

FREEDOM

50P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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PARAMILITARY LEADER FREE?

Carlos Castaño, notorious leader of the far right Colombian paramilitary group AUC, may have entered Israel under a false passport – placed on a US government witness protection programme. According to French news-group AFP, Colombian diplomatic sources report that Castaño was flown to a military base in Panama before finally being sent into Israel under an assumed name. Castaño was reportedly being targeted by fellow AUC leaders after supplying the US government with information on the AUC's massive drug trafficking operations.

One month after his disappearance fellow drug boss Carlos Mauricio García was shot dead in a Santa Marta supermarket, fuelling rumours that Castaño's disappearance on 16th April had seen him meet a similar fate.

Castaño is renowned as being one of the most unpleasant and violent drug barons in all of Latin America. Recent reports suggest that his AUC militia has been responsible for 85% of the massacres that have destroyed rural Colombian communities. Other targets have included

trade unionists, leftist sympathisers, journalists and human rights workers. During the FARC (Marxist-Leninist guerrillas) cease fire in the 1980s, Castaño and other rightwing gunmen were responsible for the murder of around 3,000 activists and can be credited with perpetuating the devastating civil war.

Castaño himself may find his supposed new surroundings familiar. It was on an Israeli military course that he first learned the tools of his trade back in 1983. Following training with death squad specialists he returned to his native Columbia to help run 'Los Tangueros' with his brother Fidel, a militia force named after the Castaño's ranch.

In 1990 the Colombian government visited the Castaño ranch and exhumed 24 decomposed bodies showing signs of torture. A Time magazine article in 2000 estimates that AUC violence may have forced around one million Colombians to flee their homes.

These organisations have become entirely dependent on their drug operations with the US government's Drug Enforcement Agency flagging up their links to the enormous Medellín cartel in 1993. Castaño and the AUC have strong historic links with both the United States and Israel. Apart from his training in the early 1980s, government linked Israeli and British mercenaries entered Columbia later in the decade to set up training camps for paramilitary leaders. These same mercenaries were later to be involved with the training of Nicaraguan contras and Honduran death squads (both intimately involved with the CIA). Several of his militia men were sent on a similar exchange programme to Castaño's, with the



'Communists out of Colombia' – right-wing paramilitaries and their graffiti

presumed blessing of the Israeli Defence Force.

It is rumoured that AUC's weapons supply was sourced in the Middle East, with a major shipment of 3,000 Kalashnikov rifles handed to the paramilitaries by IDF linked arms company GIRSA. His links extended deep into the Colombian government and Castaño boasted repeatedly in his autobiography of high level meetings with their officials. Colombian administrations are traditionally very closely bound to Washington.

Castaño's alleged release echoes the rumour surrounding his brother's disappearance in 1994. Fidel Castaño was also a prominent paramilitary leader, supposedly killed in a chance encounter with FARC guerrillas. However even his whereabouts continue to be the subject of some mystery, amid accusations that he has now retired to Israel. If reports of Castaño's release ring true then the United States will come under considerable criticism for letting the world's most unpleasant terrorist and

drug runner run free. Responsible for the murders of countless innocents and repression of thousands of rural communities, as well as continuing participation in the drug trade, Castaño would, by any normal estimation, represent an unparalleled catch in terms of the 'War on Drugs' and the 'War on Terror'.

It appears though that terrorism and narcotrafficking are forgivable crimes when committed by CIA assets.

Jack Ray



Not so dead – Carlos Castaño

END LONG HOURS AND LOW PENSIONS

British workers are fighting back against attacks on their pensions and attempts to make them work longer hours – and no wonder! British workers face the longest working hours in Europe. Four million people work more than 48 hours a week. One in six women work more than 60 hours a week.

Pension schemes are being closed at record levels. Even when schemes aren't closed employers are cutting back what they put in. According to the TUC employers have saved themselves £4 billion in pension contributions. Good for profits. Tough for the workers.

While the TUC has organised a 'Pay Up For Pensions' rally in London on 19th June, workers are taking direct action to defend pension schemes. According

to official figures issued last week strikes over pensions are at their highest level for fifteen years. 140,000 working days were lost last year. Action over the "duration and pattern of hours worked" also hit a high. 62,000 working days were lost in disputes over working hours last year, the largest for thirteen years.

Strikes to defend pensions, for example, have taken place in recent years at Caparo, the steel works, Rhodia and Co-op Financial Services amongst others. Rail workers are planning industrial action next month to defend their scheme. Brendon Barber, the TUC's boss, has warned that if "employers continue their cutbacks, we may very well see more industrial action."

There are now two million fewer

people in final salary schemes than in 1995. More and more people will have to rely on the woefully inadequate state pension which on current trends will be worth just 10% of average earnings in twenty years time. This will mean people will have to work for longer and longer. Across the public sector the government is trying to push up the retirement age.

While strikes over working time and pensions rose last year there was a fall in the overall number of stoppages according to the Office for National Statistics. Wildcat actions, as in the recent fire fighters dispute over stand-down time, however are still taking place. Wildcat actions though are taking place in unexpected areas.

Recently Unison and Amicus members at Sunderland City Hospital walked out in protest as management tried to introduce the new NHS pay scheme – Agenda for Change which would have resulted in pay cuts of up to £7,000 for some workers.

Lower strike levels do not necessarily mean a reduction in militancy. Often the threat of industrial action is enough to get increases from employers. Last week unions representing 1.3 million council workers welcomed a local authority employers' increased pay offer, up nearly 2%.

Traditionally militant industries like transport also show no sign of slackening. RMT members working on the tube in London were set to strike

on 10th June for an above inflation pay increase, reduced working week and minimum starting salary, although bureaucrats called off the action. South Central TSSA members, who work in railway ticket offices have said that they will not take passengers money next week in protest of temporary staff receiving less pay than the permanently employed colleagues.

After nearly a decade of quiet, industrial action is alive and well in spite of the union leaders' sabotage.

Pay Up for Pensions march and rally on Saturday 19th June, meet 12 noon at Embankment, London, for march to Trafalgar Square.

Richard Griffin

See On the poverty of pensions, page 3

Home and away

FREEDOM

Volume 65 Number 12

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.

We're changing

Some changes are coming up with Freedom, Anarchist News and Views, and we are keen to improve and expand. Please help us by filling in our Questionnaire on page 7 and posting it back to us. One lucky person will win a free copy of the forthcoming Freedom Press book.

Editorial

Over the past two weeks we have received so many letters that we have dropped our editorial column this issue, because we hate omitting things that people send in. Unfortunately still not everyone's would fit, but we will try to include them in future issues. For those of you who don't want to miss out on anarchist debate in-between issues you could do better than to check out www.enrager.net/forums

Bookshop

The Freedom bookshop is usually open Wednesday to Saturday, 12 noon to 6pm, with late opening until 8pm on Thursdays. If you're making a special trip it's worth calling us on 020 7247 9249 to check.

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Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 26th June 2004 and the last day for getting copy to us will be Thursday 17th June. See contact details above for where to send your letters/articles.

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

News from the inside

HMP Hell-holes

As suicides in women's prisons soar, HMP Corton Vale has come under attack and Durham is shut down. But will it reverse the trend?

Durham: The Prison's 100-capacity women's wing is being shut down. The Home Office – hardly the most liberal of government bodies, denounced it as “oppressive and claustrophobic” and claimed that it was unsuitable for holding women. Among other problems, exercise spaces were tiny and bleak.

The prisoners are being moved to (surprise surprise) for-profit jails run by private companies, such as the new one opening at Bronzefield in north-west London and later to another corporate prison in Peterborough.

Durham itself is being re-packaged as a very friendly-sounding ‘Community Prison’. But as to whether that will stop the flood of suicides occurring there in recent months, or lessen the already terrible overcrowding – who knows.

Corton Vale: The number of women imprisoned at HMP Corton Vale, Scotland's only women's prison, has gone up 150% since 1990. Overcrowding and poor conditions are exacerbating the many problems which inmates already have.

As many people will know, most women are in prison for non-payment of fines and, like most other prisons, the facts about female inmates at Corton Vale are disturbing:

- 60% have suffered from abuse;

- 80% have a history of mental health problems;

• 90% have substance addiction problems. Anne Owers, chief inspector of prisons for England and Wales has stated that these figures show that “it is quite clear that there are people in prison who don't need to be there and who are being made worse by being in prison and who could benefit from other provisions outside prison.”

Suicides: Rebecca Smith, died in HMP Buckley Hall, Tuesday 1st June 2004. She has become the tenth woman this year to die from self-harm inside British prisons – the highest number on record.

As female imprisonment rates rocket, suicide rates will inevitably follow – especially as most of those jailed have psychological problems. Prison has a highly detrimental effect on anyone's mental health and as such many vulnerable people will be tipped over the edge.

However, despite its brutality and ineffectiveness at preventing crime, the prison system is still expanding unrelentingly. With corporate investment and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) there is an awful lot of money to be made in locking people up. For a vision of the future, we need only look across the Atlantic to the US, where corporations build prisons, use their media arms to drum up hysteria over crime and then lobby the government for tougher, longer sentences. As the number of prisoners spirals up into the millions, families and communities are obliterated, but a very few people get very, very rich.

Feltham race fight bets

According to the Guardian, police are investing allegations that prison officers at a Feltham Young Offenders Institute (YOI) in West London have been placing white and black children in the same cell and taking bets on how long they would last before attacking each other.

Feltham is the YOI where 19 year old Zahid Mubarek was beaten to death by a known white-supremacist cell-mate Robert Stewart in March 2000.

Steve Gillan of the Prison Officers Association stated that “if there [were] any truth in the allegations ... we could not possibly defend such actions by prison officers.” Which is good of him.

Parole assistance

Jalil Muntaqim (aka Anthony Bottom), a former member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army was jailed at the age of 19 as one of the New York Three after a shoot-out with San Francisco police.

He has now been in prison for 32 years, and has been instrumental in a number of campaigns for prisoners' rights, including pressuring the UN to



recognise the existence of political prisoners in US jails as well as countless law suits on behalf of fellow detainees. For this campaigning he has been severely punished by prison authorities through physical abuse, formal discipline and many prison transfers.

After many years of being denied the opportunity to attend college, Jalil finally graduated with a BS in Psychology and a BA in Sociology in 1994. He would like to pursue his Masters degree, but this has been forbidden by the Department of Corrections.

His parole has repeatedly been denied, despite his minimum term being only 25 years, but he has another parole hearing in July. International pressure has helped set free many political prisoners throughout the world, and really does work. Even in the US, a worldwide campaign forced the retraction of fellow revolutionary Mumia Abu-Jamal's death penalty.

Please send letters requesting that Jalil's parole be granted (re: Parole for Anthony 'Jalil' Bottom, 77A-4283) to: Chairman, NYS Division of Parole, 97 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12206, USA. For more info, see www.kersplebedeb.com/mystuff/profiles/muntaqim.html

Action Directe

Sadly, another member of the French anarchist urban guerrilla group Action Directe has recently been arrested. There are still other members in jail, and people are requested to write to them at their addresses which you can find at www.enrager.net/newswire

LISTINGS

Ireland

25th to 26th June Just when you thought it was safe to go somewhere hot for your summer holiday, George Bush comes to Ireland: Domoland Castle, Co Clare (very close to Shannon Warport, oh yes). Details of the protests planned at www.ambush2004.org

London

15th to 21st June An Exhibition of Resistance to BP and Big Oil, for info contact 07969 786770, London Rising Tide, c/o 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES, or see www.risingtide.org.uk or www.londonrisingtide.org.uk or www.burningplanet.net

8th July South London Radical History Group meeting: ‘Deptford Infidels’, talk with Terry Liddle at 8pm, Use Your Loaf, 227 Deptford High Street, SE8, admission is free/donation.

26th July London Anarchist Forum open discussion on 21st Century Anarchism at the Autonomy Club at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1
Every Wednesday the LARC Library from 1pm at 62 Fieldgate Street, E1.
Every Friday vegan café at Use Your Loaf, 227 Deptford High Street, SE8

Manchester

19th June Manchester Radical Bookfair 11am until 5pm at Bridge 5 Mill, 22A Beswick Street, Ancoats, Manchester. Note that the fair aims to promote and celebrate grassroots, non hierarchical, DIY activism and is not a platform for

party politics!

info@radicalbookfair.org.uk
www.radicalbookfair.org.uk

Scotland

1st to 4th July Green Anarchy in the UK, Gathering of the tribes at Bilston Glen Anti-Bypass Protest Site, near Edinburgh. Contact 07747606558 info@bilstonglen-abs.org.uk or see www.bilstonglen-abs.org.uk
23rd to 24th July The Wickerman Festival, between Dundrennan and Auchencairn. Spiritualized, Levellers Acoustic, dance tents, children's area. www.thewickermanfestival.co.uk

Surrey

16th to 18th July Guilfest. Contact 01483 536270 info@guildford-live.co.uk or see www.guilfest.co.uk

International

26th to 28th June Anti-Repression Gathering around the Aubonne Court case, Geneva, to support two climbers whose rope was cut by police during a blockade against the G8 summit in Evian last summer. For more info see www.aubonnebridge.net

1st to 9th July Annual Ecotopia Biketour will ride from Vienna to The Netherlands with a stop-over at the Towards Carfree Cities IV conference in Berlin. See www.thebiketour.net
31st July to 7th August A-Camp on the Kesselberg near Erkner, 25km east from Alexanderplatz, Berlin. The Kesselberg

is a self-managed place in the woods. Contact by mail at A-camp, c/o A-Laden, Rathenower Str 22, D-10559 Berlin. For info see www.acamp.tk or www.kesselberg.info

Nationwide groups

Anarchist Federation
Box 2, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.afed.org.uk

Antifa
Box 36, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
www.antifa.org.uk

Class War Federation
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX
www.classwaruk.org

Earth First!
www.earthfirst.org.uk

Industrial Workers of the World
PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ
www.iww.org.uk

Solidarity Federation
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
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 7QX
www.freedompress.org.uk

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.londonlarc.org

Occupied Social Centre
159 Fortress Road, London NW5
www.wombles.org.uk

Printworks Social Centre
58 Albion Street, Glasgow
www.glasgow-autonomy.org

The Rampart
7a Rampart Street, London E1
SUMAC Centre

245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX
www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/

Use Your Loaf
227 Deptford High Street, London SE8
www.squat.freemove.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

IN BRIEF

ID rebellion

A new poll by YouGov has shown hostility to ID cards escalate in the past month. Commissioned by Privacy International, the poll revealed that despite a majority (61%) broadly supportive of the scheme, opposition has hardened with 28% vowing to take to the streets in protest. 16% of respondents, which would correspond to 2.8 million people, claim that they would take part in civil disobedience and 6% (one million) that they would rather go to prison than carry a card.

Though of course saying things like that and actually doing them are very different, it is encouraging to see that the more people learn about ID cards, the less they like them ...

Nuclear weapons break-in

Six people broke into the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Burghfield, west Berkshire, and began distributing anti-war leaflets. The five women and one man from Norwich, Leeds, London and Leicester were handing out legal information to staff informing them of their right, under the Geneva Convention, to refuse to carry out orders which are illegal. They were all arrested by Ministry of Defence police.

Bashing the fash

Also in Lancashire, activist from the Solidarity Federation and the Lancs Anti-Fascist Network have been pasting up anti-BNP posters, with the text "Will you be supporting England this summer? The BNP won't! During the last world cup, the BNP called for supporters to back Denmark as there were an all-white team. They claimed that this made them a better side than the multi-racial England squad. Denmark 0 - England 3."

A large 'Vote BNP' banner hung annually on a local factory was defaced with red and black paint bombs, and a BNP canvasser had their party propaganda destroyed.

In Barnsley a planned BNP march on an asylum seeker detention centre met with stiff opposition. Local anti-fascists attacked three fascists as they left the bus station, leaving their hard-nut master-race image in tatters. Later the march had to be called off as too many police were needed to protect the tiny BNP demonstration.

Lancashire Solidarity Federation <http://mysite.freemove.com/LancashireSF/index.html>
Antifa www.antifa.org.uk

Lyrical Terror

The guitarist in a rock tribute act was confronted by Special Branch as a terror suspect last month after accidentally sending a text message to the wrong person. The text contained lyrics from the anarchist rockers the Clash: "Tommy Gun? Okay - so let's agree about the price and make it one jet airliner for ten prisoners."

Police were reportedly "a little embarrassed."

Police van blown up

A police van was destroyed last week in a former pit village in Yorkshire by kids with a firework. An Inspector claimed that police did not yet know exactly what sort of firework it was, "but it was a biggie."

After what the police did to the miners and their families, it's hard to feel sorry for them.

The poverty of pensions

Roy Emery takes a look at the UK pensions scheme and the growing rebellion against meagre payouts

More pensioners are organising and demonstrating to demand a fairer share of the economic cake, having had enough of passively accepting the pittance allowed by the state. In a supposed world of choice the choice for many of the elderly is between essentials, and that's no choice at all. People endure the daily anxiety of existing on meagre incomes and suffer the inevitable health problems associated with this deprivation.

The 'elderly', 'senior citizens', 'retired' or 'mature' are an important economic factor in society simply because there are more of us. By 2008 it is estimated there will be more pensioners than children. Potentially this 'grey pound' offers rich pickings for investment fund managers and with the (paper) growth in house prices some older people appear to have money to spare for investment on the advice of ubiquitous 'financial advisers'.

That millions do not have funds tied up in property is occasionally referred to amid considerable media tut-tutting over the poverty many old folk suffer, after lives spent working and producing wealth for the elite to enjoy. Nothing is done to alleviate this as it is alleged "there isn't enough money" to increase pensions to a point where they might be satisfactory, nor is there likely to be a move to link the old-age pension to the average wage, as it used to be:

According to the Northeast Pensioners Association, "The 1974 Labour government noted that the State Retirement Pension had declined in value relative to workers wages to such an extent that over two million pensioners were in receipt of means-tested benefits. Barbara Castle, as the Social Security Minister, gave pensioners a 26% increase in the State Retirement Pension to restore its relative value, and in order that it maintained this relativity, established a link with average earnings. Under this

arrangement the State Retirement Pension was increased annually either in line with the rise in average earnings or in line with the Retail Price Index, whichever was the greatest.

"Who broke the Link? In 1980 the newly elected Tory government started to implement a long term strategy to cut existing state pensions on a softly-softly basis and in that year broke the link with average earnings, which had the effect of putting the State Retirement Pension in terminal decline."

The emphasis from 'New' Labour, as from the Tories, is on 'private initiative', 'individual responsibility'; current poverty is being something to be endured with forbearing in the interests of the general good, i.e., to maintain the unremitting exploitation of the many by the few. It seems that things will get better only with further sacrifice on the part of the poor. You've heard the propaganda: for politicians to act now would be to destabilise the successful fight against inflation, we must be patient, and so on. Accepting this means we'll wait forever for realistic improvement as conditions within capitalism are never right for social justice to apply. Tony Blair reluctantly agreed to some state protection for pensions only because this ardent control freak was caught out by the Tories as not being in control of the argument.

Continuing age-related poverty and the threat of the future 'pensions time bomb' is used through the media to frighten people into gambling more of their income in private pensions, in effect joining by proxy the players in the stock exchange casino. The pensions industry is supposedly regulated but as we have observed and more recently with pensions' and investment company scandals, security in relation to the finance industry is an illusion.

The Financial Services Authority was



ostensibly set up to ensure the bad guys in the finance industry were winnowed out but with pensions as with the 'mis-selling' of mortgages and split-capital trust investments (managers buying shares in each others' companies and taking fat fees, while informing punters that this paper scam would ensure financial growth) this watchdog bares its rotting teeth, and unsurprisingly, things carry on much as before.

Now pension fund managers are to gamble in financial 'derivatives' which, "are so risky they are only available to 'institutional and expert investors'" (Private Eye, no. 1104). These were the very experts hauled before a government committee in March because, "they didn't know their arses from their elbows" (ibid) and much needed training was mooted. Very reassuring for those trusting

incomes to these incompetent gamblers.

It's a venerable idea but it remains valid - there can be no real security within this system: even the rich worry about losing it all. There is no contradiction, or utopianism, in struggling for better conditions in the present whilst recognising the need to build a secure future for all beyond the dismal limitations of capitalism. No one social group in society can force this change to completion, the elderly need to use their experience in the struggles of the young and vice versa. We all need to get involved and organise to take direct control, to break down barriers of isolation. Moving forward to a free future depends on it.

Inside every older person is a younger person - wondering what the hell happened.

Caterpillar closed

On Friday 21st May twelve people from Why Don't you? (a non-hierarchical, Tyneside-based, non-violent direct action collective) and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign stormed the Caterpillar Factory in County Durham to demand it end its support for the Israeli army.

Some blockaded the entrance to the Peterleem works while others entered the plant and lowered the company's flag and a US flag to half-mast. Others climbed on several of the firm's bulldozers, and chained themselves to the main gates while the workers were leafleted.

Since the beginning of the intifada, in September of 2000, the Israeli military has destroyed over than 3,000 Palestinian homes, offices, buildings and other civilian structures including the destruction of more than 200,000 olive trees, which are the main source of income for many

Palestinians. Most of this destruction is carried out with Caterpillar's giant D9 Bulldozers - the same model which famously killed British woman Rachel Corrie.

A statement released by Caterpillar Inc. stated that they "share the world's concern over the unrest in the middle east and certainly have compassion for all those affected. However ... [they] have neither the legal right or means to police individual use of equipment."

A cynic could suggest that it would be easy to prevent their machines being used to break international law and flatten civilian homes purely by refusing to sell them to customers who persisted in using them to destroy and kill. But of course that wouldn't be good for profits ...

email whydontyou@post.com or write to PO Box 1TA, Newcastle NE99 1TA

Adecco exploits

Adecco, the biggest recruitment agency company in the Western world, has revealed a 26% rise in net profits to £203 million over the last year, sending its stock soaring.

The agency employs 33,000 temps across Britain, and charges companies between 10 and 25% commission for supplying them - more at short notice. Effectively this acts as a parasitic tax, as the agency's only function is to provide a central space for companies to request workers.

Most temp workers don't get health insurance, paid vacations or a pension plan. They don't get paid for illness, and they are asked to sign exemptions from the working time directive. As companies are required to pay these benefits for permanent staff (comprising an extra 30% on top of normal wages in most cases), they therefore find it is

often cheaper to hire temp staff despite a superficially higher outlay. As a result, they pay fewer permanent staff, thus putting more people out of work and undermining worker's rights. Effectively then, companies such as Adecco are not only profiting from the exploitation of labour without contributing anything to the national product, they are also weakening the bargaining power of permanent workers.

There are 1.4 million registered temps in Britain out of 24 million workers, the highest number in Europe, yet Britain had the lowest temp worker redundancy payment in Europe last year, just £5,128 for ten years service.

Adecco currently faces class action lawsuits for violations of the securities laws, after they misled the markets on their profitability over the 2000-2004 period.

International

Bringing back the factories

Two and a half years after the insurrection, Argentinian anarchists talk about their experience of workplace occupations

In spite of the violent eviction and lost battle, the Brukman Mill has become a global symbol of the resistance of the recuperated (worker-reclaimed) factories in Argentina. But, what are the lessons of the Argentina's self-managed workplaces? Between eight and ten thousand jobs have been saved by the workers of recuperated companies who are now working directly for their own benefit, after the financial crisis caused the owners to abandon them – in almost all cases working far shorter hours for more pay than before.

The occupations are one of the most important social experiences of the popular revolt which exploded on the 19th and 20th December 2001 which brought down several governments and saw huge numbers of people using direct democracy and self-organisation in almost all areas of life.

The movement is far from homogeneous, with many different viewpoints and ideas within it. A political agenda is emerging, and the movement is beginning to make institutional demands.

While the national government has announced a slight economic improvement, Argentina continues to suffer with 21% unemployment, and with 21 million people living under the poverty line and almost 10 million in a state of abject poverty. Over 70% of households still have real wages of only 54% of their level in 1975.

This is the result of a process of impoverishment, unemployment and huge sell-off of public holdings which began during the dictatorship of 1976. This required the extermination of a generation of militants and labour activists, and the ongoing economic 'liberalisation' still necessitates the

harsh repression of dissent. The union bureaucracy has also played a key role in dampening the resistance of workers.

However, beginning with the formation of the first organisations of unemployed workers – the 'piqueteros', or 'picketers' – and with the seizure of some factories by their staff in the latter half of the '90s, the working class had begun again to look for answers.

Strong support for the worker-run businesses from the other bodies of working-class organisation, the popular assemblies, piquetero organisations, student groups and rank-and-file trade unionists is evidence of the strong sense of class solidarity.

Left-wing political parties have tried to shift the movement away from direct action to making demands on the State. They are asking the government to effectively step in and fund the self-managed firms by paying wages and subsidising products, and formally recognise the occupations as legal.

We argue that it is naive to think that the capitalist State will begin to fund the co-operative factories because workers' control is not a capitalist solution – but it can be used to build working-class power. Also of course seeing as the State caused the problems in the first place they are not the ones to come up with a solution!

On the other hand, co-operativism does not provide a real, lasting solution to the people's problems. It is incapable of providing an answer which would benefit all workers, since at no time does it question the fundamental relations of capitalist production. And a network of co-operatives cannot create a rival system to capitalism – it would either be subsumed into it or die out.

The political wing of the movement of recuperated businesses presented



The Zanon Ceramics works was one of the first factories brought under workers' control

candidates for various lists and parties in the elections of last August and September.

The National Movement of Recuperated Businesses (MNER) presented candidates for the Social Pole, and in Buenos Aires through the Party of the Democratic Revolution, a group that supports the president, Kirchner. Celia Martínez, a worker in the Brukman factory, stood as a candidate for deputy with the Socialist Workers' Party and her co-worker Juan Carlos Ragghini, as candidate for the Labour Party. In Avellaneda, the MNER lawyer Luis Caro stood as a candidate for Aldo Rico (right Peronism).

The MNER and the small group aligned with leftist parties are separated by differences regarding the mechanism of self-management. The former encourages the formation of co-operatives and the use of surpluses to generate greater production. The latter

seeks "State intervention in the factories under workers' control" and for surpluses to be used "for the benefit of the community."

Apart from all this, the workers are genuinely revolutionising how they work, and are eliminating the hierarchies in most factories and installing systems of equal distribution of income.

Anarchists have been organically absent from this process. It could not be otherwise: our social influence is minimal and is restricted to specific, smaller circles – in the case of the OSL (Libertarian Socialist Organisation) – Argentina, to the Unemployed Workers Movement Anibal Verun, the human rights movement standing up to the trigger-happy policies of the police, the teachers' associations in the province of Buenos Aires and the couriers' union, SIMeCa.

The OSL has maintained good

relationships with the workers of the occupied Ghelco factory in Buenos Aires, where it has assisted the reactivation of the machinery, and more recently with staff at a candle factory in Monte Grande on the outskirts of Buenos Aires who have been setting up a new workshop.

The idea of workers' management of production and society implies the only power in a revolutionary society is in the organisations of the working class. This workers' management should be understood as the abolition of all power exercised by a minority, the abolition of capitalist power and of all manifestations of the State. The workers must not only take on the management of fields, factories and workshops but all aspects of society.

By the OSL- Argentina, translated by the Mutual Aid Libertarian Network (RLAM), Spain edited by Rob Ray and Alex Allison

US repression

Matrix redrafted

Mechanisms are being put in place to steal away the youth of America. The plan? To create an army of brainwashed, subservient soldiers to fight in a fictitious war and keep the majority of the human population in a prison they cannot see or smell or touch. A prison ... for their minds.

The army will be created using two systems known as S89 and HR163 – draft bills quietly being put through the US parliament. These shall become law in 2005 and effectively restart the draft across America.

Unlike in the '60s there will be no escape this time across the border, thanks to agreements signed with Canada in 2001 to avoid border skipping.

The army will be created for 'fighting terror' and maintaining homeland security, providing an excuse to bring a mechanised army down across the world while most Americans lie quietly in an electronic fantasy land of their own imagination.

G8 police – licensed to kill

To combat the possibility of protests at the G8 conference in Georgia later this year, the governor has declared a state of emergency. With a coolness reminiscent of James Bond himself, the plucky leader has suspended the first amendment, giving police a shoot to kill order if things get out of hand. Would you like a Martini with that over-reaction sir, shaken not stirred?

Kids – just say no!

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), the multinational drugs cartel, was summoned to court last week over its possible selling of highly dangerous uppers to young children on the streets of New York.

Eliot Spitzer, New York's attorney-general, has brought the case after the deaths of several youngsters were linked to Paxil – a GSK monopoly. He is seeking to recover millions in profits made since 1998, as well as damages.

Paxil – known as Seroxat in Britain – is sold as an 'antidepressant high' to kids, and distributed by unscrupulous 'reps' to doctors who may be ignorant of its effects.

According to Joe Baker, Spitzer's

head of healthcare cases, in the Times last week, "We think it is a case of deceit. The studies were not disseminated widely to physicians."

Studies allegedly suppressed by GSK showed that in some test groups depressed children were rendered suicidal after taking the drug, and in at least one case the placebo – a dummy drug used to rule out data corruption from patients imagining a positive effect – performed better.

The drug peddlers are alleged to have done five tests on children and teens, but only one of them was properly conducted, and that shows mixed results.

A GSK spokesperson said: "We have

acted responsibly in conducting clinical studies in paediatric patients and the dissemination of the results. We would strongly disagree with any suggestion that we have done otherwise."

GSK makes \$55 million a year pushing Paxil to kids in the US, who take 2.1 million pills annually. It is thought that if the Attorney-General's case succeeds other lawsuits will follow.

Presumably if it is proven in court that GSK has knowingly sold dangerous drugs to young children over a six month period, making millions for a small shadowy group of powerful villains, US forces will extend its 'War on Drugs' to GSK offices across Western Europe?

Rob Ray

Feature

Social control?

Is social work an egalitarian service, or is it a soft police force?

Steve McKee investigates

Social workers have been criticised from many quarters in recent years. The right wing tabloids see them as the civil servants of political correctness and the 'loony left'; and when they are not being criticised for not acting decisively in cases like that of Victoria Climbié, they are criticised for being too heavy-handed, as in the Orkney child abuse allegations. My criticism, though, is that the profession is institutionally disempowering, and, more fundamentally, has a social control function.

There are, it must be said from the start, many individual social workers with a radical outlook, who stand up for what they believe in. These are, sadly, the exception, and the fact that they need to stand firm against institutional pressures is evidence in itself of social work's imperatives. My analysis is of the role that social work as an institution plays; it is a critique of the general effect of social work intervention, rather than a blanket condemnation of all social workers.

First of all ask the question what is social work? Then ask who provides it, and why? It is, like education, an arm of the state. And, like education, it claims to have an egalitarian purpose. But it exists to maintain approved social values, and to keep down those who need to be kept down. Social work comes with its own jargon, some of which seems designed only to ensure knowledge remains with the professionals. Some – like the term 'client' – is explained as being anti-discriminatory, but could be seen as an attempt to distract. These 'clients' are receiving a 'service', rather than a programme of social control.

The role of social work, we are told, is to meet the needs of various 'care groups', whether that be people with disabilities, older people, or people with addictions. And it is certainly true that there are provisions made for those groups. We might ask whether it is the right provision. And if needs are not fully met, then we are asked to believe the issue is one of resource allocation. Is this credible? These issues are important, but they distract from the core point.

The core point – perhaps as ever – is class. We need only look at the 'problems' social work sees itself as dealing with to spot that there is a social control function; a class dependent function. Hilary Searing, a practicing social worker who writes the Barefoot Social Worker website, says, "There is clearly a link between social work intervention and the policing of the so-called 'underclass'. The gulf between middle class social workers and working class clients has never been wider."

Searing is a social worker with a radical outlook. What's more, her critique deserves attention precisely because it comes from within the profession.

What does she mean by 'the policing of the underclass'? Part of the answer has to do with social norms. Some behaviours are seen as 'normal' within one group of society, but may be seen as 'deviant' by another. A well-known example is the study in which white middle class psychiatrists interpreted raucous domino playing by Afro-Caribbean men as indicating psychological problems. They didn't know – or seemingly care – that this was perfectly normal for that culture. The dominant culture had assumed that its own values – in this case playing dominoes quietly – were normal, and that any variation from that constituted 'insanity'.

In many ways that is what social work does: it tries to 'mend' behaviours that may not actually need mending. Perhaps they are only *different* to the values of the predominantly middle class social workers. And the behaviour in question may well be a rational response to the circumstances individuals find themselves in.

Take, for an example, one of the most heinous crimes in the social work lexicon: a 'client' who doesn't turn up to appointments. This can get the client labelled as uncooperative, unreliable, apathetic, and even disruptive. But what about the client's perspective? Maybe their experience has been that the appointments aren't worthwhile. Maybe they find that the social worker doesn't understand their problems, and instead reinterprets the issues with the client being at least partly at fault. Maybe the social worker 'takes over' and leaves the client feeling they have no control in the relationship, that the social worker will do what he or she thinks best anyway. In those circumstances – maybe reinforced by years of experience – why is the client's presence needed? Why be a passive recipient of a service you'd rather not have? And what if you've tried explaining that and haven't been understood or listened to? What if every attempt to delay or cancel an appointment is met by officious disbelief, or seen as another example of 'unreliability'? Well, then maybe you won't even bother giving your apologies.

This raises the issue of 'institutionalisation'. Normally applied to inmates (or, as they'd have us believe, 'patients') of asylums (or 'hospitals'), this might at first not seem applicable to people not detained in a physical asylum. But that is to miss the point; an institution, in that sense, can be a place where many people are detained, or it might be a one-bedroom flat. It depends on the conditions in which the person is living. If you are a person with learning disabilities and your support staff are

deciding your bedtime, your meal times, what your meals will be, how you should budget your benefits, then your one-bedroom flat is an institution.

Similarly, even if you live independently, you can still be institutionalised. This happens when you become somebody else's workload. You become a 'case'; you have the power to make certain decisions – maybe all – removed. (Although, of course, this will never be admitted: you are a willing participant in the decision-making processes.) And of course social work is underpinned by legislation and regulations which can give other people the power to do things to you 'in your best interests', even against your will. But who decides what is in your best interests? Well, not you; the social work department will decide that.

It became the received wisdom some years ago that institutions didn't solve anything, that they merely perpetuated the problems. So institutions were closed down, and we saw 'Care in the Community' introduced. This was sold in the language of inclusion. And if it did what it said it'd do, then it would be a good thing. But what it really meant was *lack of care*, and people still not being *part of the community*. Social work became part of that process. And what was missed was that social work was itself an institution, and was institutionalising clients. It was disempowering people, and teaching them passivity. It was reinforcing already low self-esteem, and sapping from people the will to act.

Of course part of the issue is the way social work is organised. Again Hilary Searing sees the root of the problems: "What is needed is a shift in values, away from the more authoritarian, controlling social work that is practiced today towards a social work that is truly liberating and empowering." But it is not just the client who is disempowered; the social worker is also disempowered. Unless they are designated a 'Care Manager', they have little or no budgetary discretion. And even where they do, these are often within strict boundaries, and subject to management veto. Your professional judgment about a client's needs will count for little if your manager doesn't share your spending priorities. This can, of course, also be a convenient get-out. 'It isn't my decision, it's my manager's'.

Similarly pushing against institutional imperatives can't be easy. You'd soon get exhausted if you had to do it all the time. And if it singled you out as a 'troublemaker' or made you feel your job security was in question, you might not think it worth the effort. So you either become demoralised, or you buy into the institutionally approved dogma. An authoritarian, hierarchical institution is hardly going to provide a



Photo courtesy Lib Ed

liberating and empowering service.

One of the amazing coincidences of social work assessments is the way needs are met. Your needs are often assessed as requiring to be met by the services that happen to be on offer. People tend to be fitted to the services that exist, rather than services being tailored to the individual needs. And it is sometimes the case that, for example, the hours of support a person is assessed as needing will very much depend on how many hours the budget will stretch to. A few 'unmet need' hours can be useful in inter-departmental budget wars, but too many wouldn't do at all. That might start to look like social work is powerless to help. And it can't admit that. It can be 'under-funded', but it can't be irrelevant.

Like many seemingly liberal features in capitalist society, social work hides not only paternalism, but a social engineering, some might say eugenicist, tendency. There are people who are or have 'a problem'. They 'need treatment'. We have no difficulty in identifying this trend in societies we disapprove of: the Soviet treatment of dissidents as 'insane'; the Catholic Church's literal damnation – maybe taking the form of Inquisition – of people with views it disapproves of. When we are closer to the problem, though, it is sometimes harder to see. Is our well-meaning social work service really just a more

subtle mechanism for maintaining social conformity?

Well, I don't mean to propose a systematic and fully conscious conspiracy. It is partly that by usurping natural solidarity and mutual aid amongst humans that government distorts them into relationships suited to vertical rather than horizontal structures. And it is partly that an inequality of power – whether that is access to resources, access to knowledge, or access to coercive instruments such as legislation – leads to an imbalance in freedoms. These are not wholly conscious mechanisms, but are the by-product (though often desired by-product) of an unquestioning acceptance of the need for authority and hierarchy.

But 'deviance' like the lack of desire to try to find work in a third generation long term unemployed person is unintelligible to those convinced of the work-ethic or the ability of capitalism to provide for all. People without the will to find work need help to see things 'correctly'. Social work is therefore a form of authority, of coercion, used by the state. That many of the 'problems' it tries to fix are symptoms of the very system it is upholding is something it is institutionally unwilling or unable to see.

Steve McKee

The Barefoot Social Worker website mentioned in the text is at www.radical.org.uk/barefoot

Commentary

Nuff respect'

I think the RESPECT coalition, and the various other moves to form left alternatives to Labour deserve more thoughtful coverage than the puerile commentary in the last Freedom (29th May 2004). What makes RESPECT significant is the very fact of the involvement of substantial numbers of young Muslims in non-faith based anti-imperialist politics. It has to be conceded also I think that George Galloway has played a principled role in developing solidarity with Iraq and with the Palestinian struggle. Re-telling the story of Galloway visiting Saddam (and mis-representing what he said) is hardly likely to give us the ear of those who acknowledge that he's gone out on a limb over these issues – particularly given the clear attempts to smear him (as they attempted with Scargill) by the state. A proper critique of RESPECT ought to focus on the short-termism of the SWP, who will seek to pull the plug on the coalition if it doesn't deliver immediate gains, and the fact that RESPECT is focused entirely around electoralism – it has developed as yet no real community base at all – and so is faced with the classic contradiction which befalls every left wing electoralist project that it has a programme of undeniably attractive reforms but no extra-parliamentary social weight through which it might deliver them.

The fact that RESPECT has no reputation in practice within working class communities doesn't though preclude some of the forces within the coalition learning the lessons of electoralism and seeking to develop a different-direct action based practice. As Asad Rehman, Galloway's political assistant, acknowledges, even if the SWP pull out "such a process itself will leave the Muslim community in its larger sense 'more politically aware'." RESPECT does represent, as Rehman claims, at least the beginning of a coherent discourse between the left and the Muslim community, and we should not shut ourselves out of that discourse by offering nothing other than mockery to its most serious proponents.

RESPECT in one sense represents a considerable advance on the efforts of the Independent Working Class Association – a grouping more favourably considered by some anarchists. The IWCA has done a lot of good credible work in working class communities to restore the reputation of autonomous working class politics after years of neglect from the left. It has a coherent, well argued programme and a body of respected activists. If you read its website though, you'd think the second Gulf war never happened. The IWCA appears to have abandoned the lesson learned and hard-fought by its Red Action founders – that a coherent working class politics has to have an anti-imperialist dimension. The IWCA behaves as if international issues are of no concern to the working class – but even on the level of basic economics this makes no sense. New Labour wrote itself a blank cheque to finance its Iraq

Quiz answers

1. Hitler. They twice got close, in Munich and Nuremberg, but both attempts were sadly foiled.
2. Anarchists, of course, and also Slovene nationalists.
3. From Coptic Street, near the British Museum, where one of its founders had a bookshop.
4. Parliament.

adventure – its cost over £6 billion to date. The cost will be paid by the working class – in cuts to schools, the NHS, housing, etc. If we don't make that connection we build a working class politics which behaves as if it doesn't have to ever consider which side its on in capital's wars, even while our class pay the price for them.

RESPECT has made none of the positive advances the IWCA has – they haven't done the groundwork – they haven't addressed issues of working class unity, the need for a socialist politics rooted in class issues, not just liberal rhetoric about equality and justice. It is though still the case that RESPECT has an audience with some left-looking Muslim activists, and it does, as Galloway states, represent a serious effort to take the momentum of the anti-war movement forward to an electoral challenge to New Labour. It will probably fail, but if and when it does we need to have more than sarcasm to offer to those involved, and more than anti-election rhetoric to offer to IWCA activists – who will be right to point out that the working class audience for militant direct action will continue to diminish so long as those within the anarchist movement who believe in working class autonomy carry on with business as usual and maintain an isolation in practice from working class communities that makes a nonsense of the pro-working class politics we espouse.

Paul Maguire

Good moaning

Donald Rooum is continuously attempting to get anarchists to support GM crops. He states he hopes this "correspondence may have encouraged a few to think." I would suggest that Donald's letters will reinforce the opinions of those anarchists who are anti-GM. After all, Donald (like the biotech companies) has boiled a complex socio-economic and ecological issue into one of 'safety', skilfully avoiding any issue which may paint GM in a bad light. And even on this issue he fails to convince.

He claims my "mistaken belief" that the tests were invalid comes via Michael Meacher. Yet Nature magazine reported the same fact, namely that "positive results for a third crop ... have been called into doubt as the weedkiller used on most of the conventional plants is to be phased out" (23rd October 2003, page 751). And what of the "four different regimes" Donald talks of? Looking at the article from Nature he cites, I find it full of conditional statements. Thus the ban of triazine is "likely to reduce" the (marginal) positive benefits of GM maize. This is based on some speculative analysis, assuming the "probable replacements" for the triazine pesticides as well as the conventional management techniques which will "probably" be used. Not to forget that "tentative approximation" used for non-GM crops was "the mean of the pooled categories," which included those which used the soon to be banned pesticide post-emergence. Based on this, the authors (two of whom declared a "competing financial interest" of being paid by a biotech corporation) state that "if" this "pooled category" was "representative" and "if" the GM crops are managed the same, then a GM crop is still marginally better than non-GM but by a reduced amount.

So Donald is asking us to use the planet's ecology as a laboratory for a technology whose long term impact is unknown based an article which is rooted in speculation and assumptions. Not to

mention the original test which had only a "few sites" (four!) that used non-triazine pesticides. Suffice to say, this is hardly convincing. However, all this is moot anyway. The biotech company in question has withdrawn the approved crop, complaining that any buyer will have to grow the crop under the same conditions as it was tested. Is Donald really asking us to support the introduction of a crop which will be grown in different conditions from the test which, he claims, proves its safety. As I said, this is extremely bad science.

Iain McKay

Lib parenting

Diego Garcia seems to think I was trying to tell him how to bring up his children. I don't remember doing any such thing. I do remember writing an article on libertarian parenthood, though. I don't remember saying anyone who disagreed with the article was a 'bad parent'. Or that my way was the only way to be a 'good parent', far less the only way to be a libertarian parent.

Diego seems to imagine that I am recommending he doesn't lift his youngest child off the windowsill. Does he imagine my advice would be to stand by and watch as the toddler opens the window and falls out? Or that a child running into the path of an oncoming car ought not to be physically restrained? Where would he get that impression? I think we can safely say that snatching a teetering child from in front of an open window or oncoming traffic is perfectly compatible with anarchism.

Furthermore, I don't understand Diego's point about taxation; it doesn't seem to me to be analogous to the family, but I do agree with him that anarchism should be about "trying to extend my political and philosophical ideals to as many areas of my life as possible." Especially the 'as possible' bit. It seems to me pretty similar to the point I made in the letter that was published above his in the 29th May issue of Freedom.

However, while I agree with him that there is not one but many ways of being a libertarian parent, I would question what part even reluctant smacking might play in that. I understand that Diego is against smacking. But smacking children, no matter how reluctantly, is coercion. Anarchists interested in children and education from Godwin onwards would argue smacking plays no part in a libertarian relationship with children. This isn't about me preaching to Diego, it is about what constitutes 'libertarian'. Diego can and will bring up his children in whichever way he thinks best, but the moment smacking becomes a feature of the way he does it is the moment it ceases to be libertarian. That is not the same as arguing that anyone who has ever in any circumstances smacked their children is a bad person. Or that they are not libertarian. People make mistakes. People lose their tempers. Of course they do; even anarchists. (That is a joke, by the way). But if you reserve the right to resort to smacking as a default position – as a deliberate feature of your strategy – then that isn't libertarian.

Steve McKee

Punishing

Anyone reading John Shute's letter without having seen my article would be forgiven for thinking the article was about restorative justice. It wasn't. I mentioned it only at the end, and in a particular context. My article was

primarily about two things I thought of interest to anarchists:

First, asking what conclusions can be drawn from the New Earswick experiment in putting 'more Bobbies on the beat'. The research found that contrary to the general perception, crime went up, people felt more fearful, and the community felt more divided. John appeared not to find this information worthy of mention. I thought it interesting enough to head a feature with.

Secondly, the current data which shows that the criminal justice system discriminates against certain groups in society. John found this information 'routine'. Well, the argument might be routine, but isn't it useful to have the latest data to back up what anarchists have long argued, especially when others may find our position difficult to believe? I thought so. If John doesn't, then he needn't use it.

John agrees that the root of crime is to be found in the breakdown of human solidarity. I certainly didn't think it an original point, but I did want to begin a discussion on how anarchists might practically respond to that fact. Not in an anarchist society, but here and now. I think anarchism too often dodges that question, instead concentrating on society after the revolution. In that context I suggested that there were 'some aspects' of restorative justice that were of interest. I in no way intended to argue that it was all great stuff, as John appears to have taken me to mean. There is only so much space available for any feature in Freedom, so I didn't go into great detail on restorative justice, but I did point out the features I thought of particular interest. John appears to have ignored these, and instead concentrated on things I wasn't arguing. I specifically say in my article that "within the restorative justice dialogue there is much to be wary of." John rightly highlights some of those things, for example asking about conflict resolution between tenant and landlord. Yet I specifically warn of restorative justice being used by the middle class to further oppress the working class. It therefore isn't a criticism of my article to give examples of how the middle class might do that; it is agreeing with me.

If John or anyone else wants to debate how anarchists might help communities find responses to crime and the breakdown of solidarity, then I feel my article has done its job. If, however, John wants to put forward arguments I'm not making and then attack them as if I was – for example, "should anarchists really be embracing this shite?" Answer, of course not! – then I can only imagine that either my article wasn't clearly written, for which I apologise, or that John didn't read it properly, over which I have no influence.

Steve McKee

The feature on Crime and Punishment in the 15th May issue of Freedom, made some very good points on the futility of imprisonment which is encouraging to read. However, the crime rate isn't going up and has been declining over the last two decades. Since 1992, youth crime has declined by 21% (see stats by NACRO and the British Crime Survey). The prison population is still growing due to new laws being added to the statute books and longer prison sentences being introduced.

I also agree with Steve's article that anarchists should embrace certain aspects of restorative justice, even though it is a joke that 'justice' will prevail from anything organised by the criminal justice system. I prefer the term conflict

resolution, as crime has no ontological reality, if you were to get rid of criminal law, you will then have conflict/s between individuals. I would dispose of magistrates courts and replace them with community centres where conflict disputes could be settled.

Restorative justice has mainly been used for petty offences committed by young people, as the Thames Valley police introduced reparation back in 1994. There have been more serious cases such as rape and murder which have attempted to use restorative justice, but this could obviously only happen if both parties voluntarily agree to it. RJ is being introduced in to criminal law and I fear that it will be used as another form of social control, rather than an as it should be, an alternative to the criminal justice process.

I also agree with Richard Alison's letter, 'Where to now?', from the same edition. Anarchists are stuck in a catch-22 position, as we cannot provide practical alternatives, as there can be no blueprint for an anarchist society. Not until we overthrow the British State, the UN and of course, NATO. Anarchists will always remain marginal, inward-looking, exclusive and alienating, because we do not want to engage with the rest of society unless they meet our terms and conditions?

The No More Prison website is proposing to relaunch the Radical Alternatives to Prison RAP, a progressive group of individuals during the 1970s and 1980s, which actively provided practical alternatives to custody.

Lee H.

See www.alternatives2prison.uk.com

Voting debate

As an anarchist who has advocated voting against the BNP in the European elections I feel I must respond to the Editorial in the last issue of Freedom (29th May). Let's be absolutely clear – advocating a tactical vote against a fascist party is not the same as advocating voting as a means to achieve wider social change. Far from it. It is a strategy aimed solely at the BNP (and NF where they stand). I will *not* be voting in the local elections or the general election as there will not be any BNP candidates standing where I live. This is not the case in the European elections where the BNP are putting up candidates in every constituency and where proportional representation means votes can make a difference. Don't confuse the two arguments.

Voting alone will not stop the fash – but who says it will? Your editorial writer notes that the BNP will fare better than Respect. It is quite possible in the North West that they may break through the 5% barrier and get Griffin elected. If they don't it will be more due to the support that the equally far Right UKIP is receiving than the activity of antifascists.

It seems quite logical to me as an anarchist and an antifascist to use a vote as a tactic against the BNP. This is the territory that they are choosing to fight on after. Don't we advocate 'by all means necessary'? Voting in this case is a legitimate means. What do you achieve by not voting against the BNP in terms of stopping their rise?

Freedom says that "as anarchists we should be trying to tackle issues like housing, poor public services, lack in investment in housing, low benefits" – the sort of issues that breed support for the far right. I agree. There may well be lots of anarchists doing this; if so it

Commentary

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would be good to read about them in Freedom. We are though a long way off from anything even remotely resembling a "mass working class anarchist movement" Freedom refers to. The tactics we use today need to engage with the reality of now not some abstract future.

Where I live the far-left is tiny and split (thanks to Respect). You can count the number of active anarchists across the whole county on the fingers of one hand and still have a few left over. We want to stop the fash. The best we have been able to do with the limited resources we have is to shove leaflets through people's doors urging them not to vote for the BNP and tackle racists when we meet them. This isn't pure anarchism, neither is voting, but I want to see the BNP smashed. Voting against them is one way to do this and I'm going to have no problem doing it.

A quick response to Les Ismore's letter about my piece on the decline of voting (Commentary, 29th May). I think that everyone has the potential to be an anarchist. In fact I think it is a natural way for people to behave. If I didn't there wouldn't be much point being an anarchist as I am not into imposing my views on anyone. I don't though think that the decline in voting means that anarchism is any closer. What I do think it may signal is a decline in support for liberal democracy. To move from where we are to where we want to be this is a prerequisite. People are not going to believe that the world can be run without states until they see through the sham of elections. This is why I said that declining participation in voting is 'good news for anarchism'. This is also why I do not advocate voting *per se*; other than in very exceptional circumstances.

Richard

Les Ismore continues his attempts to get anarchists to join the circus of elections. I'm all in favour of using elections "as an opportunity to reach out to people" - that is why I support anti-election campaigns. I do reject the idea that anarchists should be urging 'tactical voting' simply because it drags us away from presenting the anarchist message at election times. As for the results of elections making a difference to everyday organising, well Labour replaced the Tories. Was this a significant improvement? The same with the Spanish elections. I'm sure that the new government will be ignoring/oppressing the population just like Aznar's did - and the previous Socialist government before that.

Ultimately, it is our ability to resist the government of the day which really counts and we should be trying to build that power. So, given this, I feel that the anarchist anti-election message is more relevant than joining the chorus of politicians who are urging us to vote for someone, anyone, in order to make the game seem legitimate.

As such, I think that creating a dialogue with the increasing ranks of people who see through the farce of elections, who either don't vote or vote against, not for, parties, is the best way of spreading anarchist ideas and alternatives. It seems obvious that only by directly building the "new creative living and working arrangements" Les says he wants can we promote libertarian ideas. And that means constructive self-activity in our communities and workplaces rather than bourgeois electioneering. Which, as history has repeatedly shown, as deradicalised all who take part in it and not brought us any nearer

anarchism.

Iain McKay

Les Ismore also seems to be under some misapprehension: if our non-voting propaganda has helped to make voting 'uncool', why would we need to change tack now? What policies would we vote for? Tactical voting for anarchists? Dear, dear. Isn't that following the opportunist line of the trots? Some individual members of political parties may be sincere in their political stance but this is to ignore the fact that they don't stay that way once on any rung of the career ladder. Those who remain in the party and choose not to or are unable to follow a career are election fodder for the careerists. There's no need for us to join their dispirited ranks.

It is not 'purist rejectionism' to abstain from voting but a question of principle and efficacy: direct action remains the best method, which is why it is so frequently frowned on in the orthodox media as the tactic of 'extremists'. Voting is indeed a diversion from direct action. If we want to remain in touch with sympathetic mainstream elements we don't need to ditch our principles and accept their expediency, but explain, explain (as Lenin said).

Roy Emery
(SolFed type anarchist)

E-Useless

The EU: I'm afraid I can remember our referendum (thanks to Harold Wilson) on staying in the European Economic Community (which Ted Heath had already taken us into).

In fact the only times I've voted nationally (yes, I admit it - with shame!) were firstly for Heath who promised we'd not go in without a free vote in Parliament - where a majority against seemed do-able - secondly for Wilson who promised a referendum. Now admittedly he changed tack and put all the money behind a yes vote which he got. But he did keep his promise. Not a lot of the voters did! Everyone I came across was afraid to pull out at the time. Afterwards I could only ever come across one guy who admitted to voting yes!

The facts on the CAP were well known if waved aside by the pro campaign. The price of food did indeed multiply - there was never any doubt. That alone was surely enough for any apolitical folk to say no. but the point I tried to put over to people was that the EEC was now favoured by *all* parties, but they were giving the people this chance to say something direct.

The European project should have been rejected irrespective of one's personal leanings, since we had this lone little accidental chance to tell the politicians they were not all mighty. What the hell - we're not all anarchists are we!

Paul Campbell

Where to now

Contrary to what some of us may have suspected prior to the establishment of the Campaign Against Prison Slavery, and contrary to what some may still suppose, the issue of forced labour in British prisons has generally proved a very popular one with the general public. I'm not sure about Richard Alison's experiences (see Freedom, 15th May), but this has certainly been the case on all the pickets of Wilkinson stores I have been on personally (around twenty), and it is what is being reported back from CAPS pickets all around the country. People are shocked and surprised by what is happening in

British prisons and are expressing their support for the campaign. They are taking our leaflets for their friends, refusing to shop at Wilko's, and sometimes even making financial contributions to the campaign. On one Leeds picket we even had a newspaper seller ask if he could have a bundle of leaflets so as to put one in each paper he sold.

Of course, we have sometimes had individuals say that prisoners should be made to work, but these comments are surprisingly rare, and expressed by people who have not actually read our leaflets. When it's pointed out to these people that the profits of the private companies who exploit prison labour are actually being subsidised by the taxpayer, and that their job could be on the line next, they tend to sing a different tune. Generally though, people are not supporting the campaign because of their own interests, but because they share our moral repugnance at slave labour.

Through the Campaign Against Prison Slavery we are putting prison issues on the agenda, in the high street, and helping to expose the reality of the secret world of the British prison system. I think it has made a lot of people think twice about what is being done in their names, and we are building links with many people well outside the Anarchist ghetto. While the campaign is certainly not exclusively anarchist, it has allowed us to put forward an anarchist position on prisons. For example, I think it unlikely that the BBC would invite me to speak on the issue of prison abolition directly, but because they interview me about CAPS I get the opportunity to put forward abolitionist arguments.

CAPS pickets are taking place regularly around the country, and I would encourage everyone to get involved. They represent a rare opportunity to communicate with ordinary people about an issue that should be important to us all.

Mark Barnsley

Holy Bakunin!

Iain McKay's piece on Bakunin (29th May 2004) is typical of presentations of anarchism's 'great men'. Little context is provided and no effort is made to read critically. The purpose of the following letter is to demonstrate that despite Bakunin's canonisation as one of anarchism's big men, a detailed analysis of his writing reveals not so much Bakunin's ideas but the assumptions of Bakunin's time. I will start by situating Bakunin in early modernity. Then I will engage in a critical reading of Bakunin's God and the State. This will focus on Bakunin's conceptions religion and history. I will say here, and now: great man history needs to be consigned to the dustbin. History is not about individuals but anonymous structures and forces.

Definitions of modernity note a series of phenomena including technological innovation, industrialisation, massive demographic upheaval, urbanisation, systems of mass communication, education and mass literacy, capitalism, nations, nationalisms and processes of secularisation. Modernity marks a shift in the production of commodities and the production of knowledge and, moreover, heralds a transformation in human experience of space and time. Furthermore, the changes mentioned above have been greeted as harbingers of a strangely familiar promise for liberals, Marxists and anarchists alike. Science, the city and the machine will bring freedom from poverty, hunger and

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FREEDOM READERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

We at the Freedom newspaper collective have been thinking about the future of Freedom. We feel that we wish to use our resources more effectively, and so are assessing the value of Freedom in its current format. Also unfortunately we need to make the paper more financially viable. We would like all Freedom readers, subscribers and supporters to help us create the best possible publication for the anarchist/libertarian movement, and so we ask that you please tick the boxes and answer the following questions about what you'd like Freedom to be.

Where do you usually buy Freedom?

I have a subscription
 Other
 (if other, please specify)

In Freedom, would you like to see more, less or the same of the following features?

	LESS	THE SAME	MORE
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Short Britain news stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long International news stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short International news stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In-depth features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strike news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community struggle news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anarchist movement news/action reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prison news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
News about corporations and government policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anarchist theory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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(Semi-)Humorous/satirical articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quiz/games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anything else?			

Which of the following formats for Freedom would you prefer?

Newspaper, 8 pages, fortnightly, price £1
 Magazine, 16 pages, fortnightly, price £1
 Magazine, 32 pages, monthly, price £1.50

What do you think the purpose of Freedom should be?

And just to satisfy our curiosity ...

How would you describe your politics?

Please send your completed questionnaires to: Freedom Questionnaire, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX by 1st July 2004. If you'd like to add your name and address (you could use the sub form overleaf) it will be included in a prize draw to win a copy of the forthcoming Freedom Press title A Summer in the Park by Tony Allen

Commentary

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disease, liberation from the irrationalities of religion, the suffocating ties of parochialism and release from the arbitrary exercise of power. The modern, then, is defined in terms of a self-conscious opposition of the new against the old that is understood in terms of a radical break with a so-called pre-modern past. Critically, religion occupies a central space in deliberations upon relations between the (pre-modern) past and the (modern) present.

God and the State commences with a critique of philosophical idealism. According to Bakunin, idealist philosophy begins with spirit, mind and God, which as eternal and perfect entities and/or qualities, reduce matter – and therefore humanity – to that which is perishable and vile. According to Bakunin, philosophical idealism can only conceive of history or time as a process of degeneration and corruption.

Materialist philosophy begins with humanity, with life and energy. It constitutes time not as a process of decay but rather as a “wholly natural movement from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher, from the inferior to the superior” (page 13). In other words, Bakunin subscribes to the notion of history as a progressive movement from darkness to light and from barbarism to civilisation. Just as biological life on Earth began with simple organisms that evolved into complex organisms, so human societies evolved from hunter-gatherer societies into industrial-scientific societies. According to this narrative, anything connected with the past is backward or recessive.

Bakunin inscribes a negative relation with the past typical to modernity, constructing religion as an obstacle to reason and progress and the future anarchist society, specifically as an early stage of intellectual and/or social development that must be overcome. Yet, like Freud, Bakunin regards religion as having been a necessary stage in the development of human civilisation. Indeed, according to Bakunin, “the divine idea ... is an error historically necessary in the development of humanity” (22).

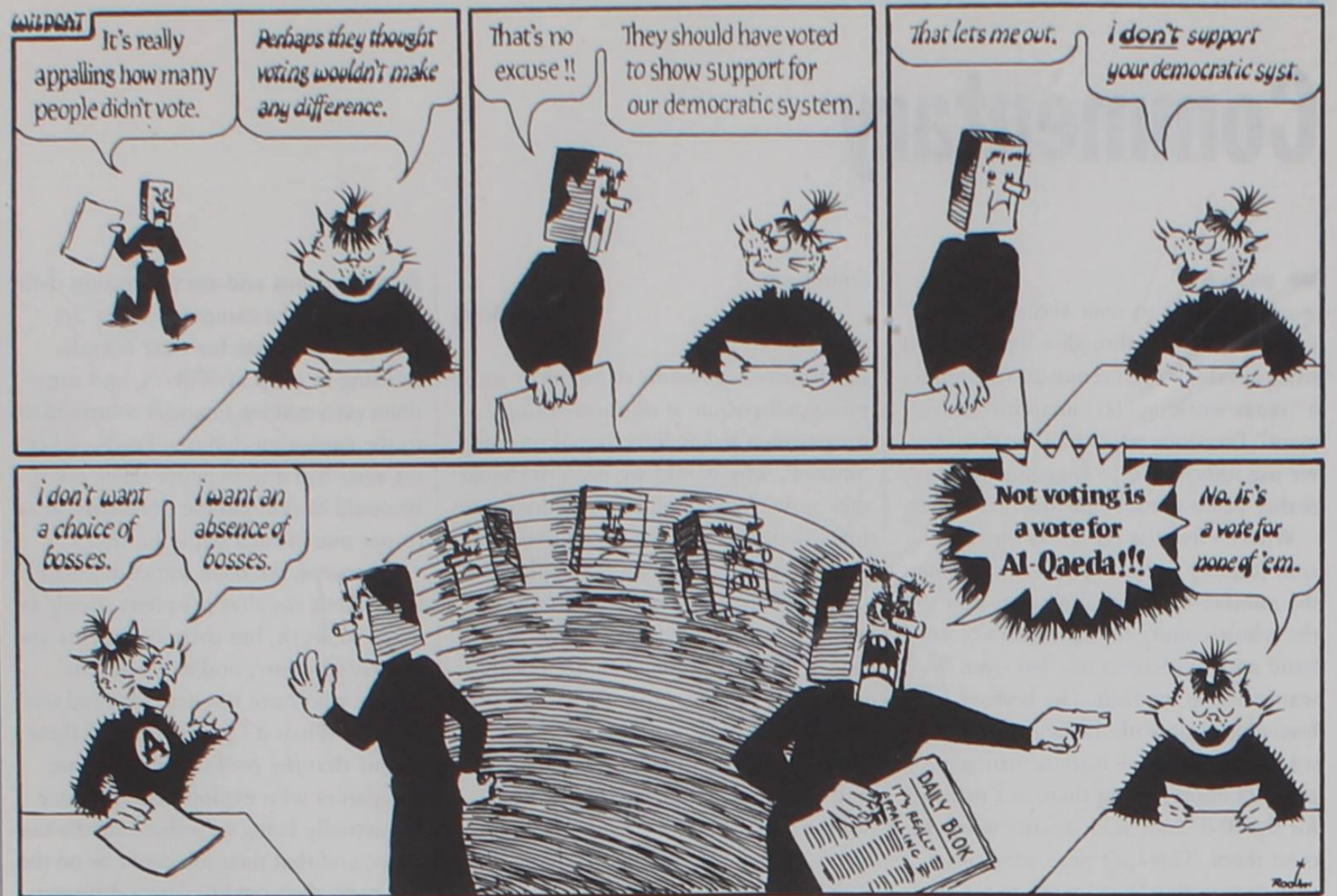
Elsewhere, Bakunin claims like Marx, that religion is a product of empirical error (“the credulous fancy of men”) and a sign of protest or “discontent” (23). He argues that religion produces and perpetuates ignorance and that it prevents human beings – echoing Marx’s theory of ideology – from understanding the true nature of their relations with society as a whole. As such, Bakunin asserts that science is the only legitimate method for the production of knowledge because it manufactures knowledge that accurately reflects reality. According to Bakunin, the scientific method is consonant with the idea of liberty. Religion – as a source of knowledge – must be discredited and overcome, for it threatens to condemn humanity to the shadows of ignorance and slavery.

Science provides the weapons, so to speak, with which religious knowledge can be tested and shown to be false. The exposure of religious truths as falsehoods is an essentially liberating act.

Thus far, I have sketched Bakunin’s general position *vis à vis* religion. I have already noted how close this is to positions taken by Freud and Marx. In order to understand Bakunin’s posture in more depth it is necessary to turn to Bakunin’s conception of history. What follows is a lengthy quote that I will refer back to for the remainder of this essay: “History then appears to us as the revolutionary negation, now slow, apathetic, sluggish, now passionate and powerful, of the past. It consists precisely in the progressive negation of the primitive animality of man by the development of his humanity. Man, a wild beast, cousin of the gorilla, has emerged from the profound darkness of animal instinct into the light of the mind, which explains in a wholly natural way all his past mistakes and partially consoles us for his present errors. He has gone out from animal slavery, and passing through divine slavery, a temporary condition between his animality and his humanity, he is now marching on to the conquest and realisation of human liberty ... Behind us is our animality and before us our humanity; human light, the only thing that can warm and enlighten us, the only thing that can emancipate us, give us dignity, freedom, and happiness, and realise fraternity among us, is never at the beginning but, relatively to the epoch in which we live, always at the end of history. Let us, then, never look back, let us look ever forward; for forward is our sunlight, forward our salvation” (21).

God and the State was written some time between 1870 and 1872, and Bakunin is clearly a man of his time. The words in the passage above reflect powerful currents in Western European thought towards the end of the nineteenth century that also structure the historical, sociological, anthropological and philosophical writings of the likes of Comte, Hegel, Tylor, and Spencer, among many others. For these thinkers – as for Bakunin – religion occupies a critical space in meditations upon the advent of modernity.

According to Bakunin, history is an objective structure that operates according to verifiable laws of progress. As such, Bakunin imagines three historical stages or epochs which define the human journey from savagery to civilisation. The first he describes in terms of ‘animality’. This, for Bakunin, is the darkest hour of human history, where men and women are barely distinguishable from animals, and are, as such, slaves to instinct. The second stage is characterised by religion. Although in the passage above this emerges as a single stage or epoch, elsewhere in the Bakunin subscribes to the notion – popular during his lifetime – that religion evolved from so-called fetishism, passing through several distinct stages through polytheism before reaching its final expression in



monotheism (69). The final stage in Bakunin’s conception of history is simultaneously “the end of history,” the moment when reason and liberty finally triumph over superstition and bondage and the conditions for an anarchist society prevail.

There are two important points here. The first thing that strikes one is the thoroughly Christo-centric nature of the promise articulated by Bakunin. The future (anarchist) society is there, it awaits us – we who have journeyed so long – it is our ‘salvation’. Given Bakunin’s enlightened hostility to Christianity, it is ironic that his conception of history should resemble the Christian redemption so closely. Moreover, the revolution, in Bakunin’s writing, has the aura of the messianic as an unrepeatable and miraculous event that will propel humanity into the promised-land.

The second thing that leaps out at one is how unremarkable Bakunin’s (anarchist) promise is. Although Bakunin seeks to distance himself and his vision from liberal and Marxist promises about the future, what strikes one is how profoundly the late nineteenth century speaks through Bakunin. The text has meaning not because of what is known about the author, Bakunin himself, but because of what is known about the period in which he was writing and living, and the general ideas – scientific, political and philosophic – popular at that time. Bakunin’s ideas about religion and history are neither distinctly Bakunin’s nor distinctly anarchist, but are rather part of wider discourses about progress and about the modern. These discourses of progress are vital to the construction of a pre-modern past represented in terms of backwardness, ignorance and superstition, and to a conception of history as progress in true knowledge and freedom.

Paul-François Tremlett

A sideways look

Imagine my surprise when nearly a dozen different leaflets fell through my letterbox. I expect one or two a day, usually for pizza or Indian take-away, but this was all too much. On closer inspection the one on the top appeared to be from the English Democrats, which sounded fishier than a battered cod and chips. It sported the cross of a Middle Eastern saint who is generous with his intercessions, covering as he does England, Aragon, Moscow, Georgia, Catalonia, the boy scouts, Genoa, Greece, Germany, Ferrara, Malta, Lebanon, Istanbul, Lithuania, farm workers, Venice, Palestine, Canada, soldiers, butchers, skin diseases, herpes and syphilis. There are more but you get the picture. A quick check on the web and I find them to be basically anti-EU Tories who want an English parliament and fewer immigrants. Still, at least their leaflet isn’t glossy and looks like it comes from a fringe political group.

Next in the pile was UKIP, Thatcher’s children. Their leaflet was boring but did at least look like they might have some pizza or curry on offer on the inside. Sadly they didn’t. Nor did they bother to mention the threat to this mythical sovereignty from one-sided treaties with the US Empire. Was I surprised?

Next up came the latest vehicle for Gorgeous George, Respect. Tellingly, this one actually had a shopping list of demands and was the first to mention defending refugees rather than implying they need to be attacked. Worthy demands in the main, but not a clue of how we might get there apart from showing each other ‘respect’. Labour’s was the biggest and glossiest, looking more like a fold-out menu from a trendy brasserie than a take-away leaflet. You can tell they are worried because they talked loads about extra nurses and the NHS and very little about Europe – which is after all what these elections are supposedly about. The Lib-Dems carried on with the glossiness, but didn’t seem to have got the idea about pizza delivery leaflets. Someone really should tell them that going on one demo and a bit of voting in Parliament isn’t enough to stop a war. The Greens were next – these people do a nice line in organic, sustainable wood-fired pizzas, I think, but their name will put off anyone berated for not eating them in their youth. But Ultimate Pizza and Chicken was the most believable and get my vote.

I didn’t get anything from the Real Tories or the fascists. I’m not complaining. I suspect that our good friends in the Royal Mail probably boycotted the latter, as for the former, let’s hope everyone

else failed to get them.

The pages of Freedom recently have featured several anarchists discuss using voting in elections as a tactic. Quite a few anarchists probably will vote next week (last week by the time you read this), often for quite personal reasons or because they think it might make a difference where they live. I am unconvinced but I do think we need to get away from a purely negative response to elections, often just done in a knee-jerk way. Turnout is likely to continue to fall and gimmicks like all-postal voting (pushed through because Labour felt so threatened in the North West) will prove only a temporary blip. The collapse of trust in politics and politicians is good but we are still a long way from people trusting in themselves.

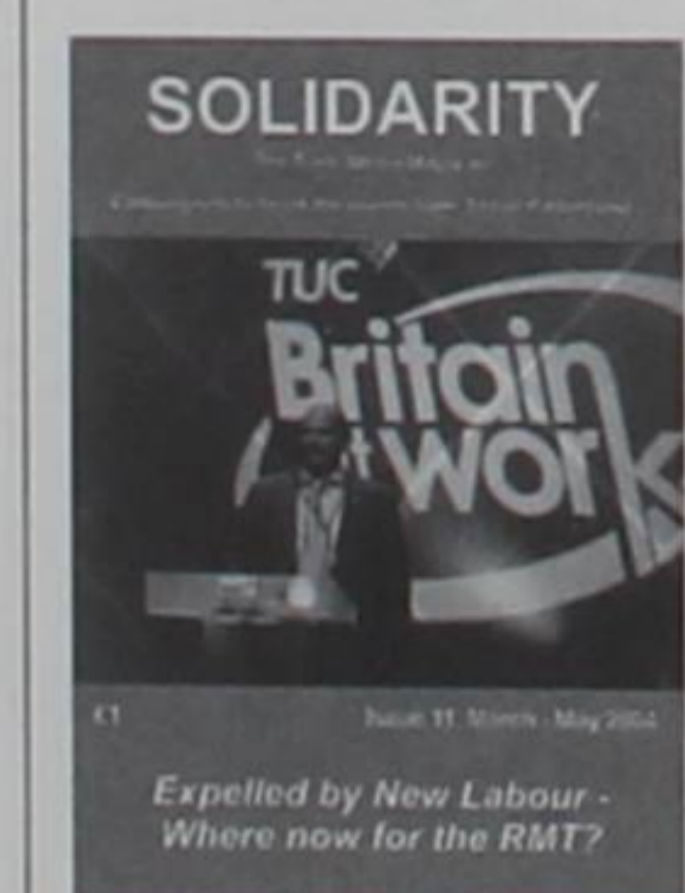
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Magazines



Anarcho-Syndicalist Review issue no 38 Winter 2004 £2.95 (add 50p in the UK, £1 elsewhere)

The latest ASR focusses on struggles for a shorter working week. It also contains news of strike victories, ‘development’ in Africa and other international anarchist news and reviews.



Solidarity issue no 11 May 2004 £1 (add 50p in the UK, £1 elsewhere)

The campaigning trade union magazine features the RMT after expulsion from the Labour Party, the FBU grassroots and much more.

The quiz

1. Who did the Schwartzrotgruppe, originally from Dusseldorf, try to assassinate?
2. In 1943, when fascism fell in Italy, who were the last to be released from the prison camp at Ventotene?
3. One of the predecessors of Cienfuegos Press was Coptic. Where did the name come from?
4. According to Republican graffiti in Belfast, what was the political wing of the British Army?

Answers on page 6

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