

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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NUCLEAR WASTE CONTRACTS SOLD

EXCLUSIVE

As Freedom goes to press, Britain's nuclear waste industry is entering the final stages of privatisation. American companies are leading the bidding, including a strong challenge from Halliburton, The Washington Group, and a consortium of Amec, Shaw group and CH2M.

But an exclusive investigation for Freedom has revealed that none of the five have a reliable safety record when dealing with nuclear waste.

Halliburton are under investigation for alleged involvement in the theft of radioactive materials from Nigeria's government in 2002. The materials were recovered from Germany only after Nigeria imposed a ban on further national contracts with the group.

The Washington Group declared bankruptcy in 2001, and was in administration until two years ago. They currently have a work backlog worth \$4.0bn. The group are involved in various ongoing court cases in the US, according to their 2004 SEC filings, which said: "The typical negligence claim [was] that we had a duty but failed to warn the plaintiff or claimant of, or failed to protect the plaintiff or claimant from, the dangers of asbestos."

Amec are heavily involved with Sellafield, the facility bearing particular

mention for its recent fine over dumping nuclear waste into the sea.

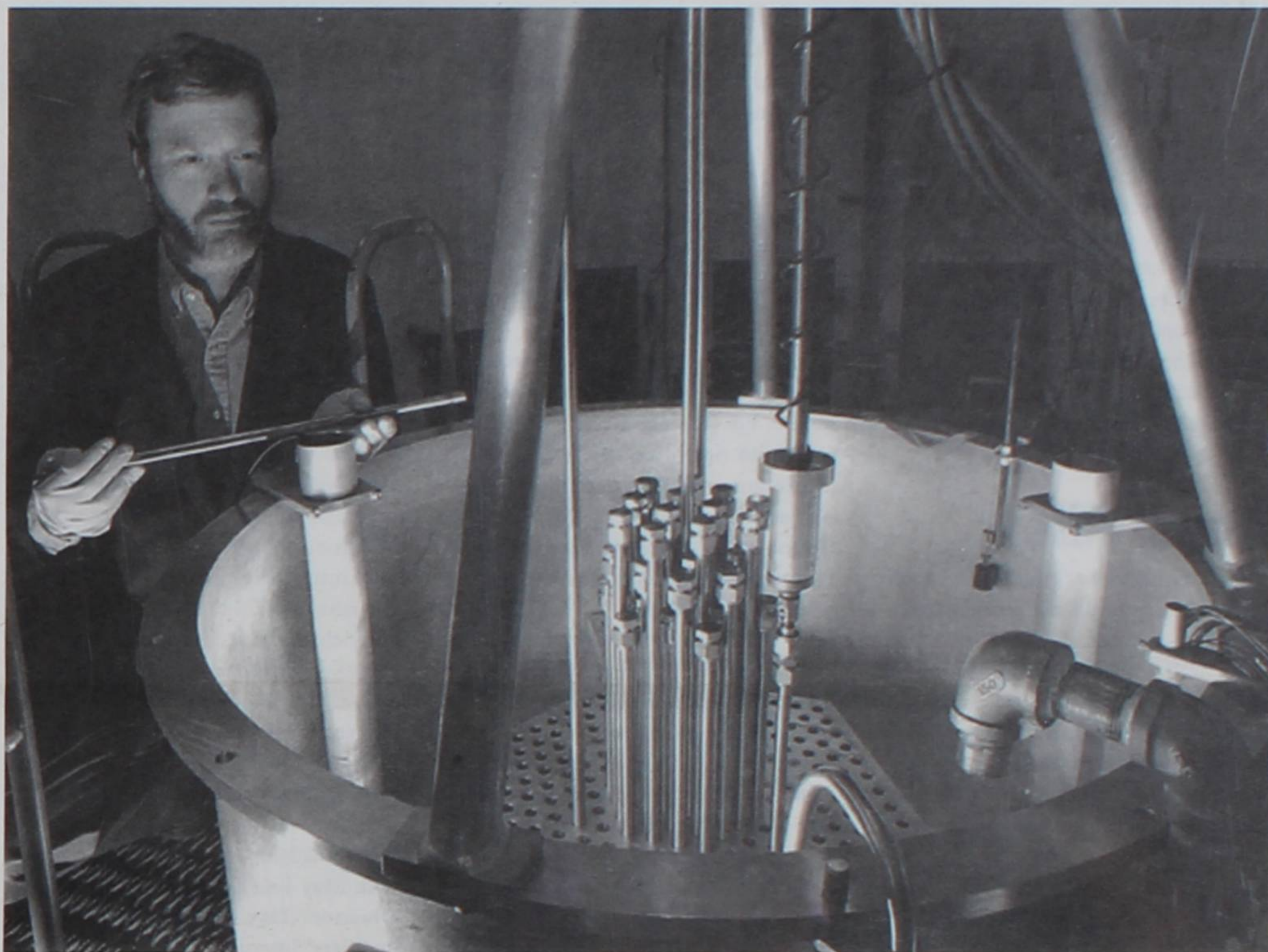
The Shaw group specialise in making pipes while CH2M was fined \$300,000 on 10th March for safety violations which led to the exposure of a member of staff to dangerous levels of radioactivity in July last year.

Contracts for processing the highly dangerous materials are worth £2bn a year. The companies will have no liabilities if something goes wrong and will not receive penalties for late or shoddy work, leading to fears that US-based company bosses will cut corners.

As they won't be prosecuted for any accidents or affected by waste spillage from across the Atlantic, the only motive for US companies will be to take an ever-larger percentage of the money provided in their contract.

The news comes hot on the heels of new evidence that the US is keeping its elderly nuclear stockpiles underneath Lakenheath in Suffolk, and has led to further fears among nuclear activists that the UK, currently discussing the possibility of introducing more stations to resolve Europe's deepening energy crisis, is not serious about protecting its citizenry.

Mell from Theatre of War, who campaign on nuclear issues, said: "Sensible people know there is nothing you can do with nuclear waste, so the



only people you'll get attempting to take this on are people who don't give a damn - who will hide it."

Amec claim to have discovered a means of making nuclear waste safe for twice as long as previous dumping techniques,

extending the point at which leaks could occur to around forty years.

Jack Ray

COLOMBIAN KILLINGS

Two sets of assassinations have come to light in the last two weeks, inflicted on Colombian farm union organisers by the state's own armed forces. Three members of farming union FENSUAGRO, from San Jaun de Sumapaz near Bogota, went missing on 18th March. Days later media reports alleged that three guerrillas had been killed, and on 27th March, the farmers' bodies were found in a morgue in the nearby town of Fusagasuga.

A coalition of community groups and trade unions in the region have released a public statement saying that all three men were well-known political and peasant activists. The Colombian Army has claimed that all three were guerrillas that they killed in combat. This is the same claim made by the army last year when they killed three senior trade union leaders in the region of Arauca.

A correspondent for solidarity group Hands off Venezuela has also reporting the killing of eight campesinos (peasants) from the village of San Jose, including Luis Eduardo Guerra, a local community organiser. The following report contains harrowing descriptions.

"I knew two of them, Luis, 35, and his son Deiner Andres who was 11. Luis Eduardo was the target of non-stop death threats from the military/paramilitary forces of the region. Luis Eduardo, his girlfriend, Bellaneira, and his son, Deiner Andrés, went to harvest cacao from his farm about six hours up the mountain from the village. They were on their way home when they saw an army patrol lying in wait further along the path. One of the group, who cannot be named as it would put his life in danger, said, 'Let's run'. 'No', said Luis, 'I've nothing to hide and anyway Deiner can't run well' (Deiner [had been] seriously hurt in August).

"The other person bolted and is still alive. Luis Eduardo, his son and his girlfriend were surrounded by the 17th Brigade, who are based in Apartadó.

"They were taken a few hundred yards away and murdered. No bullets were used as they were strangled. They

were also tortured and mutilated. Deiner's head was found thirty yards from his body, it was detached by brute force, not using a machete. Luis Eduardo's scalp around the back of his head had been sliced through and then pulled forward so that it covered his face.

"The man who escaped hid in the forest for a few hours and then went looking for them. He didn't find them but when he got to a nearby farm he found traces of blood that led him to a shallow grave, which only half-hid the remains of the second family massacred that day. He sent word to San José. The community notified the police and then 120 of them went to find the bodies, to guard them to make sure that the Army did not dress the corpses as guerrillas ...

"The soldiers who massacred these people did not run they've never had to face justice for any of their previous murders and massacres. When confronted by local people about what they had just done, they didn't bother to deny it, and one of them actually said that the locals should be grateful that they hadn't killed more.

"Twelve members of three nearby families are still missing, we fear the worst."

DETERRING DEMOCRACY

When the Iraqi assembly opened on 16th March, the fact that there was no government was dutifully reported. Why this was the case went unmentioned. The BBC news failed to mention why, their reporter Jim Muir in Baghdad saying that coalition politics was a novelty in a country ruled by a tight dictatorship for decades, and the learning curve has been steep.

The implication is clear - it is the fault of the Iraqis themselves. This, however, is not the case.

In any democracy worthy of the name, if a party has 51% in parliament it automatically gets to form a government. This was the case with the last US Presidential election (ignoring for the moment the issue of vote rigging).

Not so in Iraq, where a two-thirds majority is required.

This means that the United Iraqi Alliance, a coalition of Shia parties, that has about 53% of the members of the Iraqi parliament, is not able to form a government.

Six weeks after the election, no government is in sight. Shia/Kurdish negotiations have fallen apart.

Thus the Iraqi democratic process has been gridlocked by this need for super-majorities, a provision imposed by the American occupiers. Why? Simply to secure the continuation of the US occupation and the furthering of US interests by means of a neo-colonial decree. It is an anti-democratic mechanism used to thwart the will of the majority of Iraqis (who, let us not forget, braved great danger to come out and vote).

So remember when Bush and Rice praised the elections, chastising critics for supposedly claiming that Iraqis were not ready for democracy? Well, behind the scenes they made sure that democracy was not really an option. For the Bush administration, the Iraqis are not considered ready enough for any form of self-government not approved of by Washington.

Ironically, the Bush administration's own elections in Iraq confirm Bush's own demand that Syrian troops leave Lebanon "because you cannot hold free and fair elections under foreign military occupation."

As well as being beyond self-parody, it is also true. As US occupied Iraq shows.

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Home and away

FREEDOM

Volume 66 Number 7

Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject government, and all forms of exploitation and domination.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher, founded in 1886. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice – see our website for a full list.

In our building in East London we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host the Autonomy Club meeting room and the Freedom Hacklab open-access IT space.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that people can work together and use direct action to practically improve our lives and build a better world.

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.

Angel Alley

Right well we're back after our Easter break – we hope all our readers had a good few days off.

We've been having trouble doing the mailout of the paper, so if you can help each fortnight with stuffing and stamping envelopes, please email subs@freedompress.org.uk. It's not glamorous, but it has to be done!

Community Action

On the sixth Anniversary of the J18 Carnival Against Capitalism, Saturday 18th June this year, radical community groups Hackney Independent and Haringey Solidarity Group have organised a Community Action Gathering.

On the agenda are practical organising tips, discussions and workshops on improving our neighbourhoods, fighting for decent housing, gentrification and workplace issues.

The gathering will be held from 12 noon until 5.30pm at Oxford House, Bethnal Green Road, London E2. For more info, see www.enrager.net/cag email info@hackneyindependent.org or write to CAG c/o HSG, PO Box 2474, London N8.

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Next issue

Contributions are wanted for future Freedoms. The next issue will be dated 23rd April and the last day to get your copy to us will be Thursday 14th April (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

Freedom for prisoners

As many of you may know, Freedom provides free subscriptions to anyone in prison. If you have friends or family in prison, or regularly write to a prisoner, if they are interested we will be happy to send them a free sample issue or sub. If you are a prisoner yourself we can provide subs to any of your fellow inmates if they wish. Please also feel free to write to us with any news about your imprisonment, developments in your case or anything else!

Aachen trial begins

On 23rd March the trial against the four comrades arrested last year in

Aachen, Germany began. Gabriel Pombo Da Silva, Xose Fernandez Delgado, Bart De Geeter, and Begonia Pombo Da Silva were stopped by police on 28th June 2004, and while Begonia, Gabriel's sister, was quickly taken into custody, Xose and Gabriel, already on the run after each spending more than twenty years in brutal Spanish prisons, and Bart, a member of Gent ABC, were only arrested following a shoot-out. After a few weeks, Begonia was granted bail, but the three men have been held in custody, mainly in isolation, since their capture. The charges now being brought against them relate (in the case of Xose, Bart, and Gabriel) to their

attempt to flee the scene, as well as to various armed robberies.

In a show of solidarity, about fifty supporters from Belgium, England, Holland, Germany and Spain have travelled to Aachen to attend the trial. On the opening day, a demonstration was held outside the court, and as each of the prisoners were brought in, Xose and Gabriel hooded and shackled hand and foot, they were greeted with cheers and applause, and the singing of *A Las Barricadas Por El Triunfo De La Emancipacion*.

It is expected that the trial will last until at least the end of April, and during this period there is a call to

show revolutionary solidarity with the Aachen 4. For more information on the case see www.escapeintorebellion.info

John Bowden

John Bowden is a long-time prison resister with a jailhouse CV that includes lockdown in control and segregation units, organising protests and work strikes, taking the governor of Parkhurst prison hostage, and a bold and brilliant escape. Recaptured after two years 'on the run', John spent more time in England's maximum security 'dispersal' jails, before being moved to Scotland. John continues to write

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LISTINGS

Every Sunday the Kebele Kafe from 6.30pm, 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol. For info call 0117 9399469.

until 15th April Counter terror, build justice international, a month of anti-war action sponsored by Voices, Hands Up for Peace, Edinburgh People and Planet amongst others. See www.j-n-v.org for more info.

until 14th May RISK: Creative Action in Political Culture, art and film at the CCA, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. See www.cca-glasgow.com or www.riskproject.org.uk/risk.htm

26th April Brixton Prison Blues, talk at The Pullens Centre, 184 Crampton Street, London SE17 at 7.30pm.

29th April London Critical Mass monthly bike ride, and eleventh birthday party. Meet on the southbank at Waterloo (NFT Café under Waterloo Bridge) from 6pm.

30th April Seventh Manchester Radical Bookfair from 12 noon to 5pm, The Basement, 24 Lever Street, for info see www.radicalbookfair.org.uk

9th to 28th May Brighton Fringe Festival, see www.cowleyclub.org.uk for more info and event listings

10th May Wild Walworth history walk, meet 7.30pm at 56a Infoshop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17.

30th May Kingston Green Fair at Canbury Gardens, Kingston upon Thames, from 11am to 8pm. Family environmental event. 020 8546 5202 or

www.kingstongreenfair.org.uk
4th June Strawberry Fair, for more info see www.strawberry-fair.org.uk

7th June Battle of the Beanfield talk at The Pullens Centre, 184 Crampton Street, London SE17 at 7.30pm

11th June Norwich's second annual anarchist bookfair from 10am to 7pm. For info call 07941 657485, email norwichanarchists@hotmail.com or see www.norwichanarchists.org

4th July Big Blockade at Faslane, for info see www.tridentploughshares.org

15th to 17th July Guilfest, for info see www.guilfest.co.uk

International
15th May International Conscientious Objectors' Day, organised by War Resisters' International, 020 7278 4040 email info@wri-irg.org www.wri-irg.org

21st May Global Boycott Proctor & Gamble, see www.uncaged.co.uk/pg.htm

11th June World Naked Bike Ride, protest against oil and clothes dependency. Go on, do it! For info see www.worldnakedbikeride.org

6th July Global day of action at the opening day of the G8 Summit. See www.agp.org or www.dissent.org.uk

Nationwide groups
Anarchist Federation
Network of anarchist-communists
Box 2, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

www.afed.org.uk
Antifa
Militant anti-fascist organisation
Box 36, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

www.antifa.org.uk
Class War Federation
Class struggle anarchist group.
PO Box 467, London E8 3QX
www.classwaruk.org

Dissent
A network of resistance against the G8
www.dissent.org.uk

Earth First!
Ecological direct action network
www.earthfirst.org.uk

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

Solidarity Federation
Anarcho-syndicalist organisation
PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8FX
www.solfed.org.uk

See also www.enrager.net/britain

Social Centres
Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh
(ACE)
17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh
www.autonomous.org.uk

The Basement
24 Lever Street, Manchester (contact mustsocial@yahoo.co.uk or 0161 237 1832)
The Common Place
23 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ
www.thecommonplace.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

Institute for Autonomy
76-78 Gower Street, London WC1
Kebele
14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY
www.kebele.org

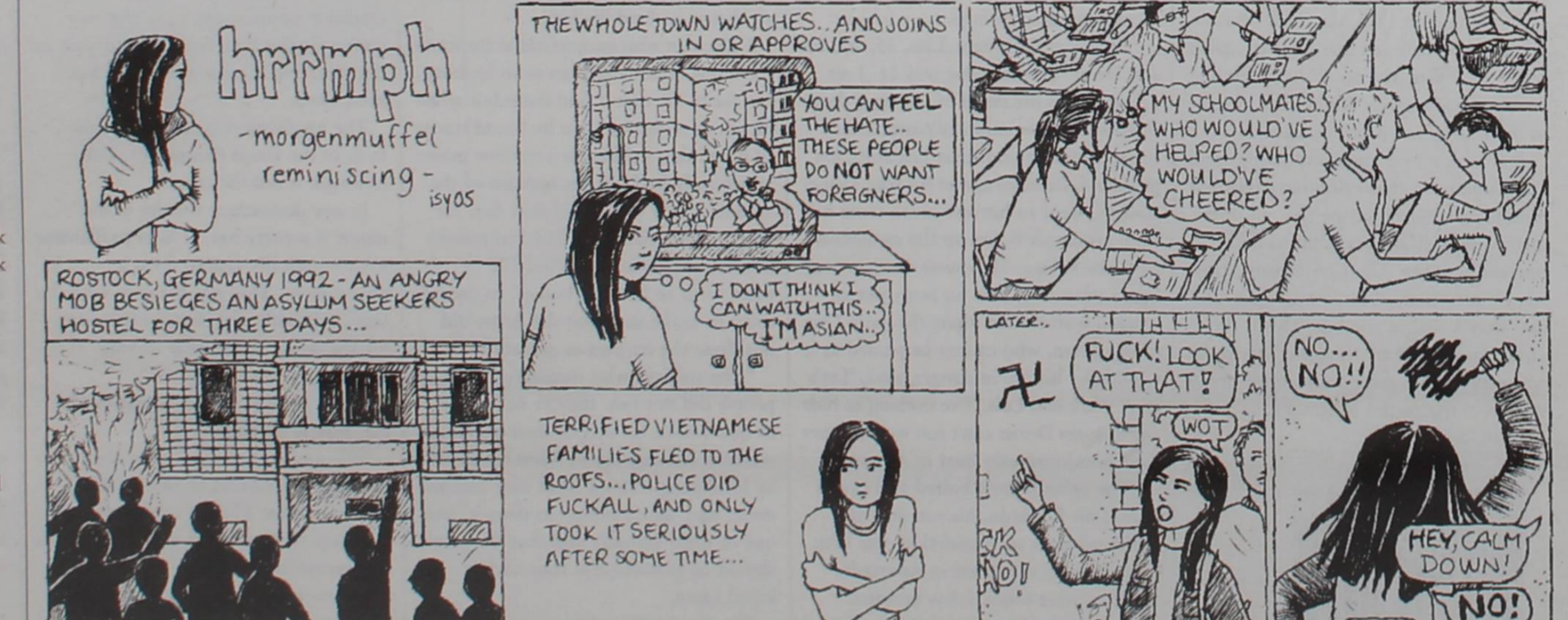
Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)
The Basement, 78a Penny Street, Lancaster
www.eco-action.org/lancaster

London Action Resource Centre (LARC)
62 Fieldgate Street, London E1
www.londonlarc.org

The Rampart
7a Rampart Street, London E1
SUMAC Centre
245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX
www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/

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



Continuing this exclusive series of cartoons for Freedom

News

In Brief

One in seven Londoners earn below poverty level

A major new report finds that one in seven of London's workers are paid at rates which leave their income, below poverty levels.

Even when benefits and tax credits are taken into account, the first report of the newly-formed Living Wage Unit – established by the Mayor – calculates a 'poverty threshold wage' in London. This finds such a wage is £5.80 an hour. This is significantly above the new national minimum wage of £5.05 per hour, to be introduced in October. The reason that the national minimum wage falls below poverty levels in London is largely accounted for by much higher housing costs in London. One in seven of London's workers receive a wage of less than £5.80 an hour. This of course excludes the large number of exploited illegal and cash-in-hand workers.

The Living Wage Unit calculates a living wage to lift a worker out of poverty in the capital would be £6.70 per hour. The announcement was met with concern expressed by trade union leaderships, with Tony Woodley, General Secretary of the T&G saying: "It cannot be right that one worker in five in the capital has to get by on less than a living wage and one in seven is in real, dire poverty ... the best way to tackle low pay is to bring those affected into strong, fighting trade unions. That is the T&G's priority."

Whether these strong words will translate into action, however, is debatable.

Fifty Legal Observers needed for G8 week of protest

The build up to the meeting of the G8 at Gleneagles on the 6th to 8th July has begun in earnest. All three of the main protest networks have announced some plans, with marches, blockades and actions planned throughout the week.

As well as the protest networks, the state has also been busy planning. All police has been cancelled and new laws drafted. There will be a large security cordon around the Gleneagles Hotel and police from other parts of the UK will be drafted in. Edinburgh Sheriff court has been cleared for the first two weeks of July to deal only with G8 cases, with special Saturday sittings arranged. The former RAF Turnhouse in Edinburgh is likely to be used for holding cells.

Previous international summit demonstrations have been notorious for the heavy-handedness of the state and the violence of the police, with thousands of arrests and injuries and even shootings in Gothenburg and Genoa. To try to counter some of this and ensure the right to protest is respected, a G8 Legal Support Group has been formed. We plan to field a team of legal observers, all volunteers, to attend all of the protests, to monitor the policing of the protests and to try to get witnesses to any arrests. We will also provide support to anyone who is arrested and we will liaise with local solicitors. But, we can only do this if enough people come forward and volunteers to help and be involved.

To find out more about the G8 Legal Support Group, or to volunteer as a legal observer, email g8legalsupport@riseup.net or see www.g8legalsupport.info.

www.dissent.org.uk

Working in 'Unison'

Despite the rhetoric, the public sector union seems unwilling to fight for its members, says Rob Ray

EXCLUSIVE

It has emerged that public sector union UNISON excluded affected ALMO staff from their strike ballot over pensions last month. The union, which covers 1.3 million people, sent out correspondence, acquired by Freedom, banning members from taking part in the now abandoned strike. The letter says: "I am ... having to inform UNISON members they cannot lawfully take part in the strike action planned for Wednesday 23rd March. This is as a result of technical difficulties around the balloting process and the process of notifications to employers that are required under the appropriate legislation."

ALMOs (Arm's Length Management Organisations) are semi-independent groups who run council services, most commonly council housing stock.

Staff are usually ex-council employees, whose pensions remain part of the public sector. UNISON however seem to have banned involvement across the sector. One member said: "I know of at least two other ALMOs in the same position. This does seem like a deliberate decision to exclude us even though we are all

members of UNISON and of the pension scheme under threat, rather than an administrative cock-up which is what UNISON keep referring to."

John Prescott, who prompted the strike threats with his proposals to raise the age of retirement and attack pensions for younger members, has set-up a negotiating group to discuss the situation with unions.

The strike has been put off, but fears are high that the measure will last only until after the elections.

A member commented: "UNISON are very relieved that the strike is now off, because it means they can get out of this one without too much public embarrassment. I don't see that they should get off the hook so easily. Personally, I am still furious about it and so is every other ALMO member of UNISON I have spoken to."

It is hoped the ALMO groups will be consulted in future. The letter continued: "We have already made some process changes at our ends that should prevent this situation arising again."

ALMOs aren't the only sector that were excluded from the vote. According to NHS workers, they were also kept out of the process, although their pensions



are also under fire. The fiasco looks set to permanently damage UNISON's reputation in some of its most important areas, and adds to severe failures over local member recruitment that are currently impacting on the union.

One member said: "I've been working in the NHS for six months now. In the

health centre I work in there's no shop steward, no union contact, not even a noticeboard. The local office is based in another town and staffs just three days a week. Unison are yet to contact me regarding membership, and have contacted no-one else in the office about anything during my time here."

Climbdown not popular

The actions of UNISON in leading their members away from the picket lines have gone down well with the government, but other unions and unionists, particularly within the PCS, are less than happy. Freedom conducted a vox pop inside the unions to find out more:

Michael: "I'm a PCS rep and the members are more than a little hacked off with the fact that UNISON chose to hijack the pensions issue. They wanted the action on 23rd March, which was certainly not a good time for the Civil Service as a large proportion of our members were on leave."

"They then announced the strike was off before everyone else, despite (I understand) an agreement that none of the Unions would make an announcement until all the unions had come to a decision, and then a joint announcement would be made."

Richard: "The rumour going around the unions at the moment is that the deal Prentis has done is the government will back off the 65 retirement issue post election, and the unions will back off defending final salary letting the government get away with 'career average' instead."

"What that means is that rather than having your pension based on the salary you are earning when you retire, it will instead be based on the average of your earnings throughout the years you are employed. For most workers (including the low paid) this will mean a substantial

cut in the value of their pension as most people earn more at the end of their career than at the start."

Sheila: "In the build up to the strike we tried working with Unison. The local members were brilliant but the full time officer was worse than useless. He wouldn't return calls or commit to any of the work we were planning. Looking back you cannot help wondering whether he knew all along that Unison would back down. Mind you PCS weren't any better."

"The fact that the unions have let the government off the hook is a disgrace. People are really pissed off and no one is fooled. My members know after the election the government will shaft them. My job is to recruit people to PCS."

"In the run up to the strike there was a lot of interest. People were worried about their pension and pleased to see the union doing something. That's now been lost."

Martin: "Unison's whole approach to this issue has been one of stitch-up. This first came up over a year ago and Unison stalled taking any action. The Solidarity Federation had a leaflet prepared for the march/strike on the 23rd, saying 'Unison wasted six months lobbying the Labour Party' and 'Union leaders don't want to harm Labour's election prospects by taking effective action'."

"Most of them support Gordon Brown as Labour Party leader and it's his sums that won't add up unless our pensions are cut."

Pensions – the score

Last month's climb down by the TUC and union bosses over pensions came as no surprise to anarchists. Over 1.25 million public sector workers were set to strike in protest at the government's attempts to slash the value of their pensions. On the eve of the strike union leaders called it off following 'guarantees' from ministers that it will reopen negotiations after the election and hints that they will back off from their insistence that public sector workers in health, education, the civil service and local government will have to work until they reach 65.

While hailed by the TUC and some on the left including the SWP as a great victory the truth is very different. The unions have secured no guarantees. Indeed there is a rumour that a deal has been done. Scared by the publicity the biggest public sector action in nearly three decades would have caused it in the run-up to May's election Labour, it is suspected, has agreed to drop its demand that the retirement age be increased from 60 to 65 years old. In return unions called off the strike but critically will allow the government to change the way that the value of pensions are calculated.

Currently pensions are worked out on the salary a worker earns when they retire (in fact normally the average of what they earned in the last three years of working). Most people earn more towards the end of their career than at any other point. The government wants to see this replaced by a so-called 'career

average' calculation. What this means is that the pension is calculated on the average salary through out the worker's career. While this sounds technical what it means quite simply is that workers will be out of pocket. The GMB union has calculated that throughout retirement workers would face a six figure loss. Many would in fact be forced to work longer to make the shortfall up! So much for the unions' so-called victory on early retirement!

Poverty in retirement is a growing problem in Britain. Almost three quarters of Britain's pensioners earn below average incomes. The average gross income of a pensioner couple in 2003 was in fact just £388 a week. Workers' pay for their pension through the contributions they make, sometimes for forty years. In effect they defer some of their salary until they retire. It is their money.

The government's assault on public sector pensions is a crude attempt to reduce public sector expenditure so that taxes for the wealthy can be kept low. The anger felt by teachers, lecturers, council workers and civil servants as union after union got yes votes for the strike in March has been wasted. After the election the assault will begin again. A real opportunity has been lost. As anarchists we are not surprised that the union bosses have sold their members out. What is needed are militant unions accountable too and willing to stand up for their members. Sadly we are some way from that.

Richard

News

The Fruits of victory

Four years of action shows Taco Bell that the American workers' movement is not dead, reports Louis Further

A workers coalition in Florida with support from student groups has recently won a major victory against fast 'food' behemoth, Taco Bell, and set an encouraging precedent for workers' rights. Early in March the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) called off its four year national boycott of Taco Bell after winning concessions in wages and living conditions.

The Coalition is a farm-workers' organisation made up largely of indigent immigrants who work tomato fields in southwest Florida. Previously they have been successful in prosecuting Florida agribusinesses who have literally been holding workers as slaves. Taco Bell undertook to 'help ensure' that none of its tomato suppliers employ indentured servants.

Workers pick tomatoes for just 40 cents for each 32lb (14kg) bucket. That's barely half a UK penny per pound: the same rate of pay as in the 1970s. Now Taco Bell/Yum Brands (which also owns KFC, Pizza Hut, Long John Silver's and A&W All-American) has conceded. The company is to pay directly to the pickers a cent more for each pound picked; that's nearly twice as much. Although workers will still have to pick a US ton of tomatoes (907kg) to earn \$50! An increase it is – but not one to bring them very far above the official poverty level.

Grassroots

What's exciting is the grassroots nature of the struggle and the successful alliance between the Immokalee workers and students. Indeed, the student movement

played a significant part in this victory: 22 colleges were successful in preventing Taco Bell from operating on their campuses.

The 'Taco Bell Truth' and 'Boot the Bell' Tours travelled around the country successfully asking people to stay away from all restaurants owned by the Louisville, Kentucky-based corporation – as much a household word in the US as Wimpy in the UK. Petitions on such sites as www.thepetitionsite.com also put pressure on the company.

Yum Brands claims to be the world's largest 'restaurant' chain with over 33,000 establishments in a hundred plus countries and 840,000 employees.

In the fourth quarter of 2004 the company reported record earnings and an increase of 15% over the same period in 2003. Its annual revenue is over \$1bn; an operating profit of \$160m, or nearly £10,000 an hour – and growing. According to the Yum website, "147 million people see a Taco Bell commercial once a week – more than half of the US population." Nor are they above spending \$200m on one 'image-moulding' campaign, more than all the Immokalee workers can expect to earn in their working lifetimes. Yum had long resisted an increase in wages claiming that, because it was only one buyer of Florida tomatoes, it was only called on to offer higher wages if the rest of the industry could be induced to pay more.

Since Taco Bell buys nearly five million kilos of tomatoes a year, the thousand workers picking for it can

expect to benefit to the tune of a £100 each. The average farm worker in Florida earns about \$7,500 (£4,000) a year, without health insurance or paid vacations. Indeed, pressure was put on Taco Bell to stop the conditions of effective slavery: some members of the largely Latino workforce have been regularly held in chain-gang-like conditions with inordinately long hours in semi-captivity and sometimes at gunpoint.

Success

So the significance of the victory is not the meagre increase in wages, welcome though that is, but the exercise of concerted power by workers, and college and university students.

While Lucas Benitez, co-founder of the CIW described the move as "a tremendous victory for the youth and for the student movement ... they are not only demanding fast food but they're demanding fair food".

In a time of repression and attempted destruction of north American labour movements (a string of recent settlements between the US government and Walmart over the latter's use of child and 'undocumented' labour has been widely seen as laughable in their leniency, see Freedom 19th March), this is a heartening story.

CIW: www.ciw-online.org/
 Student/Farm-worker Alliance: www.sfalliance.org/
 Yum Brands: www.yum.com/



Truce in the Andes

Weeks of strikes, blockades, protests and demonstrations in Bolivia came to an end on the 16th March as workers' and peasants' leaders agreed to the government's revised Hydrocarbons bill.

Social mobilisations were originally sparked by a proposal to drastically reduce the level of royalties owed on gas exports to 18% from the 50% demanded in last July's referendum. With blockades already underway in El Alto where the Federation of Neighbourhood Groups (FEJUVE) were demanding the cancellation of a privatised water contract, a call to extend the blockade by the Movement Towards Socialism Party (MAS) was eagerly taken up by their supporters and joined by other groups.

As a result of the protests President Carlos Mesa offered his resignation twice, on March 10th and again on March 16th, only to have his call rejected by all of the major parties in the Bolivian congress.

Social movements had threatened to

extend the blockades and demonstrations into a 48 hour general strike, until the government agreed to adjust the gas royalties to 32%.

Despite the peaceful resolution of the crisis, the protests have substantially changed the political balance in the country. Mesa, who originally rose to power after his predecessor fled to Miami following the killing of demonstrators in October 2003, had up until recently committed himself to the 'Agenda of October'; the demands of the social movements in the wake of the protests that claimed the last President, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. His administration has now reneged on that agreement and formed an alliance with the neoliberal parties in the Bolivian congress.

Evo Morales, the leader of the largest left wing party the MAS, has tacked left in the past month. Having split with much of the Bolivian left over the issue of participation in the June 2004 Gas Referendum, MAS signed the 'Unity Pact for Dignity and National

Sovereignty' with other workers' and peasants' organisation on 11th March.

Support for the truce has not been universal, with FEJUVE rejecting the agreement and refusing to join the Unity Pact, leader of the La Paz peasants' federation Gualberto Choque declaring himself 'disconcerted' at the new stance.

Jack Ray



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Inside News

→ page 2

e eloquently about the prison struggle.

He would be grateful for any books to help pass the time, these should be in new condition, and sent by Recorded Delivery, with the sender's name and address on the outside of the envelope. If you also wish to write to John please do so separately, and as always when writing to prisoners, try to include a few stamps or at least an SAE. John Bowden, 6729, HMP Glenochil, King O' Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3AD.

Slave labour in Scottish prisons Sick of seeing prisoners 'worked like dogs', an insider in the Scottish Prison Service recently contacted the Campaign Against Prison Slavery to expose the scandal of forced prisoner labour in Scottish prisons. Among the companies reaping rich profits from prison slavery are high-street firms like Wickes and Airsprung Beds (who make beds for Argos), as well as Royal Mail and Alfred MacAlpine. In return for their involuntary labour, prisoners are paid between £5 and £7.50 per week,

while the Scottish taxpayer is actually subsidising the profits of the slave labour companies to the tune of £2 for every item produced.

Banana robber gets seven years Unlucky robber Robert Downey was recently given seven years for trying to rob a shop and a bookies armed with a banana. The court heard that the unlikely weapon was so badly disguised in a plastic carrier bag, which revealed both its colour and its characteristic bend, that they simply ignored him. Downey was found shortly after fleeing the scene of the second attempted robbery, not far from his banana. The Prosecution told how he tried to hide it a hundred yards away, but a police dog sniffed it out, badly bruised and still in its plastic bag. After a similar raid, for which he was jailed five years ago, Downey was arrested within minutes because he couldn't get off his balaclava as it was too small.

Despite his incompetence, and the fact that nobody was harmed, Downey only narrowly avoided a mandatory life sentence for attempted armed robbery and possession of an imitation firearm.

compiled by Mark Barnsley

Feature

The Austrian Left

Some lessons still have to be learned from the collapse of the workers' movement in Austria over seventy years ago, argues Jack Ray

In the history of the working class some things are certain, and one of these things is the suicidally 'moderate' attitude of social democrats. No matter the gravity of the threat, European Centre-Left leaders have always had one gear – reverse. In 1920s and 30s Austria they developed this tendency into an art form under Social Democrat Party (SPO) chairman Otto Bauer and his executive.

The 1920s

Austrian workers in the mid 1920s were seemingly the most organised and class-conscious anywhere in Europe. The Socialist party was able to poll around 40% of the electorate throughout the 1920s and in 'Red Vienna' support reached nearly 60%. They had complete control of the Capital and were able to run it virtually as a 'Red Republic' of their own.

Astonishingly nearly 10% of the population were card carrying party members. They were able to raise their own paramilitary organisation – the Schutzbund – after an abortive revolution in 1919 left thousands of weapons in member's hands. Workers had already won control over the Vienna armoury in the aftermath of World War One.

A disastrous split which had occurred in German socialism after the Russian revolution simply didn't happen in Austria. The Moscow-controlled Comintern (Communist International) sponsored KPÖ had just 6000 members and was unable to command a single seat in the Austrian parliament. The Left was united and committed in the fight against Fascism. If their vigilance waned all they need do was glance over the border to Italy, whose own Left had been annihilated by Mussolini just a few years earlier.

Yet despite all this, less than a decade later the Fascists would be in charge, the workers smashed and 'Red' Vienna prepared to welcome Hitler with open arms, while the culprits hid in Czechoslovakia, making excuses.

Bauer's first betrayal of Social Democracy truly began on the night of March 2nd 1927.

Acting under orders from a governing parliamentary coalition of Bourgeois parties, elements of the Austrian armed forces – the Bundesheer – illegally broke into Vienna's armoury, seizing some relatively unimportant rifle parts.

The significance of this action became clear over the next two months. The break-in provoked a heated debate in parliament whether arms legally stockpiled to protect the Republic should be under the control of Social Democratic authorities. Eventually it was agreed that the weapons should be moved for safe keeping to a secret location known

only to the government.

In May, machine guns, rifles, bullets and mortars were moved under cover of darkness to a warehouse in Vienna, never to be seen again by Social Democrat members. Over the following years, similar seizures occurred regularly and by the time insurrection had finally broken out, the working class had lost their ammunition, 710 machine guns and nearly 40,000 modern rifles.

The Social Democratic party was not content with simply giving away the worker's arms. It also undermined their will to resist.

Earlier that year the Social Democratic party had held a rally through the small town of Schattendorf, as a counter to one already being held by the Fascist Heimwehr militia. During the rally a barman and his son began shouting fascist slogans at the marchers, who threw stones in return and tried to break into his pub. The publican fired a shotgun, killing two marchers – one a child, the other a pensioner.

He was acquitted six months later and by 16th July, two days after the trial, word of this injustice had spread around the city. In a spontaneous demonstration, workers downed tools and headed for the centre of Vienna to protest. A de-facto general strike was called around the city as trams stopped and streetlights went out. A huge mob gathered at first outside the parliament building, later moving down the main street to the city's high court. Mounted police responded to this by charging the crowd, but they were soon overwhelmed. Protesters charged inside the building and set it alight.

Faced by confrontation the Social Democratic leadership tried hard to avoid any further fighting. Their solution was to dispatch the Schutzbund – not to defend the workers but to restrain them. The armed force of the workers stood between them and the police. As Schutzbund leaders and the Social Democrat Mayor of Vienna urged calm upon the seething mass they were spat and sworn at.

Finally the protesters dissipated, attacking police stations as they returned to the suburbs. By the end of the troubles, 57 workers, 28 bystanders and four police were dead, the credibility of the Social Democrats was utterly destroyed and the hopes of the workers crushed. Months later at the Fifth National Schutzbund, conference delegates would discuss the lessons of July.

Their conclusion? They drafted a paper called 'Directives to be followed in case of spontaneous work stoppages for political reasons' – effectively a guide to using the workers' armed forces against a popular uprising.

The 1930s

The forces of Clerico-Fascism mounted against Austria's Social Democrats in the 1930s. After the elections of 1932, Christian Socialists formed a coalition government with the Fascist Heimwehr party. Emil Fey, leader of the Fascists, was made Minister of the Interior and his paramilitary was converted into an auxiliary police force.

In February 1933 the conflict between workers' and bosses' groups sparked into life. The strongest SPO trade union, the railway workers, went on strike. The government responded using the army, arresting strikers and sacking workers.

The Social Democrats pressed in parliament for an amnesty for the strikers (in itself a moderate demand given the state's already violent actions), and in March the Austrian parliament reached a deadlock in the debate. Rather than vote on the subject again however the Prime Minister, Engelbert Dollfuss, chose to suspend parliament under an old War Emergency Powers Decree.

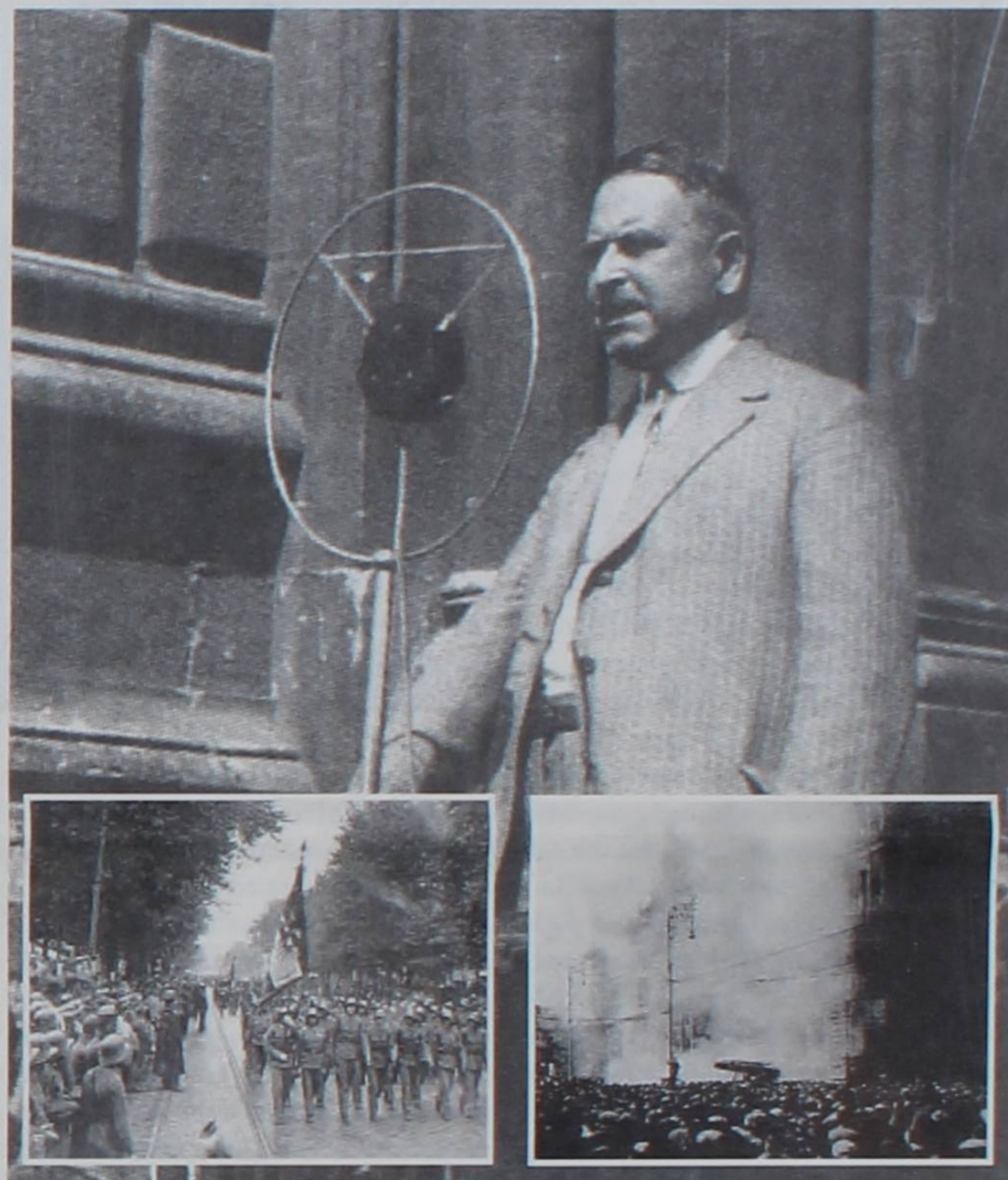
SPO members reacted with fury. Otto Leichter, who was to join the Communists after the civil war, said: "This is the beginning of Fascism and if we don't resist the first move with all our power, then there will be no turning back."

Six days later, Otto Bauer and the rest of the leadership rolled into action to calm their comrades revolutionary ardour. At a meeting of the 382 Vienna party sections they put forward a proposal that:

1. They should try and get the Fascists to reconvene parliament;
2. Karl Renner should publicly protest the dissolution of parliament;
3. Vienna's provincial assembly should be convened and Karl Seitz should argue against the emergency powers act before a constitutional court.

This line of negotiation with a government containing openly antidemocratic elements such as the Heimwehr ultimately proved fruitless and in mid-March, Social Democratic leaders belatedly issued orders for a general strike if police tried to prevent parliament meeting. As they well knew however, a general strike effectively meant civil war, so to prevent this from happening it was necessary for them to maintain the illusion that they'd resisted the suspension of parliament.

The SPO thus took on the strange task of trying to keep the bosses' government and the Schutzbund – their own paramilitary – from each other's throats. The result was a farce. Bauer and the rest of the Socialist leadership went to parliament early on the 16th and declared the house to have 'met'. The police then escorted them from the building, and the government declared their meeting void. As Bauer could claim to have restored parliament, he was able



Otto Bauer (main picture). Fascists marching in Schattendorf (inset left), and protesters in Schattendorf (inset right)

to tell the Schutzbund to stand down.

Any doubts over the nature of the new regime must have been dispelled over the coming months. Dollfuss announced that parliament "had died and would not return" and government would be "on the basis of estates under a strong, authoritarian leadership," yet the SPO executive continued to prevaricate. By February 1934 this became too much for the party secretary of Linz, Bernasek. He dispatched a letter to the Executive: "When tomorrow, Monday, an arms search begins in an Upper Austrian city or when officials of the party, particularly Schutzbündler, are arrested, violent resistance will occur and will persist, turning into an attack. We expect that upon receipt of our telephone communication to Vienna, you will give the Viennese working class, and thus the whole working class, the signal to let go. We will not turn back. I have not informed the party executive of this decision. If the working class leaves us in the lurch, shame and disgrace on them."

Otto Bauer received the letter at midnight, and quickly dispatched a message demanding Bernasek refrain from action. Nevertheless, when at six in the morning police attacked the Social Democrat headquarters in Linz, Schutzbündler troops opened fire with machine guns and Austria was pitched into civil war.

With insurrection finally underway,

the leadership dithered once again.

They rushed about the city in search of a compromise, before the Social Democrat Mayor's eventual arrest on the afternoon of the twelfth. At the time of his arrest, the Mayor had been busy trying to halt the general strike by restarting the trams (their stoppage was the acknowledged sign for revolt).

That morning the Social Democratic party held one last meeting before their dissolution, issuing Otto Bauer's closing orders that the Schutzbund not fire unless fired upon. The fighting itself was over in days, the failure to effect a railway strike and the inaction of the Lower Austrian Schutzbund preventing any attempt to halt government reinforcements. The rebels were hopelessly outnumbered. In the end 314 workers lay dead, and before the month was out the 'leadership' fled to Czechoslovakia to bleat it wasn't their fault and attempt to rebuild their party.

Over the course of seven years, the Social Democratic leadership had managed to divide a united working class into a series of embittered, squabbling factions, each accusing the party of capitulation to the fascist bourgeois government.

The lesson of the Austrian civil war is that a led working class is one ripe for exploitation and betrayal, whereas a free working class will resist oppression wherever it encounters it.

from www.enrager.net/history

Editorial

An emergency Congressional bill designed to save the life of brain-damaged Florida woman Terri Schiavo (now-deceased) was passed by the Republican controlled the House of Representatives on Palm Sunday. The law would have allowed federal courts to review her case after the state courts in Florida had unanimously backed Mrs Schiavo's husband in his contention that she had no hope of recovery and should be allowed to die (as per her own wishes), and was designed by congress specifically for her case due to pressure from her parents and the right-to-life lobby.

Bush himself flew halfway across the country to sign the bill into law, cutting short his pre-Easter holiday. It is a shame he did not do the same when he got the 6th August 2001 memo titled 'Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US'. Nor, for that matter, was the Tsunami considered important enough to forgo a few days holiday when it struck last December. Nice to know he has his priorities right.

Bush stated he intervened in the Terri Schiavo case because "our society, our laws, and our courts should have a presumption in favour of life." That explains why, in his five years as governor of Texas, he executed 131 prisoners, far more than any other state, and used his power to grant an execution stay only once, and in 1999 signed the Texas Futility Care Law, which allowed hospitals to withdraw life support from patients, over the objections of the family, if the patient could not pay and there was no hope of revival. Under this law, a baby was removed from life support against his mother's wishes in Texas just the week before Bush took to the skies. So if you happen to have been born a poor black child shutting off support against the mother's wishes is fine.

The Republicans also voted en masse to end the medicaid funding that pays for the kind of care that someone like Terri Schiavo and many others who are not so severely brain damaged need all across this country. They have also thinking about 'tort reform' that would preclude malpractice claims like that which has paid for her care thus far. Ironically, the 2000 and 2004 Republican Platforms both talk about "putting patients and doctors in charge of medical decisions."

This is about defending life," said Scott McClellan, the White House spokesman. Unless you are poor, then defending life is less important than the price tag. Or a foreigner. Then defending life means bombing a country and killing over 100,000 people. Or if you are a soldier. Bush has yet to attend a single funeral of the 1,500 soldiers who have died fighting in Iraq on his behalf.

This case is also part of a wider Christian evangelical assault on individual liberty. As those pressing for the bill have made clear - they believe the case may help inject new life into their long campaign against the right to choose. Yet, ironically, this case shows the strange logic of the Christian Right. They say that it is up to god whether Terri should live or die yet it is doctors who have ensured the former for the last fifteen years.

In Republican America it is the desires and dogmas of a particular religious constituency and the profits of the private healthcare corporations that matter. The rights of the individual are being destroyed by Bush's government in favour of the rights of religious and political elites to control individuals - particularly women.

Commentary

Iran's nukes

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is signed by both nuclear and non-nuclear powers. Those which do not have nuclear weapons agree not to acquire them, and those which do have them to get rid of them. The government of Iran has not signed up, but has indicated approval of the terms. Indeed they have offered to give the United States government a cartload of pistachios for every nuclear bomb it dismantles. The offer was reported in the British media, but not dwelt on, perhaps because it goes against preconceptions to think of grim-faced mullahs making jokes.

Donald Room

Street justice?

With the defeats of the organised working class and the consequent defection of the left from any engagement with working class people, its easy to forget what a working class politics might be. Two significant events recently have shown clearly what working class independence from the state does and doesn't mean.

Take the recent campaign by the McCartney sisters over the murder of their brother Robert. The mainstream press have portrayed the sisters' campaign as a grassroots struggle for justice by a group of working class women in the face of a mafia-style IRA. A few professional dissident Republicans - in particular Anthony McIntyre and Eamonn McCann - have been keen to push that line. (Both McIntyre and McCann seem to have a bit of trouble with political coherence in that, having denounced the armed struggle in the Six Counties as a dead end, they also now get headlines by denouncing the Provos as sell-outs.) It is certainly the case that the intention of the McCartney sisters to secure justice for their brother is genuine. It is also though the case that, in terms of whether they themselves are being exploited, their campaign might equally well be judged by the company it keeps. In recent years, working class Republican activists have tried to raise the case of Robert Hamill, kicked to death by a Loyalist mob in 1997, in full view of an RUC patrol who did nothing but watch. I doubt anyone can remember the Daily Mail, the Telegraph or the Sun rushing to demonstrate their support. For the media, and the security forces and New Labour spin-doctors who feed them, the McCartneys' campaign is just a convenient excuse for a bit of Provo bashing. Equally, the judgement of any campaign which visits George Bush Jr to raise with him their concerns about unlawful killing must be open to question.

No-one should deny that the killing of Robert McCartney was a disgrace. So far as I can see, though, no-one has. The IRA have expelled those they feel

are responsible, Sinn Fein have suspended others believed to be involved. Both Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have called on Republicans to help the sisters. Its not clear what else they can do. Equally, the police haven't charged anyone, but you don't see Catherine McCartney condemning them. There's been a good deal of fuss about witnesses not coming forward. But, according to the McCartneys, their brother was drinking with Brendan Devine, who was attacked alongside. What other witness do they need? (Or is Devine's pending GBH trial a bit of an obstacle as regards credibility?)

During the course of the nationalist struggle in the six counties, an honourable tradition developed within working class nationalist areas of refusal to co-operate with the state - specifically in its policing functions. Justice in working class communities was administered by organisations which grew within those communities. Liberal leftists might wince at the idea of IRA punishment beatings of petty hoods but they enjoyed widespread community support. Nationalist communities policed themselves. When the McCartney sisters call for witnesses to go to the police, it's this tradition they're seeking to dismantle. For many working class Republicans though, the police in the Six Counties have no legitimacy, and there must be a question mark of the motivations of those who back the sisters so enthusiastically. In whose interests is it to seek to legitimise the police and discredit Republicanism within communities such as Short Strand? Much mileage was made of the offer from the IRA to shoot those believed responsible for Robert McCartney's death, but no-one seems to have recognised the major point in this - that the IRA did not treat it as an internal disciplinary matter, but left the matter for the sisters to decide. What more could the Provos do? (It has to be said also that when Gemma McCartney says "I can see parallels between the current generation of IRA thugs and the Nazis" she insults everyone whose families have suffered at the hands of Orange death squads with real links to fascist groups.)

Part of the problem for Sinn Fein though is that they also have walked away from the tradition of working class self-determination which militant Republicanism developed in communities like Short Strand. With the embrace of the peace process Sinn Fein have come face-to-face with the central contradiction of their own politics. You can't be part of a bourgeois state while being linked to an armed group which is opposed to that state. The point of the peace process from the British states' point of view was to house-train Sinn Fein and get them to put the guns away. The problem for the Sinn-ers is that they've rushed so enthusiastically down that

road they've lost any of the extra-parliamentary weight which go them to the table in the first place. The 'ballot box and Armalite' strategy only worked in the Six Counties because of the threat of the Armalite. Contrary to popular myth, the post-ceasefire talking-shop has dragged on not because it suits the interests of Republicans but because it suits the interests of the British state. The longer the ceasefire drags on without any progress, the more nationalist communities become demoralised and demobilised, IRA members drift away, etc. Peace with justice as an ideal becomes replaced with peace on the same rotten basis as before, with no grassroots momentum to force through anything else. The reason Sinn Fein are so vulnerable to the McCartneys' campaign is because they've been so keen to play at constitutional politics they've demobilised their own communities, and are now faced with having to decide whether to carry on pretending to be part of an armed revolutionary movement or to keep the Armani suits and the monthly salaries. You can believe in working-class self-determination or you can believe in constitutional politics. You can't have both.

Dessie Noonan was stabbed to death in Manchester on Friday 18th March. Dessie was described in the press subsequently as a gangster, and a thug. It would be better to remember him as what he was - someone who gave a shit about the working class community he lived in, who was part of Anti-Fascist Action's success for years in keeping Manchester fascist-free, a solid working class Republican. A recent Guardian article by Mary O'Hara commented on a Channel 5 documentary which showed Dessie and his brothers acting as 'community guardians', intervening in disputes, generally helping resolve community tensions. O'Hara can only ask why such a parallel system of justice is allowed to exist and what strategies can be put in place to reclaim such communities (from themselves?). The lesson is simple enough. In order to support and organise working class self-determination it is necessary to follow in practice Stirner's dictum "We are two enemies, the State and I." And it is necessary to get our hands dirty in the process. In doing so we will be roundly condemned by liberal leftists who believe in 'authority, the state, the law, the system', etc., etc. Like Bakunin we have to cast our lot with the "proletariat in rags ... For the spirit and force of the future social revolution is with it and it alone, and not with the stratum of the working class that has become like the bourgeoisie." And we have to recognise that the likes of Dessie Noonan are a lot closer to that 'spirit and force' than the McCartney sisters, the SWP, the massed readers of the Guardian and all the rest of the white collar screws and touts who make up the middle class left ever will be.

John Shute

Hereford's help

I'd be interested to hear from anyone who can recall an anarchist presence in Herefordshire before 1999, if one existed at all. Any information would be welcomed, however small or general.

I am also seeking contact with fellow employees in Youth Work who would be interested in discussing the job with the aim of developing some sort of anarchist analysis.

Please contact hereford@afed.cjb.net with regards to both subjects.

Dan

Rob Ray, for Freedom, writes in response to John Shute's letter which appeared in our 19th March issue:

I think the comments are overly harsh John. Sometimes the cutting works, sometimes it doesn't, but if we're having to cut large sections out of a piece it's because it's too long, not because we're deliberately taking out the sting of the article. Sorry if we cut an important bit out.

We have analysis in Freedom every week, in the features page, comment, often as part of the main news articles. We have been cutting back on the size of smaller articles and on comment within those because there is simply so much to document.

Bear in mind that Schnews are covering one issue every week, we are writing on 10-20 topics, which people are welcome to then comment on. What we write on can then be followed up by the reader should they choose to do so.

Because we are now covering more at once, that can impact on the depth of coverage on individual items. For example, I had to do a News in Brief on spiralling homelessness in mining towns, I wanted to do more but couldn't due to space restrictions. Having said that, because we've shortened the articles, I was able to include it, which I wouldn't have if we'd been concentrating on intense analysis of something else.

What I'd ideally like to do is have Freedom covering the news, with a roundup then being published with a more in-depth monthly/quarterly analysis in a separate, linked magazine such as Black Flag. As it is, we're trying to do both jobs at once in an eight page paper, which we can't get right for everybody all the time. We're trying our best though.

I'll bring up your letter on Sunday when we're doing the paper next and see what we can work out.

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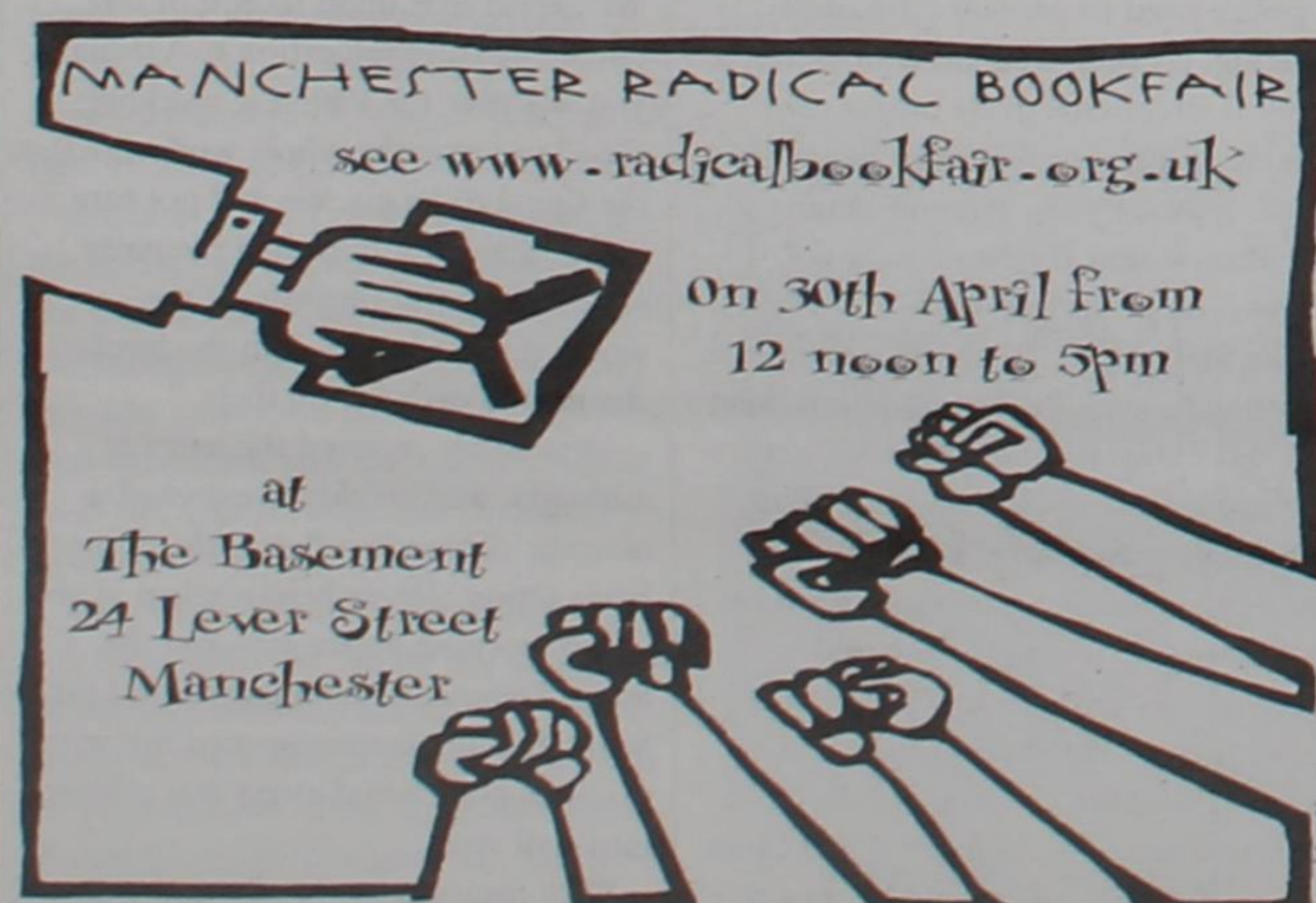
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Quiz answers

1. The Story of the Blues by Wahl, which featured the lines "People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth" from The Revolution of Everyday Life.
2. He was cremated at Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris.
3. The IWW, who were finding success with their anti-war message. After the Bill was passed, wobblers got six months in jail just for being members.
4. Wilhelm Reich, after he refused to stop distributing 'orgone accumulators'.



REVIEW

The filthy fables of Paul Abbott's *Shameless* trample over bourgeois morality, and Tom Jennings tries to contain his laughter

Channel 4's comedy drama *Shameless* riotously restarted in a 2004 Christmas Special curtain-raiser to the second series. A north-west community defeats army quarantine and besiegement, after – in timely fashion for the festive season – a consignment of meat falls off the back of a lorry. With typically inspired symbolism, Paul Abbott pits the grandiose poisonous stupidity of official power against the informal ingenuity of ordinary folk, who rally when it transpires that the bonanza was deliberately contaminated in a disaster-contingency exercise. Various central characters – the Gallagher clan and their nearest and dearest – are instrumental in the imaginative ducking and diving that restores (dis)equilibrium on the (anti)utopian Chatsworth council estate. Rounding off this holy fantastical yarn – minus po-faced wise men pomp and circumstance – the new lover of pathetic patriarch Frank then goes into labour. As in all its storylines, *Shameless*' gutter surrealism elevates a barful of lowest common denominators into both art and politics.

The narrative arc of the original series concerned the survival together of the six Gallagher siblings, aged 3 to 21, with an increasingly absent, unemployed alcoholic father and long-gone mother. Despite their chaotic social situation, desperate finances and violently conflictual personal dynamics, they ward off dangers arising from their own self-destructive urges and mistakes, the hostility of local State agencies and malicious fellow residents, and the not inconsiderable inconveniences of pure misfortune. Throughout, social control mechanisms of pressures to respectability via the isolated nuclear unit are flouted with haphazard self-fashioned mutual care-giving full of warmth, generosity and spontaneity – which, while frequently fractious and abusive, has no truck with emotional blackmail, self-disgust or meanness of spirit. These themes mature in the new stories. Having established the Gallaghers as a viable entity with fluid and variable interconnections in

their local environs – now beset by more and bigger threats – the question becomes, how will the family change?

This broader problematic deprives series two of so clear a unifying thread, and the uneven tenor of successive episodes veers wildly between melodrama, romance, personal dilemma and crime caper – with new characters and guilt-free secrets, lies, perversions and purposes parachuted in soap-operatically to add dysfunctional flavour. However, the immense wit and intelligence in the scripting consistently fashions satisfyingly unlikely scams and dodges, averting catastrophe with a remarkable social synergy where even the most feckless shine. The ensemble acting needs to be, and is, superb – enhanced with a postmodern bag of filmic tricks, styles and devices to complicate and distort perspective, manifesting the confused richness of subjective experience.

A closing chorus of 'Jerusalem', sung enthusiastically over a wide-angle aerial pan of the estate, sees the remaining friends and relatives contemplate with apprehension, love and goodwill the departure of eldest daughter Fiona and her boyfriend (de facto parent-figures-in-chief). The strong family brew of differentiated vulnerabilities gives its members the confidence to pursue their desires, and next year's third run will hopefully enlarge on this theme with similarly sophisticated levels of integrity and self-deprecating affection. 'England's green and pleasant land' is afforded further irony by the humiliation in the local pub of a bullying rotten-borough councillor. The prejudicial hatred crystallised in his bluff and bluster hastens his decisive rejection by a clientele (the public sphere of this 'nation') of irrevocably mixed background and colour – comparable to the diversity and complexity intrinsic to each of the Gallaghers and their collective identity. It will be fascinating to see if this righteous idealism can be followed up too.

The Gutter Snipes Back

As outrageous comic entertainment, *Shameless* foregrounds the positive potential inherent in the lives of the vulgar



great unwashed, along with its cultural and situational basis in material conditions and social history. Romanticisation, sentimentality and patronisation are largely sidestepped in its hilarious scenarios because their resolutions depend on the interweaving of so many characters' flaws, fuck-ups and unexpected capacities. However, the fragile civic balance forged by British working class extended family networks, neighbourhood mutual aid, irreverent expression and 'creative accountancy' has been systematically savaged by governments slavishly following the new 'logic' of capitalism, replacing jobs and welfare with drugs, guns and jails. The damage inflicted by our more troubled members as well as external 'betters' now often escalates far beyond the unfeasibly benign atmosphere on the Chatsworth.

Sure enough, Abbott condensed and exaggerated his own experiences among ten abandoned children in 1960s/70s Lancashire for grist to his mill. This accounts for the authenticity as well as

the whiffs of nostalgia in absurdist escapism effectively melding satire and critique at a time when the criminalisation of lower-class anti-social behaviour blurs into War on Terror rhetoric. These days, refusing to conform to middle-class hypocrisy – offending sensibility or 'quality of life' (or merely hysterically inflated perceptions of threat) – attracts dehumanising, punitive reprisals from the State. Legitimising their assaults on flexible labour indiscipline as protection against yob culture, the real thugs profiting from neoliberal misery instead glorify selfish narcissism as the end-point of aspiration. That's what I call shameless.

Meanwhile *Shameless* gives a very rare mainstream media portrayal of organic lower class communal solidarity, doing justice in depth and texture to what's possible when individual action is valued principally for its contribution to collective effort – without pandering one iota to the bourgeois agendas reiterated in dramatic genres and, disastrously, in left-wing traditions.²

Soul-searching, preaching, laments and defeatism remain the preserve of documentary balance, liberal issue genres and social realism – which are only too eager to emphasise the depressing likelihood of tragedy rather than pleasurable farce. Preoccupied with the short-term demands of everyday life, Abbott's characters articulate no explicit ideology – but then art (like ideas) can't make history, though its material presence contributes to the stew of cultural resources nourishing political movement. *Shameless* has much to say – and, no doubt, "they know how to throw a party!"

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Footnotes

1. Writer of many excellent television dramas, including *Cracker*, *Clocking Off*, *Linda Green* and *State Of Play*.
2. See my 'A Low Down Dirty Lack of Shame', Variant 19, 2004 (www.variant.org.uk) for a contrast with conventional representations of working class life.

FILM

The Yes Men

directed by Dan Ollman, Sarah Price, Chris Smith (USA 2004)

This latest liberal-left documentary on the big screen follows anti-globalisation performance-activists Mike Bonnano and Andy Bichlbaum spoofing neoliberalism on the internet, in the media and at international trade conferences. Faking World Trade Organisation and GATT websites, they parody corporate-speak so convincingly they're invited to global industry junkets – pronouncing and powerpointing on squeezing niche profits from contemporary slavery and market-driven fascism. So, on the problems of keeping the peace on remote factory

plantations, they zip open their business suits to reveal giant inflatable phallic panopticon surveillance gizmos; or resolve uneconomic patterns of agriculture along with world hunger by unveiling surreal Soy lent Green junk food recipes for Third-World burgers made from First-World shit. And they're taken seriously, applauded politely, and welcomed into the prestigious think-tank fold. It should all make energising material in the service of some larger anticapitalist tactic – and much fun is clearly had. Nevertheless, despite the creative intelligence at work, there's a sense of naïve fluffy left-critique gone horribly wrong, sucked into the Quatermass of its antithesis.

Entertaining, insightful and potentially

productive though this kind of 'culture jamming' may be, it doesn't occur to the film makers to address viewers not converted to the cause – or to design the narrative so as to solicit active participation. We're left in a curiously passive position, open-mouthed like the hapless corporate patsies at the cleverness of Bonnano and Bichlbaum's interventions. This is a wasted opportunity if the film reaches multiplexes, which was crying out for a sharper promotional hook than merely trumpeting student rag week japes. After it was made, another 'triumph' was achieved when a purported representative of Dow Chemicals admitted responsibility for the Union Carbide chemicals disaster in Bhopal,

India. Considerable international news coverage elapsed before the Yes Men were rumbled; whether or not they accounted for the survivors' falsely raised hopes and anguish is unclear ... Populist political comedians like Michael Moore or Mark Thomas would never make these mistakes, and their grandiose schemes always at least hint at smaller-scale efforts that us lesser mortals might consider. Genuine personal involvement helps – with those resisting domination, on a comically human level with adversaries, or direct bodily engagement with your 'issue'. And if the film was intended for internal consumption by the anti-globalisation movement (not being expected to attract

commercial interest), then finding a politically strategic focus for Situationist stunts should top the agenda. Simply cheerleading our heroes' sneering at the cretinism of capitalism's flunkies doesn't cut it. We're all stupid, after all.

Having said that, *The Yes Men* is well worth seeing and recommending – for a laugh; as food for thought and inspiration; to enrich our polemical vocabulary ... and as encouragement to aim for more than protesting the moral evils of late capitalism.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

The Yes Men is on general release, and can also be seen on 21st April at the CCA, Glasgow, as part of the 'RISK: Creative Action in Political Culture' programme, see Listings on page 2.

Anti-fascist roundup

Nick Griffin's Car Trashed?

Well it might've been. British National Party leader Griffin was in Halifax last week to address a meeting which, among other things, was to work out Party strategy for the May elections.

Anti-fascists from the region learned of it, and at short notice organised to oppose it. Despite a police presence outside the meeting, thirty people attacked BNP security skinheads, throwing bricks and rocks. They then proceeded to smash the cars of BNP organisers parked outside, causing an estimated £15,000 damage. Fascist activists abandoned the meeting and were observed in a less than jubilant mood surveyed the devastation, presumably worsened by the fact that car insurance rarely covers vandalism.

There were no arrests.

I wish I'd said that

The Daily Telegraph last month revealed that the BNP's newspaper, The Voice of Freedom, was printed by Muslim workers at a Saudi Arabian-owned firm in Essex. What angered us at Freedom, apart from the BNP stealing our paper's name, was that we had known about this for months as one of our team's housemates works there. At the time we didn't consider it newsworthy and ignored it, only to see it broken as an exclusive in a major daily!

BNP leader loses £60,000 appeal

John Walker, BNP Treasurer from Wales, last month lost his bid to win £60,000 compensation for his expulsion from the Transport & General Workers Union.

Previously BNP activists such as David Ward have won thousands of pounds in for being expelled from trade unions. Ward, from Kent, was awarded £5,000 for his expulsion from Aslef. The anti-worker Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 was largely to blame for this, since unions were forced to pay expelled fascists, and yet "no such minimum award to a worker suffering racial discrimination or sacking" existed, claimed Aslef-acting General Secretary Keith Norman. The new Employment Relations Act 2004, which came into force at the beginning of this year, has changed this.

One anarchist member of the T&G told Freedom he "wouldn't see [his] membership subs going into the pockets of fascists who would destroy working class organisations."

Murdered German anti-fascist remembered

In Dortmund last Saturday 3,000 people marched in remembrance of the young anti-fascist stabbed to death in a subway station by a fascist skinhead on 26th March – just four days before the 60th anniversary of the Nazis killing 289 anti-fascists in Rombergpark in the same city.

Neo-Nazis even attempted to attack a small solidarity demonstration later that week. They were unable to mount an assault, however, on the large angry procession on 2nd April with the slogan 'Fight Nazi Terror'. The mass media ignored the march, however, instead focussing on a much smaller fascist demonstration elsewhere in the country.

Turkish anarchists say !No Pasaran!

Two hundred fascist students last month organised a nationalist ceremony outside a left-wing faculty at the University of Cukurova in Adana, Turkey.

Seventy-five anarchist students attacked the far right demonstration with rocks, and riot police were called to the campus.

The following week more neo-nazis came from surrounding towns to demonstrate after the end of prayers, but this time five hundred people turned up to oppose them. Upon seeing this the fascists departed swiftly after talking to the Rector.

School shooter 'Angel of Death' a Nazi

The latest school shooting to shock America was the killing of nine people and himself by Native American Jeff Weise.

Weise was a poster on the Nazi.org website first with the username Todesengel – German for 'Angel of Death' – and later the less Byronesque moniker NativeNazi, and spoke of his "natural dislike of communism" and hatred of "youth wanting to be black."

He will not be missed.

To get involved in combating fascism in Britain today, or for news of fascist activity, check out Antifa at www.antifa.org.uk or call their voicemail on 07952 759473



A Sideways Look

Asylum and immigration are hot issues at present, mainly because the Tories have borrowed the racist populism that's worked so well for their Australian equivalents. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking" asks Michael Howard's posters. I certainly hope not. Labour's policy of triangulation, coupled with an almost universally racist popular press, means we only hear one side. Here's a different angle.

Sir Terry Leahy, boss of Tesco, who earned £2.8 million in 2003, wasn't on hand to point out how much of his business depended on legal and illegal immigrants working in agriculture, food production and packing. Similarly absent were representatives of the other big supermarkets, though Walmart, owners of Asda, do make big payments to George W Bush and he has given an amnesty to three million illegal immigrants in the US.

Nor were any of the faceless businessmen who make so much money out of care homes willing to talk about the great advantage to the country of paying people peanuts to work in their homes while trousering huge amounts of money from the state.

Someone from the government did mention the vital role played by immigrants in the NHS. Quite. Unfortunately a little bit later someone else complained that the health services of many third world countries were being starved of staff as once they had been trained they left for better money working in the NHS.

Guardian columnist Rod Liddle made a television programme basically saying that immigrants should be forced to assimilate, drawing dire parallels with the Netherlands and the brutal murder of Theo van Gogh by a Muslim. Multi-culturalism has failed, he wailed. There seems to be a lot of this sort of approach at the moment – we have to beware of

those Muslims who will eat away at our cherished liberties, such as those of free speech, and encourage discrimination against women and gays. There is a grain of truth in this, which is why commentators get to make programmes about it so regularly. And they're nearly always about Muslims, who now find themselves in the role that Catholics did in the seventeenth century, that of a ready-made enemy within, easy to scapegoat.

Of course, Britain is a multi-cultural country, but where it has worked it is organic. People worked it out for themselves, sometimes quite painfully. It wasn't sponsored by the state, which hardly has clean motives. New groups coming here will undergo similar processes. A friend expressed to me his concern about Muslim fundamentalists and East European racists coming here and causing problems for women, gays and blacks. But the future isn't yet to be written – there will be struggles around these things, and they will be painful, but I have faith in our ability to win them. Of course, that does depend on those of us who don't want homophobia, sexism and racism to grow – will we fight in an inclusive way that also addresses the concerns of Muslims, for example? If we don't we risk driving more libertarian or socialist Muslims away and strengthen the hands of those in their community who say that we have nothing in common.

Svartfrosk

\$27,000,000

How much Halliburton appears to have charged the US government to deliver fuel to Iraq.

\$84,000

How much that fuel actually cost.

Source: New York Times

Blast from the Past

Taken from Freedom of 3rd April 1993. Shortly afterwards, on 4th June, there was an arson attack on the building causing extensive damage:

"Shortly after the Freedom Press Bookshop opened last Saturday, 27th March, the building was invaded by five young men wearing balaclava helmets and carrying long wooden truncheons, one with a spike. Two stayed on the ground floor. The others came up to the first floor to attack the bookshop and the Freedom Press office. They smashed up everything smashable: the typesetting computer (this being set on a borrowed machine), the photocopier, the telephones. They knocked over the bookshelves. One display case fell on a customer in the bookshop, pinning her to the floor. Other people were pushed over, but no one was hurt ...

Before they left, the attackers sprayed 'C18' in large letters on the wall above the office door. Combat 18 is the name of a group describing itself as a 'fascist paramilitary organisation'.

They left behind a bottle of petrol, which fortunately they made no attempt to explode ... The operation was carried out with military precision."

The quiz

1. Which early 80s top three hit quoted situationist Raoul Vaneigem in the 12-inch version?
2. Where is Nestor Makhno's grave?
3. In 1917, the Australian government passed the 'Unlawful Associations Act' with the support of the Labor Party. Who was it aimed at?
4. Which writer was jailed by the US in 1954 and had his books burned?

Answers on page 6

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