

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

29 OCTOBER 2005

INSIDE ►►

Mark Barnsley's back page 2

Unions: the next generation page 3

Naughty Nicaragua page 4

Labour's great incapacities page 5

ID CARDS CONDEMNED AGAIN

After gaining a slim majority in the House of Commons last month, the ID cards bill has been heavily criticised by a Parliamentary Committee, the House of Lords and campaign groups.

A report from the Lords Consultation Committee has condemned the bill, following on from similar reports by Home Affairs Select Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and an economic report by the London School of Economics.

The latest report concerned itself only with constitutional rights, but found that these had been exceeded, and suggested that the entire bill would need to be proofed against "the potential for abuse of the registration scheme by officials of the State claiming to act in the public interest."

The committee, closely mirroring complaints from human rights groups, believes that the introduction of ID cards represents a change between the relationship of citizen and state, and says that once the cards are implemented, there is no possible need for a national database to hold details.

The committee also heard that it was likely that a single ID card system would lead to greater targeting of minority groups for checks and stops from official sources.

They come alongside reports which have shown that the technology is flawed to the point that one in ten thousand people would be mis-read, and readers would be unable to cope with

brown-eyed people or anyone who went bald.

The LSE's economic report meanwhile suggested that the cost of ID card introduction could be up to £11bn – nearly four times the government's estimate.

One pilot, interviewed by Freedom earlier this year, pointed out that existing equipment in customs and excise is not currently used due to training issues, and pointed out that introducing them across the country would require almost everywhere to have trained personnel.

Banks meanwhile have condemned the idea as an expensive waste of their time.

The comments suggest a conflict could be building between the Lords and the commons over the issue.

Microsoft also came out against the cards last month. Microsoft's national technology officer Jerry Fishenden warned the Government: "Putting all of our personal identity information in a single place is something that no technologist would ever recommend: it leads to increased and unnecessary risk".

Other IT companies, who stand to receive between £6-£19bn for implementation of the system, have remained silent.

Rebel Labour MPs failed to scupper the bill on 18th October when it was presented for its third reading, after 'last minute concessions' where the government guaranteed to keep the cost of a standalone ID card at £30 per person. The vote passed by 309 votes to 284.

When asked, the government refused



to reveal the actual projected costs, combining taxation and one-off payments, as the information was 'commercially sensitive'.

Among the amendments defeated in the reading were a plan to make registration of details on the national database for passport applicants voluntary.

Campaign group No2ID said: "Only

one in three people believed they'd be of any use against terrorists after the 7/7 attacks, and that didn't even include the Home Secretary. Ministers admit that the 'benefits' have been 'oversold', the supposedly secure technology is flawed and unreliable and industry experts – some of whom stand to make millions, even billions, from the scheme – are highly

critical. And (last month), Microsoft warned that the ID scheme could actually generate "massive identity fraud" rather than help prevent it.

"The Home Office provided no new arguments to address these serious admissions. In fact they provide no argument at all, preferring to make blank assertions backed by no evidence."

BACK DOWN BOYS

The government has claimed a victory in the pensions crisis after they secured their target for total pensions savings up to 2055. Negotiations between the Trade and Industry Department and the Trades Union Council wound up last month after an agreement was reached that existing workers would be exempt from plans to raise the age of retirement and sever the link between pensions and final salaries.

Despite TUC claims that the deal was a victory for union negotiators, and the standing down of preparations for a general strike, it will mean all new entrants to the sector will have to work under the conditions laid out in original government proposals.

Future generations will now have their pensionable age raised to 65 and their benefits reduced, leading to a full one-third pension drop in real terms for new entrants to the public services, according to the TUC's own calculations. Coming after a massive defeat for Labour on the right to sympathy strikes, the agreement has sparked anger over the exclusion of future generations from its protection.

Dave, a retired member of Unison said: "The sore point is that the people I formerly worked with, and others yet to begin public sector employment, may be disadvantaged because of governmental interference and the connivance of the union bureaucracy.

"I particularly hate the campaign to divide the country's workers into public and private sector, where the private sector is worse off as result of the public sector pension scheme. The fight goes on, but not from the upper echelons, but from the grassroots."

The deal was brokered by Trade and Industry Secretary Alan Johnson and TUC secretary Brendan Barber, who said:

"This is a real change of heart by the government. [It] has accepted that today's public sector staff should not have their pensions promise broken."

The deal covers three million workers across health, the civil service and education, and effectively ends the threat of a general strike, which was strongly supported across the public sector.

Local government workers meanwhile have been left without the backup of the other sections of the public sector, and will have to negotiate separately with their local governmental employers.

It is the second time this year the strike has been called off, after public sector union Unison unilaterally dismantled the strike process ahead of the general election.

The government have claimed that the plan will save £13bn in the next 50 years. But the long-term nature of the agreement hasn't assuaged fears over the damage a pensions black hole running to billions of pound will do now.

Many employees in the public sector already work until the age of 65, due to low wages within the service.

SUMMIT SUMMATIONS

Trial have begun for two high profile summit cases. In Genoa, police, prison officers and medical staff will face a variety of charges relating to the brutal raids on journalists and activists lodging in the Diaz school during the July 2001 G8 summit.

In Greece, six activists held after the 2003 EU Summit went free after receiving suspended sentences; the government is still considering charges against a seventh man, Simon Chapman.

Four Greeks and one Spaniard received sentences between 10 and 26 months for offences related to a riot, and in one instance for possessing a baton; all were suspended for three years. One other activist was set free amid inconsistencies in police testimony and allegations that he was beaten. The trial took just five hours, and a noisy solidarity demo took place outside.

The fallout from the Diaz raid will spill over to two court cases, one regarding the 28 officers allegedly involved in the violence during the school raid itself, and a further 47 government employees (mostly prison guards) accused of

responsibility for the degradation after those detained at Diaz were taken to a holding camp at Bolzaneto.

The Diaz raiders have been charged with trespass, false arrest, inflicting GBH, authorising GBH and inventing a reason for the raid.

Around 150 members of a special riot police flying squad were sent into the Diaz school, where demonstrators were attacked indiscriminately with batons – 93 were injured, 25 hospitalised and three left comatose by the attack. Teeth were broken, ribs broken, one person suffered a collapsed lung.

All of the injured were taken 6km to Bolzaneto, where they suffered more beatings, in addition to threats of rape; infamously detainees were forced to sing fascist and antisemitic songs. All were later released with no charges.

The trial has come under threat, after a new law halved the amount of time available to bring about a conviction before a case is dismissed. The new legislation is apparently motivated by political nepotism, allegedly to save an old lawyer friend accused of bribery.

ISSN 0016-0504



Vol 66 No 21

Home and away

Water strike

Around 5,500 staff at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have gone on strike over worsening pay, which has left them substantially behind other workers in similar jobs.

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), which deals with underwater farming issues, has been particularly hard-hit in recent years by the widening discrepancies between departments.

Pay levels vary dramatically across DEFRA and its agencies for people doing the same job. The starting salary for an administrative officer in CEFAS is £11,474 compared to a starting salary of £15,221 in the Rural Payments Agency. For executive officers in the next grade it is no better with salaries in CEFAS starting at £15,164 compared to £20,451 in DEFRA itself.

The one-day strike, organised by public sector union the PCS, is demanding greater pay rate coherence.

Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said: "DEFRA and its executive agencies are a prime example of the unfair and farcical nature of civil service pay."

"Members doing the same job have had enough of the growing inequality of pay within the department and its agencies and want to see people doing the same job paid the same rate. It is high time that the department and the government stepped in and sorted out the growing mess that is civil service pay."

Stanley murder

Two Scotland Yard police officers who shot an innocent unarmed man on his way home have been told a prosecution will not be brought against them.

Harry Stanley, a painter and decorator, was killed with a shot to the head as he walked home with a table-leg in his bag, which the professional marksmen mistook for a sawn-off shotgun.

The Crown Prosecution Service found that there was insufficient evidence that the PCs, Kevin Fagan and Neil Sharman (now promoted to Chief Inspector), were not acting in self-defence when they shot the man holding a bag from their car.

Irene Stanley, Harry Stanley's widow, said she would keep fighting and would be taking legal advice over how best to proceed.

More Georges Crossed

The squatted Circle Community Centre in the old St Georges Theatre in London has been evicted. The colourful centre, which had been in action for over a year, saw 30 police and ten bailiffs storm into the building as supporters rushed to try and obtain a stay of execution at the high court.

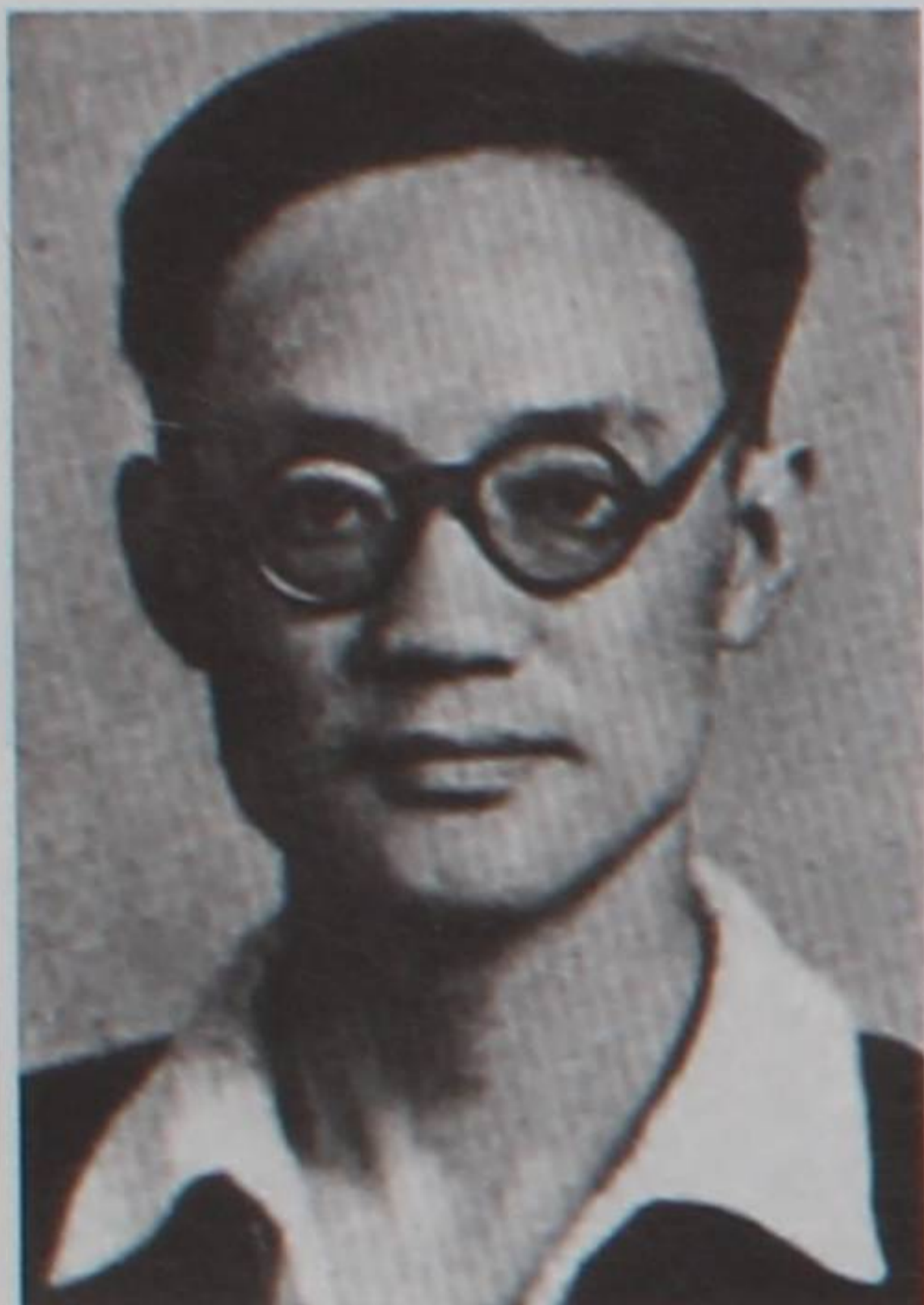
Linked to a network of similar centres across London, including the Rampart near Freedom's offices in Whitechapel, the Circle Centre was designed to work with the local community while supporting both national and international groups and meetings.

A supporter said: "It will be fondly remembered for the many workshops and events held there over the years."

The centre had courted some controversy for its night-time activities, with two local residents complaining of late arguments and parties. One said: "I live in the area. I have had to put up with concerts and parties that carry on until the early hours of the morning."

But there are also fears over the future use of the building, now owned by a Christian business known as Church on the Rock.

Around the world



• CHINA: Xinhua has reported the death of the Chinese anarchist Ba Jin (pictured above as a young man) after a six year battle with cancer. In 1919 he was part of the Chinese anarchist group Company of Equals that organised demonstrations against the warlords and distributed revolutionary leaflets.

Ba Jin was born Li Yaotang on 1904, in Chengdu, Sichuan Province but changed his name to taking Ba Jin, which combines the names of two Russian anarchists. The first syllable in Chinese is that of the surname of Mikhail Bakunin and the last syllable that of Kropotkin. He translated Kropotkin's work into Chinese.

Despite his anarchism Ba Jin became one of the most revered writers under Chinese Leninism, although he was purged during the Cultural Revolution, only re-emerging in 1977. But both before and after the Cultural Revolution he was favoured by the Communist

Party (in 1981 he was elected chairman of the Chinese Writers Association). The Chinese press in accounts of his death not only fails to mention his anarchism but even offers an alternative explanation for his name.

He was the last survivor of the first generation of Chinese writers to use the Chinese of the streets rather than formal Chinese of the court in their writings. His writings were translated into at least 30 foreign languages.

HONG KONG: Peasants and small farmers, NGOs, and social movements from southeast Asia are all converging on Hong Kong, China, for the sixth Ministerial meeting of the WTO (World Trade Organisation), which will take place from 13th to 18th December 2005. Conferences, cultural events, mass mobilisations, and direct actions are being planned between 11th and 18th December.

SOUTH AFRICA: The Southern African Social Forum in Zimbabwe saw many thousands from across the region attend – with Trevor Ngwane from the



Anti-Privatisation Forum in Gauteng opening proceedings.

Trevor started out with a wish that the Forum would provide a space for activists from the whole southern region to develop their struggle against capitalism, and he was pleased to see COSATU at the Forum, as he hoped labour and communities could join together in struggle back home in South Africa.

Zimbabwean Lucy Matibenga, president of the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council, welcomed all the delegates from the region to Harare in Zimbabwe. She spoke of how globalisation was wreaking havoc in people's everyday lives, and she accused African governments of "going to bed with" the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank. The Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed by these institutions cause unemployment and retrenchments in the public sector, which are issues of great concern for the labour movement.

WORLD: The 'polycentric' 2006 World Social Forum (WSF), one of whose centres will be in Venezuela, expects over 80,000 participants from around the world to come to Caracas from 24th to 29th January. The WSF is scheduled to take place in three locations simultaneously: in Venezuela, Pakistan, and Mali. A representative of the WSF Hemispheric Council, the Venezuelan sociologist Edgardo Lander, presented the plans for this year's WSF to the Venezuelan Vice-President, José Vicente Rangel, Tuesday, where he requested the government's help with the organisation of the event.



According to Lander: "This will be the largest international event held in the history of the country and requires an organisational effort of infrastructure, of tents for meetings, of internet access, which obviously requires public support."

However, a dissent group of social activists, artists, professionals, workers and leftist intellectuals have put out a call for an alternative social forum to the main event. They said: "We extend an invitation to an international event of and for social movements in the struggle, as a more valid option to the bureaucratic spectacle the World Social Forum has become."

The Alternative Social Forum aspires to be a net with as many hubs as possible, performing many activities in different places throughout the nation, with an agenda collectively defined and coordinated in a decentralised way. "We want a space without homogenising intentions and without electoral rationality that will in practice ... dominate proceedings."

adapted from A-Infos/Indymedia

Prison news

Aachen prisoners sentenced

As many readers will already know, the trial of the five comrades arrested in Aachen, Germany, last year has come to its inevitable conclusion, with some long sentences being handed down in line with the prosecution request.

After six months on trial, during which they have been brought to court shackled hand and foot, blindfolded, and with their hearing restricted, the sentences are as follows: Jose Fernandez Delgado, 14 years; Gabriel Pombo da Silva, 13 years; Bart de Geeter, 3 1/2 years. Gabriel's sister, Begona, who was on bail during the trial, was given probation.

The prisoners, who remain unrepentant, unbroken, unbowed, have made a call for international revolutionary solidarity. More information about the Aachen case, including the addresses of the prisoners, can be found at www.escapeintorebellion.info

Police stations again being used as jails

For the first time since the 1980s, massive prison overcrowding is meaning that prisoners are once again being held in police cells.

With the prison population rapidly approaching a record high of 78,000, up to 200 prisoners at a time are being

'locked-out' of prisons, particularly in London and the West Midlands where the crisis is worst, and held in police stations until jail places can be found for them.

New pamphlet on repression in Italy

A very informative pamphlet has recently been produced on the current 'tsunami of repression' against Anarchists in Italy, which has led directly to the imprisonment of many comrades. Copies of 'Repression in Italy' are being distributed free of charge, but donations towards printing costs and for prisoner support are very welcome.

Hunger-strike marks Leonard Peltier's 30th Year

US supporters of imprisoned Native American activist Leonard Peltier staged a 12 day hunger-strike to mark the passing of his 30th year behind bars, and called on the Federal Bureau of Prisons to expedite his release.

In 1976 Peltier was convicted by an all-white jury of the killing of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, North Dakota, the previous year.

In 1985 the US government admitted that they did not have proof of who killed their agents. The 10th Circuit Court of

Appeals has since said that, "the prosecution of Mr Peltier is to be condemned; they [the prosecution] withheld evidence and coerced testimony. These facts are undisputed."

More information on Leonard Peltier's case at: <http://users.skynet.be/kola/ipfintro.htm>

Former Spanish prisoner visits UK Anarchist ex-prisoner Laudelino Iglesias Martinez, who spent 25 years behind bars, including more than a decade in isolation, recently visited England to talk about his time inside.

Laudelino gave talks in Brighton, Bradford and London, and spent time with ABC members and anti-prison activists.

The main focus of Laudelino's talk was the repression and prison struggle in Spain post-Franco, and the brutal FIES isolation units.

He was accompanied by a representative from the Basque prisoner support collective Salakheta, who also spoke.

Leeds ABC are currently transcribing the talk Laudelino gave at Bradford's 1 in 12 Club in order to make it more widely available.

Uprising in Antwerp prison

At the end of September there was an uprising by prisoners at Antwerp prison

in Belgium in protest at the cancellation of visits because of an action by the screws. After evening exercise, 170 prisoners refused to go to their cells, erecting barricades and setting fire to prison property.

The Federal Reserve riot police were brought into the prison, and only succeeded in overwhelming the prisoners after three hours of fighting, during which some prisoners defended themselves with homemade weapons.

Antwerp prison, which is designed to hold a jail population of 350, currently has over 700 prisoners.

New Angry Brigade/Persons Unknown DVD available

For those who missed them in 1974 and 1980, two BBC documentaries on the Angry Brigade and on the Persons Unknown case (yet another attempted fit-up against anarchists) are now available on DVD.

Due to copyright payments, the DVD has had to be priced at £17.00 (which includes post and packing), but both documentaries are well worth watching. Available from: ChristieBooks, PO Box 35, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 2UX. Please make cheques payable to 'Christie Books'.

compiled by Mark Bamsley

News

Show me the money

Rob Ray looks at a new governmental plan to 'modernise' unionists and asks who benefits the most

The Department of Trade and Industry has finished setting up a board to oversee the government's newest initiative, launched in conjunction with the TUC.

The new Union Modernisation Fund, worth £5m, is to be spent over the next two years training the next generation of senior unionists on behalf of new Labour.

The fund, which would have to be matched by any union taking up the offer, has a stated aim of helping trade unions "adapt to meet the challenges of the modern workplace".

The board consists of outgoing TUC President Jeannie Drake; Professor Willy Brown from the Low Pay Commission; Judith Hackitt, Director-General of the Chemical Industries Association; Adrian Askew, General Secretary of Connect; Jeannie Drake, Deputy General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union; ex-Amicus deputy chief Danny Carrigan and is chaired by Sir Bill Connor, a member of the Central Arbitration Committee and former General Secretary of shop-workers union USDAW.

The seven members will oversee the first round of funding, which has several 'priority themes'. These themes include:

- Improving the understanding of modern business practices by full time officers and lay representatives, to better enable unions to work constructively with employers as partners to improve business performance;
- Improving two-way communication between unions and their members, leading to a potential for greater

participation of members in the union;

- Improving the ability of unions to respond to the increasing diversity of the labour market, and to supply services geared to the needs of a diverse membership;
 - Applying modern management methods to the running of unions as efficient, outward-looking and flexible organisations;
 - Assessing the challenges and opportunities of union restructuring and union mergers;
 - Developing the professional competence of union officers.
- Commenting on the launch, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "This is a welcome initiative by government that recognises the importance of unions to the modern world of work.

"But it is also an increasingly complex world and this fund will help unions develop their capacity to service their members, deal effectively with employers and contribute to building a successful economy.

"No doubt some will attack it, but it is small beer compared to the help for business that the DTI already rightly provides."

Alan Johnson said: "With any period of change, the role of trade unions – providing advice, advocacy and support in the workplace – is critical. Whether it's helping a new mother understand the new rights she has to leave and pay, advising staff on changes to their pension, or negotiating a solution to tricky workplace issues."

The TUC did not respond to questions over the purpose of the fund.



Rochdale Asbestos

A large area of Rochdale is heavily contaminated with asbestos, disproving claims of a major contractor that the area is safe. A proposed 600 house development in the Spodden Valley is now going into a new consultation process after developers Countryside Properties admitted that the entire area is full of the lethal compound.

The site used to host the Turners asbestos factory and holds at least 500 tonnes of asbestos, but that could be the tip of the iceberg, according to historical documentation found by campaigners. The Save Spodden Campaign has been careful to emphasise that it wants to see more housing, but believes the site is too dangerous and another should be found elsewhere around Rochdale, with Spodden cleaned up.

The campaign has been supported by local trade unions, including the communications union CWU, who expressed concerns over the safety of members who would have to lay telephone lines on the site. Countryside Properties have been accused of trying to bury the information, after campaigners discovered that the company had registered similar domain names to the Save Spodden website at www.spodden-valley.co.uk, before they admitted the dangers last month.

An eventful weekend

Two major events took place in London over the weekend of 22nd and 23rd October, with thousands attending.

On Saturday the London Anarchist Bookfair, the largest anarchist gathering in Britain this year, took place at the Resource Centre on Holloway Road, having moved premises after a bad-tempered confrontation with prior hosts ULU in 2004.

The event, held at a larger site, drew in more stalls and, seemingly, more people, as the larger space was again filled from quite early on in the day. Every major group had a presence, and a huge range of meetings covered topics from ID to class struggle, through Iceland Dambusting to radical co-ops.

The bookfair was spread across three rooms and incorporated a canteen. There was a massive range of literature, tee-shirts, music, films and even coffee and buttons on show, along with a mountain of freebies.

However, complaints were raised at

the presence of David Shayler, an ex-MI5 operative investigated and discredited by journal Notes From the Borderland.

The event was also marred when a disagreement at the nearby Wetherspoons pub quickly escalated into a police shut-down.

An argument between the bar manager and a group who had started up a sound system at or near the venue led to his calling the police at around 6pm that day. Wetherspoons aren't licenced for music, and the music was shut off, turned on again, and finally broken as police were being called.

Several vans of riot police, possibly from the nearby Arsenal game, arrived on the scene within minutes, and began to hem in the crowd, which was emerging from the bookfair as it wound down for the night.

The area was shut down, and after some scuffles, seven people were arrested. During the incident, a girl's leg was injured in an accident as shutters were closed.

The next day, the Freedom to Protest conference was held on behalf of various groups, including Friends of the Earth, sections of No2ID, the Muslim Parliament, trade union groups and the Campaign against the arms trade.

The conference had an explicit theme of using increased protest and defiance, as well as greater organisation, to achieve the aim of fighting measures such as ASBOs, police encirclement, harassment and road blocks.

One attendee, posting on Indymedia.org.uk, said: "It went pretty well with the place being packed and people saying that they found it really useful and interesting. A huge range of groups and movements were represented and in the brief time available there was a lot of material covered.

"There is definitely a growing movement in the country to protect our basic civil rights, and many groups are mentioning the 'right to protest' and 'freedom to protest' on their literature/demos already. Let's keep spreading it."

Road scheme protest

A protest has put pressure on Norfolk's County Council to drop its controversial northern distributor road. The N25, which the council hopes will redistribute traffic away from areas of north Norwich, has come under heavy criticism for using outdated costings for the £100m project.

The No N25 campaign recently scored a significant victory against the local council when they got the section from Fakenham to the A47 dropped – a full quarter of the route.

But last month, the three-quarter length route from the A47 at Postwick to the A140 Cromer Road, and then from the A140 to the A1067 Fakenham Road was ratified by all major parties.

Campaigners said: "The three-quarter route won't achieve the [temporary] cuts in journey times they're looking for and can be expected to deliver traffic chaos to the unfortunate village of Taverham where it stops, and to the North West of Norwich more generally. And there's been no public consultation whatever

on a three quarter length route."

Norwich Area transport said: "Both the East of England Development Agency's Regional Economic Strategy (East of England 2010) and Shaping the Future see high quality transport infrastructure as being essential to ensure the future prosperity of Norfolk. Shaping the Future therefore includes a preferred route determined for an NDR and a growing regional airport in Norwich as strategic priorities."

£6m has been spent so far on planning costs for the project, which Adrian Gunson, county council cabinet member for planning and transportation, said was being designed to go around villages and draw traffic away.

But No N25 have pointed out that the Blue route chosen, goes "through two of the villages with the strongest local campaigns - Rackheath in the east and Weston Longville in the west". The protest took place on Tuesday, 1st November at Ely.

Rob Ray

News

Naughty Nicaragua

The US sent their Deputy Secretary of State to warn Nicaraguans not to challenge neoliberal dominance, reports Jack Ray

The Bush administration has warned Nicaragua that economic aid and debt relief will be withdrawn if President Enrique Bolaños is not allowed to complete his term or if the leftist Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) wins elections next year. Robert Zoellick (pictured), Condoleezza Rice's deputy, visited the country over 4th and 5th October to show support for the embattled Bolaños regime, whose support in the National Assembly has dwindled in face of opposition from El Pacto, an unholy alliance of left and right, between the Sandinistas and the Constitutional Liberal Party (CLP).

Zoellick warned: "For those who think they can remove him [Bolaños], my message is there will be consequences in terms of their relations with the United States." He added: "The clear message that I want to send is that there is an opportunity with [Central American Free Trade Agreement], with the Millennium Challenge Account, with debt forgiveness, to really move into a take off phase for development. But that opportunity can only be seized if some of the forces in Nicaragua don't undermine its democracy and its development."

The United States has pledged to deliver \$175m in aid and to write off \$4bn of debt provided that the country keeps to economic reforms outlined in the Millennium Challenge programme.

As the two largest parties in the National Assembly, El Pacto had prevented the passage of the controversial CAFTA,

which abolishes import tariffs and trade barriers across the region. Critics argue that the agreement will destroy rural Nicaraguan communities and bankrupt 170,000 small and co-operative farmers, provoking a race to the bottom where central American countries compete to have the worst labour and environmental standards.

In 1994, a similar agreement for North American Free Trade (NAFTA) resulted in the Zapatista rebellion. Washington is a strong advocate of the agreement, which was eventually passed on 10th October following Zoellick's threats to the CLP over aid, debt and over US visas. Zoellick hinted that if impeachment attempts against Bolaños continued, thousands of Nicaraguans resident in the US would also find it impossible to return to the country after being denied visas, in particular ex-pat supporters of the CLP.

Bolaños himself is a fervent supporter of CAFTA and the US, hailing the passage of the bill. "Beyond the undeniable economic benefits, CAFTA sets Nicaragua on a long-term commitment to free markets and accelerated democratisation, and it ensures the Central American region and the US will be moving together toward a joint future based on shared values."

The US has also expressed dismay that former president Daniel Ortega might win next year's elections. Ortega led the Sandinista government following the 1979 revolution that ousted pro-US



dictator Anastasio Somoza. The American government fed the Contra Insurgency against the Sandinistas throughout the 1980s, as right-wing paramilitaries engaged in terrorist atrocities and wide-scale killing of civilians.

As in previous elections, Zoellick also

warned Nicaraguans that financial agreement would be endangered by a vote for the Sandinistas; earlier in the year a State Department official warned: "The Sandinista Party that Daniel Ortega represents is not a democratic party. They may play in democratic processes, but it

is not a democratic party."

The Sandinista revolution in 1979 ousted an American backed dictatorship, and won the country's first democratic elections by a landslide in 1984, leaving office after losing the subsequent election in 1990.

News in brief

Swazi anarchist arrested

'MK', a member of the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation's underground structures in Swaziland was among eight Swaziland youth congress members arrested by police following a congress demonstration in the city of Manzini on 1st October. The demonstration was against the continued outlaw of all pro-democratic political activity in Africa's last remaining 'white' (monarchist) dictatorship. Today Sobhuza's successor, King Mswati III, presides over one of the world's highest HIV/AIDS infection rates, in a country where for people to draw water from a stream without permission is a crime.

Over the past two years, the ZACF has established a presence in Swaziland as the only grassroots revolutionary organisation pushing for the overthrow of the king and of the British-South African extractive capitalism he supports.

Working within and outside of the congress, the ZACF has popularised anarchist class struggle ideas among politically-conscious youth. Countering Saturday's demonstration, the royal

Swazi police fired warning shots and in the resulting chaos, arrested 'MK' and seven comrades. Last month, when an armoured police 'hippo' wandered into comrade-controlled territory, it found itself stoned and petrol-bombed.

'MK' and his seven comrades have apparently been charged with "disturbing the peace". He is in high spirits, but is an ill man and is not able to take his regular medication. Bail has been set at r1,500 (£128) by the state, but civic organisations are trying to get the bail reduced to r500 – still a huge sum in this extremely poor southern African country.

ZACF

Nazi march routed

The self-styled American Nazi Party abandoned their 15th October march through Toledo, Ohio, after coming under attack by anti-fascists. Local residents and anti-fascist groups mobilised to prevent the march against 'black crime' called by the National Socialist Movement (NSM), a white supremacist group.

The Nazis were forced to flee the scene after more than 1,000 protesters over-

whelmed their police protection after throwing rocks and surging forward. Police then retreated under a barrage of stones and bottles, with locals leading anti-fascist activists in attacking police and corporate media vehicles. The riot took 150 police using tear gas and horses two hours to disperse, arresting 114 people, mostly locals.

Before the march, police and local authorities had come under heavy criticism for allowing the NSM march, with many residents remarking that such violence was inevitable with a racist group marching through a mostly black neighbourhood to protest supposed gang violence. Trouble started when officers armed with semi-automatic rifles went to protect marchers standing outside a local high school, confronting 100 people they pushed protesters back across the street before more locals joined the crowd as friends and family were called to help out. Requests are now being made for bail money. At least a dozen people were still being held nearly a week later pending bond payment of \$10,000 (£5,600). See www.antiracistaction.us

Ireland From Below

Ireland From Below, a left-libertarian newspaper that will report on communities in struggle, is being launched on 8th November.

Laurence Cox, one of the organising collective, said IFB will be anarchist in its orientation.

"Its format and structure are anarchist in that they focus on struggle from below grounded in people's real-life issues."

The result of six months planning, Cox said that "anarchists and libertarians" have been involved in setting up the newspaper, but it would also feature the work of "community organisers, feminists, non-dogmatic Marxists and others".

He said IFB will attempt to "develop a sense of solidarity generally between different movements" and "build connections between existing struggles, show people in other working-class and poor rural communities that people are already taking action and making a difference".

IFB will feature stories that "centre on people taking action around issues

that affect them and challenging the state and capital when they do so – but which focus on ordinary people as the key actors in their own lives, not passive victims of 'bad policy'."

Cox said Ireland needs a newspaper like IFB because there has been a "rise in movement conflicts across the country – from small farmers opposing Shell in Mayo, port communities opposing incinerators in Ringaskiddy and Ringsend and large mobilisations around summit meetings.

"Most importantly maybe we have a long tradition of community organising which has been bound up with the state for the last ten or fifteen years and so has become fragmented and bureaucratized.

"We hope IFB will be part of this movement wave, helping build connections between existing struggles and helping communities in struggle connect to other groups."

IFB will be available in Britain and will be stocked by the Freedom bookshop. A web edition can be found at irelandfrombelow.org

Feature

Labour's great incapacities

Iain Mackay looks at proposals to cut benefits for the disabled and reveals damned lies in the statistics

The latest of New Labour's attacks on working class people has been announced. The aim is to abolish Incapacity Benefit (IB). Alan Johnson, the Work and Pensions secretary, described the changes as the most radical benefit reform for sick and disabled people since the Beveridge report.

It is hard to imagine William Beveridge not spinning in his grave at this spin. It seems customary these days to call the destruction of something its 'reform' – someone should remind New Labour that reform means make something better, not worse.

The reforms will scrap the present incapacity benefit system, which is currently received by 2.7 million claimants. Not that IB is much. The average amount paid is £85 per week. As a proportion of average earnings, IB paid to a single person fell from 17.4% in April 1995 to 15.2% in April 2003.

This amount will get even more miserly. At first, people will be put on a holding benefit paid at the jobseekers' allowance rate of £55 a week until they face a proper medical assessment, probably within 12 weeks. The majority will receive a rehabilitation support allowance set at just above the current long-term IB rate of £74 a week. But this allowance will be cut back to jobseeker levels – about £20 a week less – if they do not take steps, including regular work-focused interviews, to get them back to work.

The aim, so it is claimed, is to help a million people back into work. How

this will be achieved is hard to know, as there are still around a million people officially currently looking for work. Surely the 'reforms' will simply mean that there will be two million people unemployed? Given that the IB reforms will not begin to bite before 2008, there is enough time to fight them. It also shows the fundamental optimism of New Labour's plans as the absorption of one million new workers is premised on the government's own desperately optimistic forecasts for economic growth. Wishful thinking is hardly a sound basis for a major policy.

As such, it is doubtful that this IB can be simply got rid of by a few cuts. The real effect will be to force people into abject poverty as few jobs are available, particularly in those de-industrialised areas with the highest IB numbers. As New Labour will not tackle the structural causes of such regional unemployment, it is doubtful that those on IB will be able to find meaningful work. This is particularly the case when we look at why the UK has so many people on IB in the first place.

The work and pensions minister, David Blunkett, stated that there is "something very strange has happened to our society" if 2.7m people are now claiming incapacity benefit. In a way, he was right: she was called Margaret Thatcher. He may have heard of her – the government he is part of seems intent on consolidating her evil legacy. So while Blunkett told claimants to "Turn off TV and work," perhaps they should reply by telling him to read a history book?



As such, it is disingenuous to hear the Tories demanding answers to why nearly three million are on IB. When Michael Howard was Employment Secretary, managers of Job Centres in high unemployment areas were instructed to put as many people as possible on to IB in order to reduce their unemployment register. Looking at those currently on IB, they are concentrated in areas of

industrial decline such as Merseyside, the northeast of England, and south Wales. In effect, the unemployed there were simply categorised as 'sick'. In other words, the Tories deliberately used incapacity benefit to disguise unemployment during their period in office. That was not all. Faced with the exploding unemployment, their economically illiterate policies helped cause, the Tories did little more than combat the statistics by revising how unemployment was counted at least 12 times over their 18 years in office (Labour denounced this while in opposition but, strangely, failed to change back to the old ways once in office.) Each change unsurprisingly revised the numbers down.

Yet, in spite of this, unemployment in 1997 was still at historically high levels compared to the 1950s, 1960s and even the dreaded 1970s. This changed slightly under New Labour when, according to Gordon Brown, after inheriting close to two million unemployed, New Labour had reduced that figure to "less than a million, the lowest for 29 years". It is worth remembering that Milton Friedman – inventor of the subsequently discredited Monetarism Thatcher imposed – said that he expected only a minor jump in unemployment in the short term when his ideas were applied. Nearly three decades is hardly short-term!

That the UK has low unemployment is, sadly, a myth based on semantics and the manipulation of statistics. The high numbers of ill people in Britain is an obvious sign that its economy is not as healthy as is regularly portrayed. It all depends on how you measure unemployment. While the UK

government claimed that 2.9% claimed jobless benefits, the International Labour Organisation presented a slightly less flattering figure of 4.7% based on their way of counting the unemployed. In other words, it simply means that unemployment has been redefined rather than reduced. To get a real idea of unemployment, you need to count both registered unemployed and those claiming invalidity. In the UK, while the unemployment rate has gone down, disability cases have risen. This points to extensive hidden unemployment. Looking at those who are claiming incapacity benefit for more than six months, the number has grown from 570,000 in 1981 to 2.13 million by 2003. In total, 2.7 million people of working age are receiving sickness-related benefits. This is some 7% of the UK's working age population and, obviously, puts the stated 2.9% unemployment rate in an utterly different light. These figures dwarf the equivalent ones from Europe. In Germany, only 2.1% claim IB while it is 0.3% in France. Add IB to standardised unemployment figures, and the supposed superiority of the British economy to those of Germany and France simply disappears. Unemployment in 'liberalised' Britain is about the same as in 'regulated' Europe. While Thatcher's labour market reforms may have weakened workers' strength and increased their job insecurity (and so increased profits and inequality), they did not reduce unemployment. So much for nearly 30 years of neo-liberalism. And Blair has the cheek to lecture Europe on the subject!

CASE STUDY: THE MINERS

A report brought out in March was amongst the starkest example of how incapacity has been used in recent years to hide much of the country's unemployment problems.

Twenty Years on: Has the economy of the coalfields recovered? examined communities where over ten percent of the population had been employed in the mines before the mass closures.

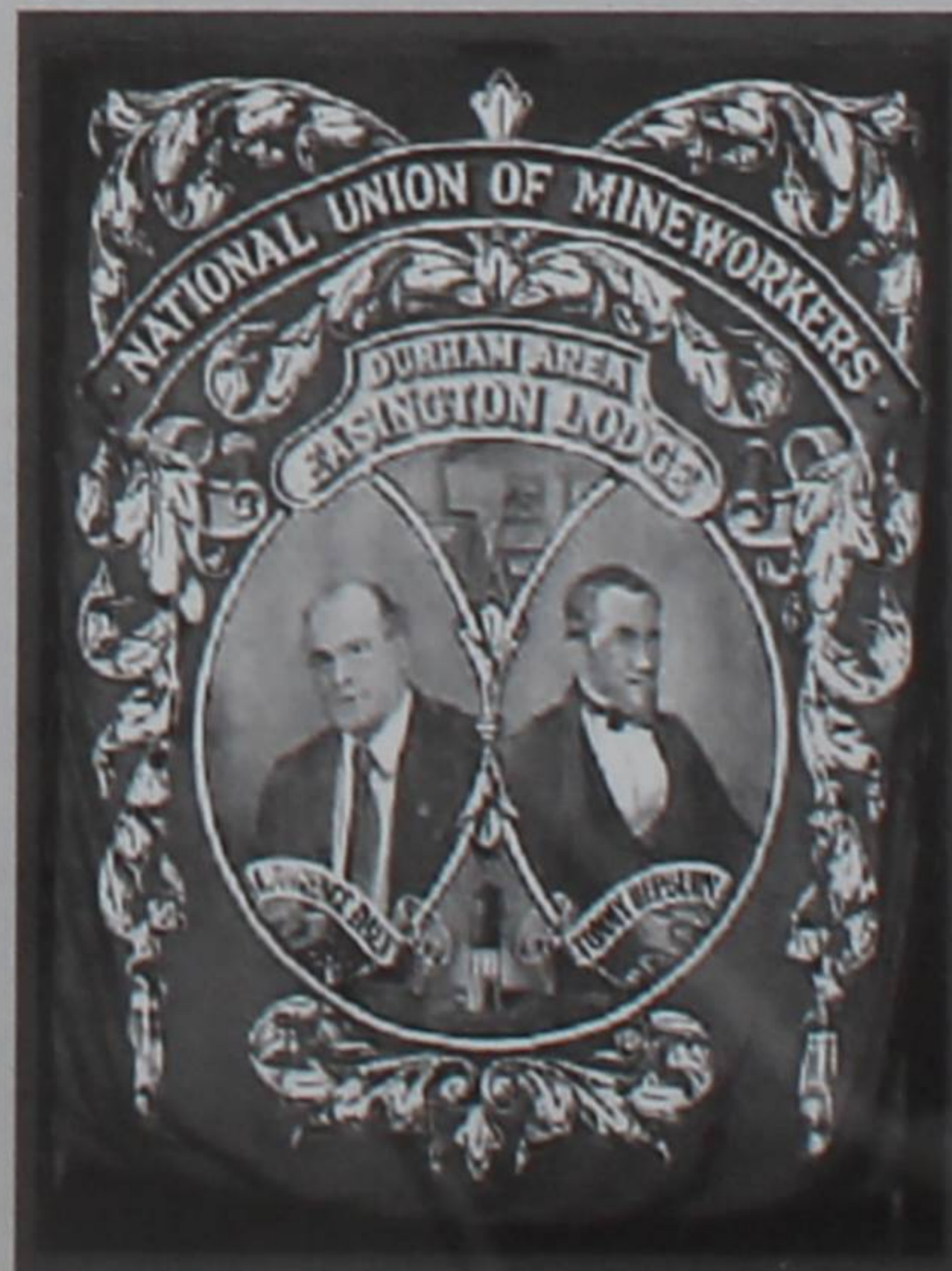
The report, brought out by the Centre for Regional and Social Economic Research at Sheffield Hallam university, said: "Claimant unemployment figures, which are currently relatively low in most former coalfields, give a wholly misleading view of the strength of the local labour market." Since the early 1980s, the rise in the number of economically inactive men of working age in the coalfields has been twice as large as the fall in recorded unemployment.

In the English and Welsh coalfields in mid-2004, no fewer than 336,000 adults of working age (201,000 men, 135,000 women) were out of work and claiming incapacity benefits, compared to just 67,000 (50,000 men and 17,000 women) claiming unemployment benefits. The evidence supports the view that in the coalfields, as in some other parts of older industrial Britain, there has been a huge diversion of people with health problems from unemployment to incapacity benefits.

Estimates suggest that as many as 100,000 men in the coalfields are currently hidden unemployed in this way.

The report covered the 1981-2004 period, and covered only the English and Welsh coalfields, accounting for approximately 90% of the total. It also only focused on the experience of men, as these made up the vast majority of those employed in the mines. In Easington, a district council in County Durham – the huge mining community which experienced 100% job loss – approximately 22% of the working age population are claiming disability benefits, and similar levels can be found in the south Wales local authorities of Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil.

The Hallam researchers found that sustained growth in the economy from 1993 onwards had made no difference to the numbers claiming incapacity benefit, which showed a four-fold increase. They concluded that a decision was taken to keep official jobless figures low by diverting people on to incapacity benefit.



Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 66 Number 21

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

The London Anarchist Bookfair was, as always, a roaring success story for us, as we had an entire wall booked up and (it can be said with no false modesty) the best selection of books in the whole place.

Away from our greedy little claws counting the pennies however, it was less of a success story for our meetings, both the media workshop, and the Freedom one which followed it, consisted almost solely of existing hacks.

The Black Flag meeting went badly. Rather than looking forward, it descended into arguing and little was volunteered (apart from one interesting idea that a marketing group to support anarchist papers be set up).

The Freedom meeting had only seven attendees, with three of these being existing editors. Having said that, the feedback we got was invaluable.

As such, and with a little discussion, it was suggested that a bi-monthly readers group be formed, featuring speakers and discussion on topics brought up in the paper. This would both allow us to get better and more regular feedback on where we might be going wrong, and also – not hiding any agendas here – to be able to ask the occasional favour.

Hopefully we'll sort out a specific date in time for our next issue, so if you have a particular speciality and would like to speak on it, please do get in touch with us.

Contact details

Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX
Tel/fax: 020 7247 9249
www.freedompress.org.uk
Enquiries: info@freedompress.org.uk
Copy/Letters: copy@freedompress.org.uk
Subscriptions: subs@freedompress.org.uk
Bookshop: shop@freedompress.org.uk
Freedom Press Distribution:
distro@freedompress.org.uk

Next issue

The next issue will be dated 12th November and the last day to get your copy to us will be Friday 4th November.

The Sorry State

James Horrox's article made some interesting points (The Sorry State, Freedom, 1st October 2005) but I thought its main premise was flawed. All states seek to maintain a monopoly on the means of violence.

In advancing his Lockean thesis on the "legitimate scope of state activity" James neglects a vital point. All states are bodies of military and administrative power exercised on behalf of one class (and in defence of a particular relationship between people and property) over another. Thus, James's attempt to argue that the state is acting ultra vires in exercising violence against its citizens actually mystifies what he seeks to explain. States will pursue violence against particular groups on behalf of other groups. In describing such action as ultra vires James takes liberal democracy's claims for itself at face value. But liberal democracy can all too easily abandon its fundamentals in pursuit of its own defence – it's not the lack of a written constitution that has brought about the extension of emergency powers in the UK. Liberal democracy is the form of rule capital favours in times of social peace. It is also a form easily abandoned by capital when it is under threat.

When James asserts that the current raft of legislation is "directly and unashamedly antithetical to everything a liberal democracy stands for" he's accepting capital's liberal bona fides at face value. Capital will use the powers of the state to defend itself from attack – and draconian powers can fit all too easily with the liberal notion of the rule of law. As we've seen on the streets of the six counties with shoot to kill, and the repression of extra-parliamentary resistance in Germany and Italy, the norms of liberal democracy will be abandoned if they are no longer convenient. The armed coup against Allende in Chile was "antithetical to everything a liberal democracy stands for" but many a liberal democracy encouraged it and colluded with it.

My point is simply that a Lockean analysis obscures the role of the state in defending the interest of a particular class, and obscures also the extent to which the liberal state can impose a regime of permanent emergency without – on its own terms – being ultra vires at all. Capital will defend its interests by whatever means necessary. We'd do well to respond in kind rather than buying into the myth that our battle should be for constitutional safeguards.

John Shute

George Fox fix

[Last issue, Freedom reported on the trespassing conviction of the George Fox Six for protesting against the continuing sell-out of Lancaster University to corporate interests]

Some observers said it was all about money. There is a wider state agenda, to which the university conforms. Ruth Kelly, the Minister for Education, has promised to drive extremism out of the universities.

Lancaster University has, in the past, enjoyed a strong reputation for political activity. In November 1991, 250 students occupied the University Senate House, in protest at 12.75% rent rises. After this, spikes and barbed wire appeared around the top of the building, to prevent students climbing in.

The consequences for the relationship between the University and the student

body of the George Fox Six trial are likely to be serious. Striking out the most militant elements of the student body may cow the rest into submission.

The external reputation of the university will be harmed. Already, applications for certain courses are down. Perhaps more damaging, but difficult to quantify, will be the decline in the willingness to question, to challenge.

The damage to the intellectual atmosphere in Lancaster will be felt. All of this is a great pity because it is, on the whole, a good university. The case is a result of a lack of leadership. There must be better ways of funding higher education, rather than being beholden to corporations. It should not be beyond the wit of university leaders to find ways.

Similarly, the university establishment have been weak in their refusal to stand up to the authoritarian compulsions of the New Labour Police State in its drive to criminalise all dissent.

One of the protesters, Rachael Jackson, expressed shock that it could be possible for so many evil corporations to be gathered together in one room. To me, this seems to be the heart of it. The university needs to cosy up to the corporations. It needs their sponsorship and supports to service its debts from the massive expansion programme.

That there are concerns about corporate sponsorship warping the results of research, and excessive secrecy attached to such work, are commonplace in academia.

That six young students were prepared to protest against this shows there is hope yet. In a grotesque verdict, denying their freedom of speech was being murdered, the judge found them guilty.

The idea of a university prosecuting its students for daring to protest against such matters is completely outrageous, but entirely in line with the absolute totalitarianism of these days we live in.

Stephen Booth

T&G and Gate Gourmet

The Gate Gourmet dispute has obviously been a cause célèbre for the Transport & General, a proud example of what is meant by its 'fighting back culture'. But what has this actually meant in practice?

On a grassroots level, the response from other T&G workers at Heathrow and across the country was exemplary. Hundreds of black and white workers immediately recognised the need for solidarity with their (sometimes literal) brothers and sisters. Across the country union members organised solidarity collections and meetings raising many thousands for the strikers.

But what of the national union, and its leadership? Gate Gourmet bosses

There's one DIY space in the UK where you can get zines like: Slug & Lettuce, Profane Existence, Maximum Rock n Roll, Heartattack and R.T.B., music from labels like: Broken Rekids, Active, Skuld, Havoc, Malarie, Flat Earth and Mortalate, books from AK Press, Freedom, Rebel Press, and many others!

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claim that the solidarity was actually sanctioned, if not explicitly organised, by the union, saying: "The TGWU was fully aware of this [solidarity] action and did nothing to stop it. A radical group of workers at the centre of this event has a history of similar illegal action, taking such measures seven times in the past three years."

Three stewards are being charged with organising the walkout (including the union executive member for aviation), and other reports have newspapers making offers of hundreds of thousands of pounds to local reps for them to say that Tony Woodley himself ordered the walkouts.

Both are untrue, the walkout was a spontaneous action by the workers, and came after clear signals that Gate Gourmet and BA bosses wanted to break the union.

They failed to do so, but they did get away with the majority of the restructuring plans the workers had been resisting for months, as well as getting rid of several 'troublemakers'.

One reason for this could happen because the actual negotiations between the union and the bosses were carried out by the T&G bigwigs without local reps being present. Local reps would not have been able to agree to the 'packages' that GG offered, having already rejected them in the past. But the leadership could accept them, and effectively wore the strikers down by failing to come up with any alternative strategy or solution. Indeed, they haven't even given workers the text of the agreement, and they do not seem to be aware of who the 144 workers, who must take redundancy, actually are!

Any successful strategy would have had to include actively supporting the baggage handlers walkout and encouraging it to spread across Heathrow, it would have meant calling for the refusal by jobcentre staff to advertise the vacancies, and the systematic picketing of the Blue Arrow recruitment firm, which organised the temp staff sparking the dispute. The union supported no such actions. Tony Woodley, along with the vast majority of union leaders, asks the Labour Party to legalise secondary action (whilst promising that it will only be utilised utterly responsibly). But unless union leaders are prepared to actually call for it now, the law will remain unchanged. And tens of thousand more workers will lose their jobs due to bosses being able to pick off groups one by one.

Richard Belbin

Richard is a member of the TGWU

The joys of democracy

As anarchists argued before the US-UK invasion of Iraq, any claims that this was a war of liberation were false. It is an imperialist war, in which the victors would shape Iraq as they desire. Due to mass protest by Iraqis themselves, the occupiers have been forced to present a fig leaf of democracy.

The first such concession was the election last January. While the bravery of Iraqis in voting cannot be denied, the election itself was a farce. With even the names of candidates not revealed to the electorate, it is hard to say what, exactly, the voters were voting for. With the US imposed super-majorities required to elect a government, it was guaranteed that occupier friendly politicians would be selected – as they were.

Many Iraqis do not have a copy of the proposed constitution and so they are

being asked to vote for a document most have not seen. Perhaps just as well, given that the US thinks it can keep on writing provisions just a few days ahead of the vote making any documents currently published potentially out of date. That, however, is not all. The Shiite and Kurdish parties have agreed that the newly elected parliament after 15th December will re-open negotiations with the Sunni Arabs on the constitution. This means that Iraqis are now being asked to vote on a constitution that may be subsequently changed. So not only are the people being asked to vote for something most of them they have not read, those who have read it do not know if it will be implemented! One thing is sure, the constitution (accepted or not) will not end the insurgency, particularly as the occupier's hand is so noticeable on the constitution itself.

What can be done to correct the situation in Iraq? Nothing, unless the US does what it will never do and end its occupation. Nor will the constitution ensure self-determination for Iraqis (with or without the US) as it will, at best, delimit the powers of the politicians and bureaucrats who will, in reality, determine their fate.

Sadly, this is what they will get – unless they create self-managed alternatives to the joke which passes for democracy under capitalism.

anon

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Quiz answers

1. All have had anarchist libraries named after them.
2. Four – he started with Carter in 1979, and redrew it (with some new oil companies) for Reagan, Bush Senior and the Monkey Boy (see <http://solidarity.com/hkcartoons/huckoiltoon.html>).



3. Rupert Murdoch. He added "But they'd kill you if you said that". Shame they didn't.
4. He said in an interview "a million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds were killed in this country and I'm the only one who dares to talk about it". He fled after death threats and now faces a trial for "public denigration of Turkish identity" in December.

REVIEW

Tom Jennings applauds David Cronenberg for linking the attractions of action cinema to ideologies of control and conquest by force

Two sleazy mobsters wipe out a motel clerk and maid and their little girl; Edie (Maria Bello) and Tom Stall (Viggo Mortenson) comfort their daughter after her dream of monsters. Ostensibly content community pillars in the Midwest boondocks, the Stalls are quietly stagnating – until the murderers hold up the diner he runs, whereupon Tom promptly despatches them with considerable élan. After the ensuing media spotlight, goons arrive led by Carl Fogarty (Ed Harris) who insists to protestations of mistaken identity that Tom is actually notorious Philly hitman Joey Cusack. Meanwhile Jack Stall (Ashton Holmes) has trouble with highschool hardnuts, but inspired by his dad's antics discovers his own vicious streak and beats up the bullies. The town sheriff is suspicious about Tom, but Edie (a bigshot lawyer) pulls rank and covers for him. Fogarty becomes increasingly threatening until Tom kills the made-men in a blur of kung-fu gunplay, also involving Jack. After bruisingly passionate sex with Edie, Tom journeys east into his past, and kills big boss Richie Cusack (William Hurt). He returns to the family, but things will never be the same...

Cronenberg compulsively blurs boundaries of fantasy and reality in his surreal science fiction and shocking tales of horror, gore and mutant depravity, often mobilising machines as metaphors for aspects of experience we prefer to overlook. This time the technology of cinematic representation itself – Hollywood storytelling strategies and the ways these smuggle ideology into audiences – takes centre stage. *A History of Violence* blends visions of small-town utopia with the more overtly masculinist fantasies of security in a hostile world of the Western and crime and action thrillers.

Corny comic characters and stock dialogue from these genres stretch the ironic limits of pastiche – but the quality of acting and careful construction of this exemplary postmodern film carry it off. The director juggles multiple levels of

interpretation and significance in calculating, equating and integrating symbolic and physical violence – unflinchingly laying bare the weighty aftermaths for the characters, the fascination for viewers, and the implications for personal biography and redemption all the way to historical allegory and the general body politic.

Systematically deconstructing the cinematic language of ordinary maleness and respectable gender relations and roles, all that survives of the classic nuclear family romance is superficial collusion in hiding dark secrets. The feminisation of men in post-industrial service sectors, as women become more professionally dominant in the public sphere, is juxtaposed with growing female assertiveness in personal relations and the complexities of dominance and submissiveness in adult love. Once Tom begins to vent 'Dirty Harry' tendencies, the spouses initiate and respond to both sexual and nonsexual aggression with ambivalent arousal and disgust that damages trust. Meanwhile the cosy reproduction of masculinity and femininity is disrupted as the children watch their parents meet external evils with their own suppressed demons – the girl seeing through the fairy tale that "there are no such things as monsters"; and the wisecracking adolescent nerd pragmatically kickstarting manhood, first against the bullies then by saving his dad.

What a man's gotta do

The storyline works simultaneously as conventional narrative and macho fantasy, destabilising and questioning happy endings and neat resolutions. Everyone and everything changes due to the "return of the repressed" – whether violent action or imagination, desire, "manly" strength and "womanly" weakness, or other brutal truths of past and present. In the conventional narrative, traditional complacencies are thoroughly trashed – of the main character, his happy family and the idealised small town community as well as the integrity of 'external' forces such as official



Viggo Mortenson in Cronenberg's *A History of Violence*

hierarchies and the outsider drama of organised crime. Likewise, as dream or fantasy, the attempted wish-fulfillments of pleasure and certainty at the individual level inevitably self-destruct, since the inconvenient realities of impulse and excess, bodily intransigence and social conflict refuse to be denied – not least from their uncomfortable proximity to what makes life worth living compared to the cloying, static boredom of perfection.

Furthermore, the spiritual overtones hint at wider historical and philosophical dreams and fantasies. The audience's relationship to violence in the media (and especially American cinema) as innocent entertainment is no longer straightforward – and, extending further, the political roles of national, societal and religious mythologies in solving conflict and legitimising authority are exposed as inadequate

and dishonest. Cronenberg's key theme comes across more strongly than ever, despite *A History of Violence*'s mainstream appeal and big-budget glossiness. This is that extraordinary reserves of psychological work must be devoted over a lifetime (thus being diverted from more constructive pursuits) to maintaining a classically 'scientific' European type of self-image – a coherent, conscious, voluntarily controlled and consistent rationality – in the face of the absurdities of the unconscious, the incorrigible sensuality and/or abjection of flesh and the general horrors of human 'civilisation'. Once the delusions they've built their identities around dissolve, the pathos of the family's disorientation shows that isolated heroes solve nothing. The American Dream leaves its banal representatives stalled in no-man's land, where banishing monsters to

nightmares leaves them unable to face real ones except by creating their own. The film weaves together umpteen of the ramifications without wishing away their intransigence, yet still captivates viewers. Independent cinema's usual depressive alienation, pretentious middle class angst or fashionable nihilism are avoided, and no magnificently sentimental denouement or fatal gesture lets us (or the status quo) off the hook. Sadly, Cronenberg's existentialist detachment preempts solutions by individualising the problem and concealing its crucially social origins in the mists of time. Nevertheless the conclusion is inescapable that only genuinely mutual and honestly collective effort will allow the family (or society) to survive and grow together, rather than violently splitting apart.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

BOOKS

A World of Fine Difference: The Social Architecture of a Modern Irish Village

by Adrian Peace
published by UCD Press, £15.95

Anthropologist Adrian Peace calls his study village Inveresk "the inlet of the fish". It is a fictional name, as are all

the names of the people and some of the other places in this book. It does not matter that he cannot identify the actual village, because the social patterns he describes resonate through much of Irish life, rural and urban.

But his study community is unique – hence his "world of fine difference". The members of Inveresk also see themselves as "a different place altogether" from neighbouring communities, which in turn see Inveresk as "a place full of really queer people".

But Inveresk is not one community, it is three closely-knit, diverse communities; Peace describes them as country, village and pier. Where Inveresk may differ from other similar coastal fishing and

farming communities is that each lives cheek by jowl, with the country folk no further than a few miles removed from the pier folk.

In Inveresk, Peace shows a community that has no desire to live up to the caricature that rural Ireland is dying or losing its cultural identity to modernity. He writes:

"Despite the extent of this sustained induction into modernity, Inveresk retains a strong, indeed pervasive, sense of its own distinct identity, of being a special place in the world.

Notwithstanding the many external forces which threaten to breach and subvert it, this sense of distinction is articulated with pride and the residents

work hard to sustain it."

Inveresk is "a modern place in a late modern society" yet sadly perhaps "also a distinctively peripheral locale in which, one presumes, the negative effects of global marginalisation should be especially pronounced".

There is little argument that "the inhabitants of Inveresk share a sense of powerlessness in relation to the politics of government concentrated in the metropolitan core". However that has not stopped them from consciously and deliberately attempting to reshape their own small world from within their local environs while keeping an eye on what is going on beyond.

Robert Allen

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A Sideways Look

My journey to work takes me past an estate of maisonettes in the process of demolition. Already, many of the new foundations are laid, only a couple of months after site clearance started. The last of the first phase has now been knocked down so I am spared the slightly jarring sight of different patches of colour hanging on the exposed walls. The demolished homes have been carted away by large lorries, at least to Erith, a journey of some ten miles. All the improvements made by the former residents have gone – the new kitchens, double glazing, gardens.

The homes being built in their stead look just like every other housing association development. They appear smaller but then more of them are houses. They come with the most usual improvements already done – central heating, double glazing, insulation.

This pattern is being repeated all over the country, albeit with regional variations. In London and the south east it tends to be council estates that are being demolished, to be rebuilt by housing associations. Some housing associations behave like a social landlord, unfortunately many don't. The government is ordering councils to raise rents so that they are in line with housing associations by 2010, presumably so that anti-privatisation campaigners can't point to higher rents.

In the north, huge areas of terraced housing – including private homes – are going to be demolished by John Prescott. Well, probably not him personally but you get the idea. It will be replaced by a mixture of developments, he says. I wonder how many property developers' boards he'll be sitting on when he's elevated to the Lords?

Some buildings are so bad that they should be knocked down. But most aren't and could easily be renovated and improved. However, there are several problems with this. Firstly, the Treasury charges VAT on renovations yet doesn't on new buildings. You could call it a tax on being green. Secondly, there's a lot more profit to be made if you free up sizeable chunks of land and squeeze in other things as well as houses (not that developers don't make enough from houses!). Also, some councils might hang on to their housing stock instead of being forced to virtually give them away to asset strippers or feather-nested former Directors of Housing.

A term I learnt recently illustrates how stupid this is from an ecological point of view. Embodied energy is the energy required to extract, manufacture and transport the materials used for a building. The material with the least embodied energy is wood – most of its embodied energy comes from drying and transportation. Next is brick, and many towns in Britain have street names which commemorate the fact that the Victorians basically dug up fields, baked the clay or loam in kilns and then built houses with the resulting bricks and tiles. Looking at old maps

from then, it's fair to say that nearly three-quarters of my life I've lived in homes built on or near former clay pits. The highest embodied energy comes from aluminium, mainly because of the enormous amount of energy required to extract it. Perhaps surprisingly, concrete and plastic are relatively low, while glass and steel are high.

All these homes that Labour want to knock down, to be replaced in some places by towers of glass and steel as is the mode with fashionable architects, cost energy to make. If we as a society want to do anything about climate change we should be starting, literally, at home.

Svartfrosk

Blast from the Past

Taken from Freedom, November 1985: Class War's Bash the Rich March number two called on people to meet at 3pm on Saturday 21st September, to march to the parts of Hampstead 'Rich Scumbags' have made their luxurious dwellings.

By 3pm quite a crowd had gathered; it was a shame that most persons present were in uniform, and busied themselves about searching the pockets, bodies and baggage of those out of uniform.

Marchers were escorted by what seemed almost as many police (including those who, previously out of sight, appeared as if on cue when the trouble started).

The actions of the police were extremely provocative. En-route to Hampstead they succeeded, by such means as several snatch arrests, in raising the temperatures of the marchers. Tempers were pushed to the limit. Just inside Hampstead we were met by a line of police blocking the march, diverting it down a side street away from where people wanted it to go. Here the march stood still, arrests were being made at the rear and fighting ensued as people attempted to resist those arrests. Those previously out-of-sight police appeared on the scene. Police lines tightened up as more arrests were made.

After people had been sufficiently frightened and once the potential trouble-makers were in custody the march was allowed to continue – away from Hampstead! It was plain to see that this was a premeditated tactic of the police, and people played right into their hands, despite the odds. As I heard someone say, "You can't take on that many coppers."

The quiz

1. What links Giuseppe Pinelli, Anselmo Lorenzo, Franco Serantini and Kate Sharpley?
2. How often has Gary Huck re-drawn his famous 'oil cartoon' showing the President mouthing text using oil company logos?
3. Who said in 1998 that "the Labour Party were more Thatcherite than the Tories"?
4. Why did writer Orhan Pamuk flee Turkey this year?

Answers on page 6



Imagine If...

Maximus Decimus Meridius and his motley band of supporters walked into the quiet pub next to the centre of Rome and set up. The barman looked on as they began to drum loudly and a few started to dance.

The barman didn't have a licence, and asked them to stop.

Maximus was outraged. "Are you not entertained?" He shouted at his audience. "ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED! Is this not why you are here?"

He turned back to his drumming. The publican told him to leave again. They argued for a moment, and the drumming died away.

Finally Maximus turned his back on the barkeeper in disgust, and told his minions: "At my signal, release hell."

But before they could start playing again, a pubgoer put through one of the drums, ruining the whole thing.

The barman had also flagged down some Praetorian guards.

As he and his fellow gladiators left, shortly before the Praetorians showed up, he snarled: "My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius, Commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions, loyal servant to the true Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife. I will have my vengeance, in this life ... or the next."

As they left, he carefully avoided taking responsibility for the Praetorians coming in mob-handed, and disappeared back to the Coliseum.

What an arsehole eh?



Listings

29th October 'Whose London? Shaping Alternative Futures for our City' London Social Forum conference, see londonsocialforum.org.uk

30th October 'William Blake: mystic, madman or revolutionary' talk by Steve Ash at South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, see ethical.soc.org.uk

3rd November Ken Campbell Impro Show from 8pm at The Inn on the Green, 3 Thorpe Close, London W10, see newagenda.demon.co.uk/perclub.html

4th to 6th November UK Hemp Expo at Hall 1, Wembley Exhibition Centre, London from 10am to 5pm, for info see ukhempexpo.com

5th November Class War bonfire night from 7.30pm, Hackney Fields, London

5th November IWW Centenary Festival with films during the day and a Robb Johnson gig starting at 8pm, Rampart Social Centre, 15-17 Rampart Street, London E1 (off Commercial Road), organised by London Wobblers, see iww.org.uk

10th November The tenth anniversary of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, see www.remembersarowiwa.com

17th November Attila the Stockbroker, plus TV Smith, from 8pm at The Inn on the Green, 3 Thorpe Close, London W10, see newagenda.demon.co.uk/perclub.html

22nd to 24th November Weekend of action against Rolls Royce Raynesway, Derby, see derby.peacepages.co.uk or tridentploughshares.org or phone 0845 330 3877 for info

24th November Jeremy Hardy, plus Whatsername, Alan Tomlinson and MC Tony Allen from 8pm at The Inn on the Green, 3 Thorpe Close, London W10, see newagenda.demon.co.uk/perclub.html

26th and 27th November BeyondTV International Festival, Swansea, see undercurrents.org/beyondtv

3rd December International Day of Climate Protest, to coincide with the next round of climate talks in Montreal, with days of action in London and Edinburgh, as well as simultaneous demonstrations in many other countries including USA, Canada, Greece, Turkey, Australia and Asia see globalclimatecampaign.org or campaigncc.org

7th to 8th January Newbury re-union, it's ten years since the start of work on the Newbury Bypass so come and meet up with old friends and relive that freezing cold winter experience! People who weren't at Newbury are more than welcome too, see roadalert.org.uk

9th to 15th January Faslane Peace Camp 'Adventure Week'

28th January Prison Abolition Seminar on resisting prison construction, radical alternatives to prison and abolitionist theory past and present, at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, from 2pm to 5pm, for more details see alternatives2prison.uk.com

Introducing...

Cardiff Anarchist Network (CAN) CAN want to pursue political demonstrations through direct action and civil disobedience, and believe in the PGA hallmarks.

They said: "Past actions we have been involved in include the 2005 G8 mobilisation, Blackwood bypass protest camp, Reclaim The Streets of Cardiff, Stop DSEi, numerous anti-war actions, protests against the EU summit in Newport and many more."

We are working on setting up a Social Centre in Cardiff. Currently we meet every first and third Monday at 8.30pm in the Glamorgan Staff Club at Westgate Street in Cardiff."

Website: riseup.net/cardiffanarchists; Email: cardiffanarchists@riseup.net

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