them we must recognise that syndicalism is today the largest organised current in the international anarchist movement. This means it is especially important to understand them.

Some problems

Anarchist-Communists do have criticisms of their politics, or more accurately lack of politics. Judging from their own statements, methods and propaganda, the syndicalists see the biggest problem in the structure of the existing unions rather than in the ideas that tie workers to authoritarian, capitalist views of the world.

Syndicalists do not create revolutionary political organisations. They want to create industrial unions. Their strategy is apolitical, in the sense that they argue that all that's essential to make the revolution is for workers to seize the factories and the land. After that it believes that the state and all the other institutions of the ruling class will come toppling down. They do not accept that the working class must take political power. For them all power has to be immediately abolished on day one of the revolution.

Because the syndicalist organisation is the union, it organises all workers regardless of their politics. Historically many workers have joined, not because they were anarchists, but because the syndicalist union was the most militant and got the best results. Because of this tendencies always appeared that were reformist. This raises the question of the conflict between being a trade union or a revolutionary anarchist organisation.

Syndicalists are quite correct to emphasise the centrality of organising workers in the workplace. Critics who reject syndicalism on the grounds that it cannot organise those outside the workplace are wrong. Taking the example of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain it is clear that they could and did organise throughout the entire working class as was shown by the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth, the 'Mujeres Libres' (Free Women), and the neighbourhood organisations.



Spain

The weakness of syndicalism is rooted in its view of why workers are tied to capitalism, and its view of what is necessary to make the revolution. Spain in 1936/7 represented the highest point in anarcho-syndicalist organisation and achievement. Because of their apoliticism they were unable to develop a programme for workers' power, to wage a political battle against other currents in the workers' movement (such as reformism and Stalinism). Indeed syndicalists seem to ignore other ideas more often than combating them. In Spain they were unable to give a lead to the entire class by fighting for complete workers' power.

Instead they got sucked into support for the Popular Front government, which in turn led to their silence and complicity when the Republican state moved against the collectives and militias. The minority in the CNT, organised around the Friends of Durruti, was expelled when they issued a proclamation calling for the workers to take absolute power (i.e. that they should refuse to share power with the bosses or the authoritarian parties).

The CNT believed that when the workers took over the means of production and distribution this would lead to "the liquidation of the bourgeois state which would die of asphyxiation." History teaches us a different lesson. In a situation of dual power it is very necessary to smash the state. No ruling class ever leaves the stage of history voluntarily.

In contrast to this, the Friends of Durruti were clear that, and this is a quote from their programme 'Towards a Fresh Revolution', "to beat Franco we need to crush the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist and Socialist allies. The capitalist state must be destroyed

totally and there must be installed workers' power depending on rank and file committees. Apolitical anarchism has failed." The political confusion of the CNT leadership was such that they attacked the idea of the workers seizing power as 'evil' and leading to an 'anarchist dictatorship'.

The syndicalist movement, organised in the International Workers Association and outside it, still refuses to admit the CNT was wrong to 'postpone' the revolution and enter the government. They attempt to explain away this whole episode as being due to "exceptional circumstances" that "will not occur again". Because they refuse to admit that a mistake of historic proportions was made, there is no reason to suppose that they would not repeat it (should they get a chance).

Despite our criticisms we should recognise that the syndicalist unions, where they still exist, are far more progressive than any other union. Not only do they create democratic unions and create an atmosphere where anarchist ideas are listened to with respect but they also organise and fight in a way that breaks down the divisions into leaders and led, doers and watchers. On its own this is very good but not good enough. The missing element is an organisation winning support for anarchist ideas and anarchist methods both within revolutionary unions and everywhere else workers are brought together. That is the task of the anarchist-communists.

1. It was known as the Industrial Workers of Great Britain.

2. Some, like the Italian USI and German FAU, have been re-founded but exist only as relatively small groups.

This article is an edited extract from *The Northeastern Anarchist #8*, available from Freedom for £2.95 (add £1 postage in the UK, £2 elsewhere)

Editorial

According to Observer journalist Nick Cohen, 2003 saw "the death of anti-fascism". Strangely, he was referring to the anti-war movement's opposition to the invasion of Iraq. Watching the likes of Cohen and Christopher Hitchens garlanding the path of tanks into Baghdad, one can't help being reminded of the 'tankies' who cheered on the Soviet army as it crushed uprisings in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

But at least the tankies had the excuse that the USSR claimed to be preserving socialism. Bush and Blair couldn't have been more clear about the reason for their actions. What was at issue was the securing of the Middle East as a stable resource for the United States.

Given that the Iraqi insurgency didn't stop the moment Saddam was pulled from his hole in the ground, it seems that a substantial section of the Iraqi people weren't so easily duped. They refuse to equate the promised freedom and democracy with a stooge assembly overseen by an American satrap.

Where the new tankies will really come unstuck is over their demand that Saddam be tried for war crimes. What to do with the self-proclaimed 'Lion of Iraq'? This will pose something of a problem for the occupying forces.

The obvious move would be to hand him over to the International Criminal Court (ICC). But the crimes the ICC was set up to try must take place on territory belonging to states that are party to the treaty which founded it. Unsurprisingly Saddam and his band of butchers didn't sign up. Cynics might say this could be fudged by arguing that Iraq is now US territory – but of course the United States isn't a signatory either.

The most likely solution is that Saddam will be tried by the Iraq Governing Council (IGC). But there's a problem with this too. According to American officials, he's being treated in line with the Geneva Convention, but this demands that prisoners on trial be "tried by an independent and impartial" tribunal. This ought to rule out any court established by the IGC, which is little more than a mouthpiece for the Coalition Provisional Assembly (CPA). This in turn does what it's told by ... the United States!

There is, of course, one other problem. In his time, Saddam Hussein slaughtered communists and massacred Kurds, all with the collusion of his then-allies in the West. Perhaps he should call Donald Rumsfeld to give evidence of how often and why US officials visited him after the chemical bombing of Halabja, or of why the Americans allowed him to butcher the Shi'a and Kurdish uprisings in 1991?

Examined objectively, the capture and trial of Saddam looks less like the victorious finale of an anti-fascist campaign than one set of murdering bastards disposing of another, less powerful, murdering bastard when he no longer meets their needs. A strange anti-fascism indeed.

Quiz answers

1. It wasn't the military, but the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels.
2. A few days before he died he dined on ortolan, a delicacy made from small birds called buntings, which are trapped, blinded and force fed. The hunting, buying or eating of them is illegal in France.
3. Charles de Gaulle.
4. Carnations. The town of Barre is famous for its stone and was settled by Italians from Carrara, an anarchist stronghold.

Commentary

Strategy please

Your views on the 'state of the movement' (20th December) read more like wishful thinking than serious analysis. Your article claimed that "anarchists are respected because we practise what we preach. Anarchists also connect with their working class communities". Most working class people, when they think of anarchists, think of crusties throwing bricks at McDonalds on Mayday.

There isn't a working class anarchist politics or orientation. The fact that your writer says anarchists "connect with", rather than "are part of", working class communities gives the game away. The main national groups (AF, SolFed) don't even accept that there's a problem regarding the lack of real working class presence in their ranks. Class War seem to think that accepting the existence of the problem (which they did some years ago) in itself counts as a solution – even though their membership looks and sounds like all the rest.

Some Freedom correspondents have identified the need for a reorientation to the working class and out of the anarchist ghetto. The 'State of the movement' piece looks like an attempt to escape that conclusion.

Its author is at least correct in saying that theory has "taken a back seat". Anarchist theory falls into two camps – one grabs at whatever postmodern claptrap is passing on the winds of academic hype, the other thinks that reciting the sayings of Kropotkin and Bakunin counts as sound analysis.

The key point, I think, is the breaking of the link between theory and practice. Because there's no serious anarchist politics based on the working class, there's no basis for serious theoretical analysis. Theory is, in the end, lessons drawn from practice. What lessons can we draw from Mayday stunts and an annual bookfair and the occasional leafletting of the SWP (which is what anarchist practice has become)? Simply saying "onwards and upwards" doesn't count as strategy.

John Shute

Mass society

Iain McKay complains about the Green and Black Bulletin article, 'Mass society' (Commentary, 6th December). I'd like to respond as one who has welcomed the diversification of views in Freedom recently.

Iain seems horrified by the idea that the small-scale, land-based groups envisioned by the Wildfire Collective will only see the few cultures nearest them. Surely tourism, a modern phenomenon, is pursued as an object of status and as a desperate search for satisfaction and reconnection with nature in a world of capitalism, work and anomie?

With a fulfilling way of life in a small community, there'd be no compulsion to travel to fill the void of modern life. And there'd be scope for journeys, on foot and by boat, for as far as a person wanted to go – across the world if that seemed more desirable than remaining with the mutual relationships of those one knows, likes and loves.

Iain's argument is contradictory. For example, he implies that there's a need for people to choose to work down a mine ("WF doesn't offer the choice to anyone who doesn't want to live in self-sufficient small groups"). Would anyone choose a society in which they had to do this, or is Iain happy to keep a class of underlings carrying out the work of mines, factories and intensive agriculture

to feed those urban masses?

He also makes much of primitivists, as he sees it, "imposing" their fantasies on others. He argues for the right to decide what level of technology is wanted. Fair enough, but industrialism as a system requires mass production and people disconnected from land and livelihood. It destroys the possibility of others in that region carrying on living in a sustainable small-scale manner. Therefore it's industrialism which removes the choice for people to decide how to live.

Iain says he doubts many in the West will embrace a return to peasant life. A peasant, by definition, is someone beholden to a ruling class which exploits him or her for tax, tribute and the food surpluses necessary to sustain urban non-food producers.

The 'primitivist' position doesn't argue for people to return to being peasants, since this would be to return to a life of drudgery, working (at least during the warmer months) long hours to produce food, not only for self, family and community, but also for a large class of rulers and their retinues and others, such as traders, merchants, slaves and artisans.

The modern peasant has to produce far more than is needed, to pay tax, rent and other demands of the wage economy. But, for all this, few people would seriously argue that a miner or factory worker is happier than a peasant. And what of the clear evidence of misery in modern industrial society, characterised by alienation, depression, suicide, addiction...?

Small-scale, land-based cultures would grow and make what they needed in their local communities, interlinked (as is the case in all small-scale societies) to other groups by social and informal exchange relationships. Mutually self-reliant, they wouldn't produce food for urban and other non-food producing groups, nor would they be toiling in factories to make mass-produced goods, using machines that are inherently destructive to the environment. The mass-produced goods and services on which a modern industrial society depends will always deplete the earth's 'resources', as Iain recognises, and use far more energy that could be supplied by solar panels and wind turbines.

Anarchists and anti-capitalists need to look at history to understand what industrial capitalism is and how it was put into place. There have been other kinds of state society, based on the exploitation of peasants and slaves. As Marx was well aware, the novel twist of industrial capitalism lies in making land and labour into a commodity.

For the first time in history, the majority of people now have no other access to livelihood than to sell their work. The means to 'subsistence' – to satisfy their need for food, water, culture and community – is removed. This ensures cheap labour for mass production and industrial capitalist agriculture (food produced, not to live on, but to sell on the market).

Another key and novel element of industrial capitalism is machinery. For the first time in history, we exist to serve the market, rather than the market existing to serve us.

The only means of abolishing capitalism, then, is to reclaim land to create locally self-reliant communities. Any other system means mass production, machinery, heavy infrastructure and a large-scale market (how else are food and goods to be moved around to feed urban areas?).

Iain raises the important issue of how people could manage nuclear and toxic waste caused by decades of military and

industrial production. We'll need skilled people to contain the legacies of industrialism effectively or to allow them to degrade as safely as possible in areas that people can avoid. This doesn't indicate any need for the continuation of industrial society, which would only create further destruction and pollution.

This is rather like saying you want to abolish prison but you can't because there will always be people who need to be imprisoned. Other societies have existed perfectly well without prisons and mental hospitals, which come into being with modern industrial capitalism (a system which has taken such a toll on psychic health that, with its abolition, there may still be people who pose a danger to others and who therefore need to be cared for safely somewhere – but not in an asylum or a prison).

Iain's final point is that primitivists want Mad Max dystopias. Small-scale land-based communities couldn't be further from this vision. But an anarchist or socialist modern industrialism could itself become a Mad Max dystopia: we have no models or examples in history or prehistory of a large-scale anarchist or socialist society, least of all an industrial one involving a complicated system whereby a tiny minority of people produce the food and means of shelter and culture, by industrial methods, for a majority of the people who are ... doing what? Sitting at computers and watching television?

The only models and examples of sustained anarchist communities are those of small-scale societies. And, as even industrial-municipal lover Murray Bookchin has argued, most anarchist movements have been those of peasants and small farmers – the small-scale, land-based cultures that the Wildfire writers argue for!

Last of all, Iain refuses to countenance the idea that he and his fellow lovers of modern industrial society might be happier and more satisfied living in small-scale land-based cultures – living a life of true autonomy and freedom, in which their days are spent in their communities, tending plants and animals (or gathering and hunting, when there's enough wild land), making musical instruments or homes or other autonomously satisfied needs, singing, dancing, laughing, talking.

What models and examples do we have of people living in this way? Well, only 150,000 years of our own pre-history, and all the remaining small-scale land-based social arrangements still in existence around the world. Such cultures are increasingly threatened by the development of technology and industrialism, giving people no choice but to work down the mine or other types of modern labour. And this is the society Iain is arguing for?

Karen Goaman

More responses to the Green and Black Bulletin next issue

What merit?

Brian Morris's review of Harold Barclay's book, *The State*, (Review, 6th December) rather typifies the bias of the Freedom editors (perhaps Brian is one of them – we have no way of knowing). Brian seems to be part of the anarchist establishment, for what he says is considered by the editors to have merit ("a timely injection of sense" they call it). What the merit is we never find out.

We're all familiar with what the state is, so Barclay's book needs to give us an insight into an aspect of the state that we're unaware of. But there's no insight and the book is, in Brian's view, a

"primer" (as though we needed one).

The interpretation of the state, alluded to by Barclay, is the one endorsed by anthropologists. They maintain that we're not animals and that our society is, as a result, self-determining. This is what 'classical' anarchists believe. It means that we have no need of the state. The woes of the world are heaped upon the institutions of the state and centralised power.

The state is seen as operating as a self-regulating machine, but exactly how it operates isn't known and the explanations given by anthropologists and economists are woolly. A good analogy is that of the Gaia hypothesis, which purports to explain how life on the planet is sustained.

If anarchists understood the mechanism of the state then the machine could be halted. It never has been understood. There was a nice piece in Freedom by Tavis Reddick recently, ('New models', 8th November) suggesting that computer games could be used to produce strategies for defeating the state. But Tavis still believes in a mechanistic state.

The premises on which the operation of the state rests are that we know what we're doing and that our separate parts add up to produce society and the state. I'm happy with this except for the bit that says we know what we're doing. The problem is that we so definitely don't.

A corollary is that we must, in the last analysis, have each other's welfare at heart. This strange belief, dear to the hearts of anarchists, stems from ideas put about by innocents like Rousseau. It's a belief in a system of organisation where most people happily accept what they're told.

In many ways Brian and Harold Barclay want their cake and to eat it as well. They perpetuate the myth of the state as an operating entity (clumsy wording perhaps) because they need it. We can't have 'good guys' if we don't have 'bad guys'. Therefore, classical anarchism, inherited from Bakunin and the others, needs the opposition of the state to blame for the ills of society. In reality, the state is a stalking horse and requires no understanding.

I have no quibble with the effectiveness of what Brian and Barclay call the state. It's simply a matter of 'cause' and 'effect'. What we see in society isn't a result of the behaviour of the state, it's a result of the way people behave. The state is, in part, a concept. Yet, were members of parliament removed, the state would still exist. Remove civil servants, the police and so on, as described by Barclay, would still be there.

Anarchists marching into Parliament Square and shaking their banners at the Houses of Parliament aren't so stupid as to think the state is only a concept. They're concerned with the people who make up the state. As Brian sardonically says, postmodernist liberals still pay taxes to a state they claim 'doesn't exist'. It's so true, but of course the money is pocketed by those individuals who make up the state and not by the concept of it. Without realising it, I suspect, he makes my point nicely.

Destroy the concept and the state vanishes. The state described by Harold Barclay and Brian Morris is a necessity to their brand of anarchism, just as the view of society as self-directing is necessary to anthropologists. It keeps them in employment of one form or another. The concept, unfortunately, stands in the way of other, more realistic, concepts.

For this reason, I maintain that any description of the state is largely value-

REVIEW

He's sometimes long-winded but at least sci-fi writer Brian Aldiss is concerned with the bigger questions, finds David Peers

White Mars, the recent novel by long-established science fiction writer Brian Aldiss and mathematician Roger Penrose, discusses several topics of interest to anarchists: a small community with few formal structures; a society that works without using money; ways of discarding previously learned habits of thought and so on. The title refers to the attempt to keep Mars 'white', free from exploitation and nationalities, analogous to the Antarctica Treaty.

The premise is that, following a crisis of capitalism on Earth, the colony on Mars, in its domes, is entirely cut off. Its inhabitants have to fend for themselves. Resources are scarce and continually recycled. The colonists form a mixed community, of around 6,000 people. This contains characters from a wide variety of nations and cultures.

The authors give many of these characters depth, rather relying on stereotyping to do their work for them. There's a nominal 'leader', who works by persuasion rather than by exercise of power. He's thoughtful, sensitive and self-aware, not having (for example) the pomposity of Jubal Harshaw in Heinlein's 'Stranger in a Strange Land'. There's also a central administrative office.

Various conflicts come up during the course of the narrative. There is, for instance, one between those who want to return to Earth and long for the first rescue ship, and those who are reconciled to the environment they live in.

A continual theme is the discussion between those who see the Mars colony as a chance to move towards a utopian society (these include the leader) and those who want to rebuild traditional structures. Interestingly the subtitle is,

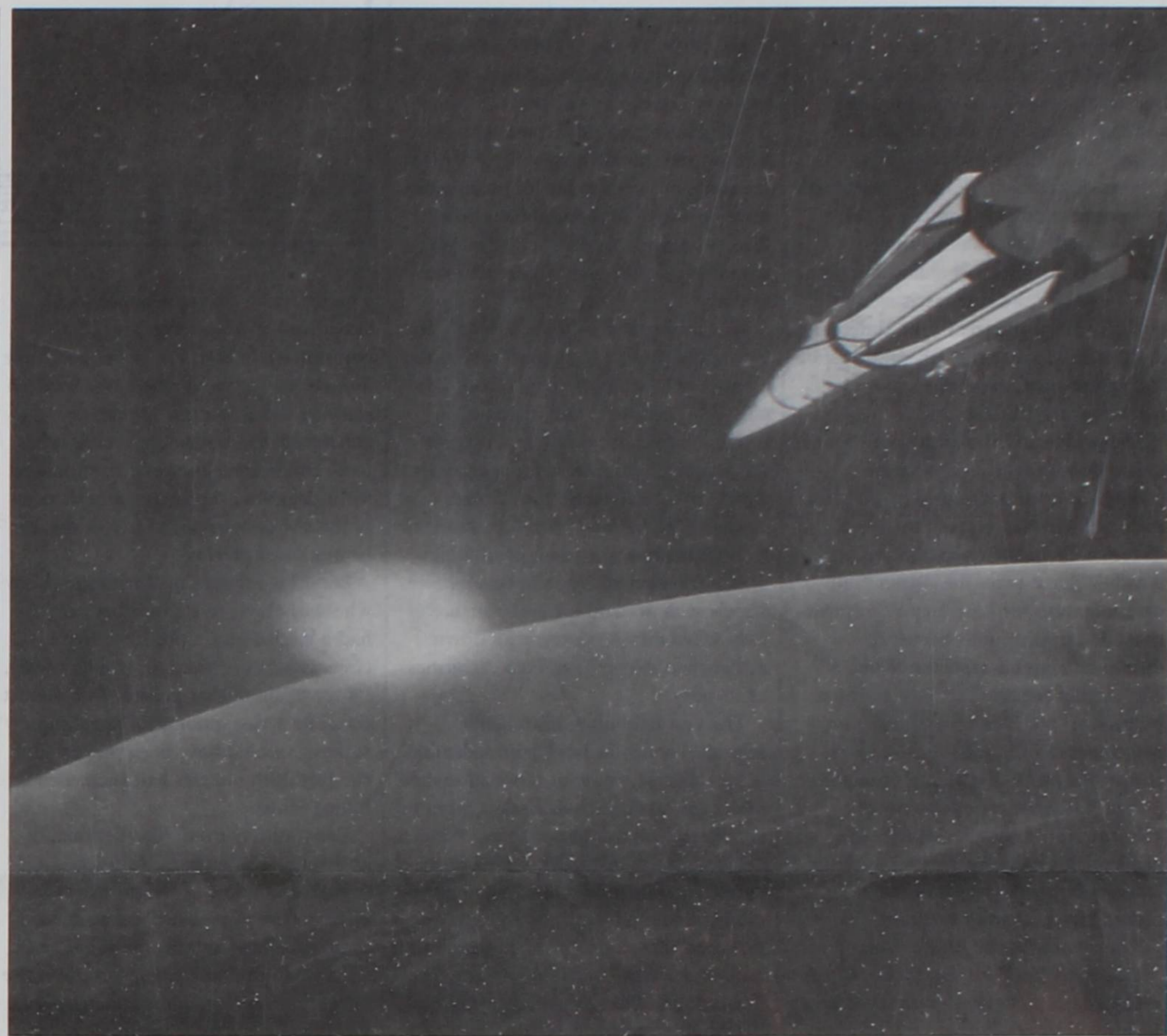
'The mind set free. A 21st century utopia'.

How do we deal with crime and punishment? There's little general crime in the Mars colony, but social tensions do eventually lead to a murder. What should be done? Suggestions amongst the inhabitants range from intense psychotherapy, through social pressure, to stringing the offender up. Various social currents come in for discussion (though this is sometimes long-winded).

The colonists establish a special women's space, starting with a maternity unit. The free sexuality on Mars leads to an increasing numbers of pregnancies (contraception ran out with the break from Earth), which may lead to problems with limited resources. Racism crops up and is generally treated as an outmoded oddity.

Traditional science fiction devices are used, glibly. Seemingly coherent technologies provide several variations on the deus ex machina theme. I've already mentioned the long-winded nature of some of the discussions. That of the isolationism, linked with nostalgia, felt by some of the colonists is one. Nor did I enjoy the metaphysical speculation about the meaning of 'consciousness', certainly not when it leads into discourse about the possibility of 'god' ('the watcher of the Universe'). These are reasonable topics in themselves but here tend to be, ahem, boring.

There are a couple of other recurrent, and parallel, themes. One is the neighbouring volcano, which seems increasingly to be alive – even though we all know that there's no life on Mars. So what does it mean when the mountain starts to extend sensory fibrils and to creep towards the domes? This metaphor looms larger as the book progresses. The other is a semi-detached science project, trying to detect an elusive sub-atomic particle. This gives an opportunity for



(guess what?) a long-winded explanation of sub-atomic physics, presumably the reason for including Roger Penrose as collaborator.

There are some nice twists towards the end. The first ship that arrives, finally, from Earth is a pilotless transport with supplies, a gift from the Terrestrial Utopian International Society. The first crewed ship to come brings with it

traditional thought-patterns and guns. The astronauts refuse help unless compensation is paid for a previously stolen shuttle. From a moneyless society!

When some of the colonists do get back to Earth, they find that capitalism is struggling. They're shocked by the widespread violence, but also find many utopian societies sprouting. White Mars is a thoughtful book, if sometimes

irritating. The obvious science fiction comparison is with Ursula Le Guin's novel, *The Dispossessed*. In that book the anarchy was established and congealing. Here, it's struggling to begin.

White Mars by Brian Aldiss (in collaboration with Roger Penrose), published by Warner Books, is available from Freedom for £7.99 (add 80p postage in the UK, £1.60 elsewhere).

NEW RELEASES

Frankenstein and the Chickenhawks: Then and Now by John Barker
Christiebooks

A huge volume of work was produced in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. Thankfully this piece of writing is of the "if you're not outraged you're not paying attention" school and is still relevant now. It might sound like a children's story but actually it's about Saddam Hussein (that is, a 'Frankenstein' of the West's own making). It's also about the kind of people who are dead keen on sending others off to fight and die but who once made damn sure they had other priorities (Rumsfeld's words) when they were offered the opportunity themselves.

John Barker casts a critical eye back to the horrors of the 1991 Gulf War. He also demolishes the fairytales which were constructed to sell the latest one. He asks probing questions about the

Chickenhawk's new-found love of democracy and other subjects of frantic myth-making, such as the notorious 'Weapons of Mass Destruction'.

He's good at analysing the different political strands behind the moves to war, from the Neoconservative 'cheerleaders' (who supported a very particular idea of democracy) to the 'power elite realists' who didn't pretend they were bothered with benefiting the rest of the world.

The arrogance of these 'Stern White Men' leaves you almost speechless, but thankfully John still has words left to lance both their hypocrisy and the pretensions of the 'Cold War Left', with their dubious 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' logic. It's always a good idea to know your enemy and reading this essay will help keep the essential fires of humanity and scepticism burning that we need to fight with.

Available as a free pdf download from www.christiebooks.com

JP

bristle no.15
winter 2003
£1.50

This is an alternative publication for the city of Bristol. Produced by a small collective, it aims to provide space and information for local groups and activists in the area, as well as acting as a propaganda tool. The latest issue is finally out, after a long wait.

It's packed full of direct action reports, local anti-war activities, news and comment. There are reports from local solidarity campaigns and meetings, reviews and the like. There's a strong community feel, with articles on community events and issues like the St Pauls carnival, as well as poignant obituaries for two local characters.

The collective have tried to jazz up the layout with, sadly, limited success (partly due to printing problems). They've included many examples of local graffiti and subverts.

Each issue of bristle has a special

feature, and this time it's on housing in all its forms. What the mag does lack is articles on workplace issues and resistance – I guess they can only print what people write about – but this needs to be rectified.

With the power of the mainstream media continuing to grow, it's as important as ever that independent local mags flourish. In Bristol, with the disappearance of the Bristolian freesheet following its disastrous foray into electoral politics, there's only bristle and Bristol Indymedia to counter the lies of the local press (owned by the Daily Mail).

There are good links between these two, but if bristle is to continue as a success and to complement Indymedia it needs to regularise its publication, expand its availability, and keep its website up to date.

MH

bristle is available from Box 25, 82 Colston St, Bristol BS1 5BB (cheques payable to 'bristle'). Check out the website at www.bristle.org.uk

For other info about what's on in Bristol visit <http://bristol.indymedia.org> and www.kebele.org

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Commentary

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less. An analysis of the state takes us nowhere. I'm looking for insights that will lead to anarchy and I see Barclay's book, described by Brian, as irrelevant. Because anarchists reject the state as a means to achieve any useful change in society they should also reject the enduring power of the myth. We need to be true to our beliefs and abandon the state as a concept. The state doesn't work in practice, in theory even less.

Peter Gibson

Diff'rent strokes

Paul Maguire seems to miss the point of my arguments (Commentary, 6th December). I thought I'd made clear that a politics of difference along Deleuzian and postcolonial lines has nothing in common with the kind of liberal multiculturalism he rightly opposes. A number of leading continental philosophers such as Badiou, Žižek, Spivak and Bhabha have written extensively in critique of multiculturalism. Žižek calls it "the new fascism" and Bhabha calls it a retreat from difference to diversity. I share the general thrust of their arguments, even when I diverge from their specific rhetoric.

The problem with multiculturalism is that it doesn't take difference far enough. It stops at the idea of 'cultures' and social groups as fixed totalities. There's a Donald Room cartoon in which Wildcat takes the slogan "self-determination for East Timor" to mean that she can determine herself to dismantle Hawk warplanes. When a cop catches her, she's set straight by a politician: "we didn't mean self-determination for your self". This is exactly the problem with multiculturalism and its demands for autonomy for cultural groups. But it's equally the problem with approaches that demand an exclusive focus on class, itself ultimately an identity-category.

The answer to the BNP's demand for 'rights for whites' isn't to insist on the replacement of 'whites' with some other identity-category, because the problem isn't only racism but also the idea of a core identity which can be expressed by a party. Fixed categories of identity – 'white', 'black', 'Muslim', 'working class' or even 'human' – are necessarily a way of restricting what people can be or become. They're ideological 'products' in what the situationists termed the 'ideological supermarket'.

'Rights for whites' necessarily means two things: first, rights only for whites, not for blacks; second, rights for whites conditional on their whiteness and on their conformity to an essentialist image of what it means to be white. Hence it's a discourse of ontological privileging, of what Guattari terms "micro-fascism": one has value only if, because and to the extent that one is white.

The same is true whenever a movement is united by a 'shared' essence of one sort or another, rather than by a desire

to free oneself from fixed essences. Essentialism implies a fixed cultural identity whereas, as Bhabha puts it, the location of culture is always fluid, contingent and shifting. We need to stop thinking of ourselves as instances of closed categories and start thinking of ourselves as people who could create and recreate the world if we could escape these stultifying ideological boxes.

This is more important than ever, now that exclusion is eclipsing exploitation as a form of social control. Can closed categories ever express anything but the repression of the flows of desire and of communication? Can one speak of 'race' or even of 'class' to those so deeply excluded they've never felt themselves 'at home' under any label?

The authority of any essence (even 'class' when it's conceived as a closed totality) must be possessed by some group who define its ultimate meaning. It's no coincidence that those who go furthest into an identity-politics of class are also most prone to fall for exclusionary rhetoric about 'anti-social behaviour' directed against working class people who don't fit into their image of a class essence.

The answer to the BNP shouldn't be a different essence but a rejection of the essentialist gesture itself, in favour of a politics of openness and dialogue, in which difference, fluidity and hybridity are accepted and in which the gestures which divide the world into closed categories of 'us' and 'them' are replaced by an openness providing possibilities of emancipation, dialogue and coexistence. Labels such as 'working class' are useful only when they serve to break down, rather than strengthen, fixed categories of identity.

The vast field often mistakenly subsumed under the label 'postmodernism' is very diverse. Some of those subsumed under the label, such as Laclau, Mouffe and Rorty, are too liberal to be of much help to anarchists. Others, such as Žižek, Badiou and Baudrillard, are too nihilistic to offer much of a political direction. But there's great potential in authors such as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and Bhabha, and their political neighbours such as Rolando Perez, Alfredo Bonanno and Hakim Bey.

One of their most crucial insights is the need to move beyond an anti-fascism of slogans and counter-totalities into a challenge against the underpinnings of the psychological and social appeal of fascism in everyday life. Guattari and Negri call for "the social proletariat and new collective subjectivities" to "lay siege to the corporations ... and impose its redefinitions and its permanent experimentation", including "new ways of imagining and of studying production."

A valuation of difference doesn't rule out a staunch and unified opposition to the proponents of global monoculture.

AR

Violence, maybe

In his response to my own earlier comments, Johnny M. assumes that I'm



a pacifist who rejects violence in all circumstances (Commentary, 22nd November). In fact, I've never been able to make up my mind where war between states or other large groupings is concerned. On the whole I think it has to be condemned in most circumstances, for it deprives everybody on both sides of the choice whether to live or die, to be mutilated or not.

But if I was confronted with somebody who was about to shoot others and I had a loaded gun, I think in most circumstances (if not paralysed by fear), I'd try to shoot that person. And almost certainly a vast amount of appalling suffering would have been prevented if the July 20th plotters had succeeded in killing Hitler.

Does Johnny mean that Berkman's attempted assassination of Frick is a practical example of the proper and effective use of violence? I find it hard to imagine how an attempt to kill Frick, successful or otherwise, could be effective either in achieving an immediate specific worthwhile end or in recommending anarchism to large numbers of others.

Rabbi Isserman's appeal to Jews to be reconciled to the Nazis who persecuted them was of course a terrible misjudgement. But surely Johnny wouldn't have recommended German Jews to rise up together and physically attack the Nazis?

Johnny is right. Talk of morality takes us into a semantic minefield. But he says that "morals ... are part of the problem. Or, at the very least, they're not part of the solution." Solution to what? Doesn't he mean the solution to cruelty and injustice? Isn't the attempt to save human beings from these, and to help them be free, something we could reasonably call a moral endeavour?

Yes, I did have destructive acts against property in mind when I wrote of violence. But surely attacks on sentient beings are usually far worse?

Amorey Gethin

A sideways look

I've never believed the nonsense spouted by Trots that the Labour Party is the mass party of the working class. But then I've also wondered why a candidate for the local council needed to be "good on Nicaragua", so perhaps I shouldn't take anything they say too seriously.

The Labour Party was always a cross-class alliance between middle-class intellectuals like the Fabians and the working class organised in unions. The unions' importance has been waning for some time, while the middle classes have grown.

When I knew lots of Labour Party members in the '90s, there was a broad mix of occupations, weighted towards local government and NHS managers and union full-timers. While not a cross-section of society as a whole in the area, it was still a broad base from which to start, and we successfully worked together on several issues from the seafarers' strike through the Poll Tax to anti-fascism.

For Christmas, I got a copy of Tony Benn's diaries from 1991 to 2001. The giver was concerned that I didn't like Benn, but he needn't have worried – the book's an interesting enough read, sometimes spot on, others a bit naive.

What's interesting, going through his book, is the changing nature of the Labour Party through this period, crowned by Blair's triumph in 1994.

Early on, Benn is complaining of the time spent witch-hunting Militant, "when really they aren't a part of the normal mainstream of the Labour Party, which is radical, socialist, at least in essence." This is 1991, at the tail end of the Poll Tax, when my local anarchist group was working with many decent Labour Party members who fitted this description, though of course there were many more who never did.

In September 1992, he's writing about Dennis Skinner being kicked off the National Executive: "the yuppie Labour Party is prepared to live with me, but not Dennis, and it's an indication of the disappearance of the working class from the Party". By 1994, he's concerned about the "gradual phasing out of the organisational aspects of the Labour Party". At some point the mass party starts to wither. The early 1990s are full of woe about the lack of money coming in and a sense that the rank and file have had enough.

Back to Mr Benn again. He describes a meeting of London Labour Students thus, "you just got the feeling that they saw the Labour Party as a quick ladder to the top". Lewisham, where I live, used to be solidly Labour. In the mid '90s, there were only four opposition councillors. The Labour elite ran the borough as a private fiefdom. But the last full local

elections saw turnout drop to less than one in four, and wins for Socialists, Greens and Local Education Action by Parents, a pressure group.

Since then, four Labour councillors have resigned, presumably to spend more time with their fund managers. All four by-elections have been won by the Liberals or the Socialists. There are more councillors, known never to show up, who are presumably only holding on for fear of losing more seats. Or is it the generous expenses they vote themselves?

Why the high turnover? And why the losses? Could it have something to do with the fact that Labour has haemorrhaged members since 1997? And those who do stand as candidates nearly all depend on the Party for employment?

At least two of the four Labour by-election candidates were parliamentary researchers. Something similar is true in other boroughs I've asked people about. In the 1990s, the Labour right learned from those they'd expelled and started moving reliable Blairites into wards thought of as left-leaning. They employed similar tactics – boring the pants off anyone else who came along.

They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Few Labour Party branches can get a quorum even to lower the quorum. My local party's website now redirects you to labour.org.uk – a dull site if ever there was one.

While I can't resist a bit of gloating about Labour's complete lack of base (the mass party of MPs' assistants?), this reflects something broader. Big P Politics is a turn-off, and the rewards for those who don't get to be elected as mayors or planning committee chairs are derisory compared to the ones they could get if they transferred to Arthur Andersen or suchlike.

I'm loath to describe this as a vacuum, waiting to be filled by Liberals or Fascists depending on local prejudice. There's something else going on here. It's a confirmation that there's little real power left in local politics. Whitehall dictates ninety percent of what councils do, and the big parties don't even need local activists as election-fodder any more, relying on the mass media instead.

Svartfrosk

The quiz

1. Where did Colonel Saunders of Kentucky Fried Chicken get his rank?
2. What was French President Mitterand's last conscious illegal act?
3. Who said "how can you govern a nation with 246 varieties of cheese"?
4. According to National Geographic, what did Vermont anarchists have on their gravestones?

Answers on page 6

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