

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

12 NOVEMBER 2005

INSIDE ►►

Pensions on a slate  
page 3

Sans hope  
page 4

Queen of coal  
page 7

Svartfrosk  
page 8

## DELIVERING REDUNDANCIES

**A**irport giant BAA have announced major job cuts just weeks after announcing a £6.8bn investment for their three London facilities over the next ten years.

BAA publicly announced 700 redundancies as part of their new 'Delivering Excellence' plan, which they say is designed to improve customer service.

Adding insult to injury, the losses – which were not consulted with unions – came just days after the announcement of a huge rise in profits for the company.

The company is also currently a front-runner to gain control of a majority stake in the \$2bn sale of Budapest Airport.

The spectacle of massive investment in facilities while hundreds of staff are sacked, along with a hike in payouts to shareholders of over 5%, has led to widespread criticism.

BAA saw a 9.6% rise in half-year operating profits to £412 million, up from £376 million in the previous half. This was despite a significant drop in tourism from the 7th July London tube bombings and the impact of the Gate Gourmet dispute, which grounded many flights from their airport.

Most of the cuts will be at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, and is already affecting personnel in the company's supply chain, IT and human resources units. BAA employs around 9,400 staff in its airports.

Mike Clasper, chief executive of BAA, said: "Delivering Excellence will improve customer service and shorten

decision chains, leading to more effective. Supported by further innovation, it will deliver continued improvement in our business performance."

But Clasper admitted that the company was expecting a rise in the number of passengers at their major airports at the same time as they would be cutting staff: "As announced on 20th September, we anticipate around 3% traffic growth for our UK airports this year."

Unions have condemned the cuts, though none have as yet suggested the possibility of industrial action. Four trade unions are currently recognised for the representation of airport staff: TGWU, Amicus, PCS and Prospect. Heathrow Express recognises Aslef.

Brendan Gold, the T&G national secretary for civil air transport said: "It does give us cause for concern that BAA has by-passed normal consultation and told 700 staff they have an uncertain future".

The company have refused to rule out compulsory redundancies, and said the losses were needed due to 'threats' to its business, such as a downturn in spending at its shops and a the possible impact of increased crowding at its major airports leading to delays in service.

The rise in BAA's profits this year however were driven by a surprise rise in retail profits from its airport shops, alongside an increase in long-haul traffic.

Job losses have capped a year of disagreement between the unions and



BAA. Disputes had risen over a number of policy areas, including the working time directive, criminal record checks and the introduction of a new retirement policy.

It was only after several months of negotiations that deals were reached, which agreed a pay settlement equivalent to an 8% rise in wages over

the next two years, just ahead of likely inflation rates.

Earlier in the year, industrial action by Glasgow fire fighters also had a major impact, over health and safety issues as the company attempted to remove fire fighters from the city airport.

The nature of the job losses, announced on the 1st November, may have under-

mined the stated employment policy of BAA, which says: "We are committed to being the employer of choice wherever we operate. In 2005/06 we will continue to work across our business to achieve this goal."

Shares in the company rose by 2.6% the day after the redundancies announcement.

## DECENTLY HOMELESS

**A** £50m regeneration plan for one of London's poorest wards has led to eviction notices being served on 4th November to 33 existing co-op tenants to make way for 24 units of low density housing.

Residents have stated that they will not leave their homes and staged a protest at the local town hall on the same day instead.

The South Kilburn New Deal for Communities, which aims to bring South Kilburn up to the high living standards of the surrounding areas of Maida Vale, Queens Park and West Hampsted, ignored a huge majority vote from tenants against the conversion of their flats into houses.

The evicted tenants belong to Brent Community Housing (BCH), a co-operative under great strain. This year alone 100 BCH tenants will be homeless and a further 200 will follow. BCH has been unsuccessful in acquiring new homes for its members. This is partly due to the Decent Homes Standards, which have exacerbated an existing lack of housing traditionally given to co-ops. Many co-ops are facing the same crisis.

"I am not looking forward to my future," said 62-year-old Gordon Rodgers, who faces eviction. "I was a drug addict for 40 years. This year I stopped shooting up. Finally having a stable home has helped me, but I am petrified of the future. Just as my life has come together, it has also been taken away."

Brent council said: "South Kilburn's location is second-to-none. South Kilburn is just over a mile north of London's West End. The potential for successful regeneration is enormous.

"There are persistent and deep-rooted

economic and social problems. Despite the positive economic climate in London, unemployment is running at over four times the national rate (16.3%)."

The Labour council voted unanimously in August to evict the families in Allington road, despite sympathetic words from several council members.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODMP) laid down the Decent Homes Standards to improve social housing by 2010, to directly benefit communities. The flip side to this is the destruction of communities in co-op run social housing.

Council's are repossessing all their properties, effectively making co-op tenants homeless. Traditional social housing stock is disappearing, and thousands of low-paid workers are set to be made homeless.

Many co-operative tenants are 'Key workers' such as teachers, nurses and charity workers who are vital to communities, yet do not qualify for council housing.

► page 6, column 4

## BANLIEUE BLAST

**R**iot have erupted across France, with 30 major urban centres affected as Freedom goes to press. We will hopefully get some more detailed reporting from the French anarchist movement for next issue. A short report from Paris follows:

"Africans living and working in Paris have been pushed into ghettoised suburbs of Paris (banlieue), where the state has withdrawn education, health, and other services, while increasing police presence, checkpoints, raids on sans-papiers and levels of oppression in general.

"The trigger came on Thursday, 27th October 2005, as a group of 10 high-school kids were playing soccer in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. When police arrived to do ID checks, the kids ran away and hid, because some of them had no ID. Three of the children hid in an electrical transformer building of EDF and were electrocuted. Two of them, Ziad Benn (17) and Banou Traoré (15), died; the third, Metin (21), was severely injured.

"On Saturday morning, a thousand joined in a march organised by religious

associations and mosques in Clichy-sous-Bois. All eyes were on Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. The response? As people were gathering in the mosques for the Night of Destiny, the most sacred night in the month of Ramadan, the empty streets of the Cité du Chine Pointu filled with about 400 riot police. Yet very few people allowed themselves to be provoked, despite racist insults from the police.

"On Sunday, however, provocation turned into outrage as the women's prayer room at de Bousquets mosque was teargassed by police. As people stumbled out gasping for air, the policemen called the women 'whores', 'bitches' and other insults.

"Ever since that night, Clichy-sous-Bois has been burning, with the insurrection spreading.

"In a press conference held on Monday 30th October, community-based activists were united in their view that, in order to calm things down, the police should leave the area. Instead, Minister Sarkozy has announced a 'zero tolerance' policy, labelling the suburban youth as 'scum'."

ISSN 0016-0504



Vol 66  
No 22



# Home and away

## Airport strike ballot

General union Amicus are balloting for Christmas strike action at Birmingham Airport after the sacking of two union activists.

The union say covert surveillance of the two men by the company has breached the data protection act, and that claims of unauthorised absence, falsification of records and breaches of trust and security.

Amicus officer, Peter Coulson, said: "Birmingham International Airport is facing the second strike over Christmas in a row because two of our members with 52 years unblemished service between them have had their careers ended on grounds that are completely without foundation."

A tribunal case will also be sought for the pair. Amicus represents over 200 security, fire and maintenance workers at the airport.

## Culture, innit

Alongside proposals for a 'Britishness' test for immigrants which can't be completed by the majority of the indigenous population, a 'British Culture' test for films is to be introduced.

A consultation process completed at the end of last month has suggested that films produced in the country should meet the requirements of a 16-point test to gain tax breaks on the project.

Films will be measured on how culturally British they are, with points awarded for using British writers, making the characters British, and filming in English (apparently Welsh is not British enough). They will also get more points for shooting and editing in the UK, and more points will be awarded per cast/production member of a British background used.

## Bad BNP week

BNP leader Nick Griffin has appeared at Leeds Crown court, charged with incitement to racial hatred.

A large crowd of around 600 anti-fascist protesters gathered outside the court, alongside 200 BNP supporters and a high police presence.

Griffin, 45, is charged with incitement along with former BNP youth organiser Mark Collett. They both deny the charges.

The hearing dealt with a number of legal technicalities. The trial is expected to start early next year.

In separate developments, a planned national BNP march in Keighley on 5th November has been banned by the government, who feared it could spark violence.

## Manslaughter lawmakers

The House of Commons Select Committee have begun hearing the first oral evidence for a new corporate manslaughter bill.

Following the freeing of directors in the Hatfield rail crash enquiry and admissions from the Crown Prosecution Service that they had problems obtaining convictions, it is hoped the bill will make industry directors more accountable.

Unions have called for more direct input from workers on the issue.

Alan Ritchie, General Secretary of the construction union UCATT, said: "In the last five years there have been over 400 deaths at work and every year construction accounts for a third of all work related deaths."

"A majority of these work related accidents could have been avoided had company directors taken their responsibilities for health and safety seriously."

# Around the world



• **POLAND:** A series of actions were launched on 8th November by anarchists in Warsaw against continuing court cases which follow protests earlier in the year.

When Vladimir Putin came to Poland in January, anarchists organised a protest against the war in Chechnya. The action in Krakow was attacked by the police (see picture above) and 33 people were arrested. Many anarchist activists have charges against them.

Among the more serious cases, Grzegorz Sobieszak from Warsaw is facing six charges, and Marek Kurzyniec from Krakow is being charged with 'organising an illegal demonstration'.

Kurzyniec has had many such charges in the past and they were usually suspended or fined. It is possible this time that the court can give him a jail sentence due to recidivism.

The Warsaw Anarchist Group and others have been coordinating fundraising for Marek. Mutual aid efforts for others has been weak due to lack of coordination in solidarity campaigns.

Laure said on A-infos: "[We] tried to legalise some of the demonstrations and authorities refused and the authorities

have also banned some other types of events, like the Gay Parade. Repressions have taken place not only against anarchists, but against some workers' demonstrations."

• **SOUTH AFRICA:** Late last month 16 shacks were burnt down in the Kennedy Road informal settlement in Durban. A one-year-old boy, Mhlengi Khumalo, was very badly burnt and died. It was the third conflagration in a month. The fire started when a candle was knocked over.

Until 2001 pre-paid electricity meters were being installed in shacks. To get electricity you needed to pay R350 (£30) and to be able to represent your case in a certain way. According to S'bu Zikode from the Kennedy Road Development Committee: "It all depended on who applied. If you seemed ignorant because you can't speak English you were just told to wait outside."

The Thekwini Metro has since informed Kennedy Road residents that there is a "new policy not to install electricity in informal settlements". The electrification policy openly states the following:

"5. Informal Settlements – In the past (1990s) electrification was rolled out to all and sundry. Because of the lack of funding and the huge costs required to relocate services when these settlements are upgraded or developed, electrification of the informal settlements has been discontinued."

More than 70 people with receipts for payments for installation have neither a refund nor electricity.

• **TURKEY:** Conscientious army objector Mehmet Tarhan's demands have been granted. Currently held at Sivas Military Prison, Tarhan ended his hunger strike after just over a month on 2nd November.

Tarhan (pictured below) had gone on a hunger strike on 30th September 2005, after his hair and beard were forcefully shaven. His demands (with the exception of a civilian doctor's examination) were met after 34 days.

Lawyers for Tarhan announced his demands as follows: "Protesting the unfair and inhumane treatment he received, legal action against the perpetrators, civilian doctor's examination, having the same rights as all the other prisoners"

Tarhan who has been in Sivas Military Prison for seven months, had previously gone on another 28-day hunger strike with similar demands.

The verdict that sentenced him to four years was overruled on the grounds of procedure, according to the information available (there could be other reasons). It is expected that Tarhan will be tried again by the Sivas Military Court on charges of "Insistent insubordination before the unit with the intent of evading military service altogether."



• **USA:** In America, the Republican dominated Senate has just rejected a proposal to increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.25 an hour. This would have been the first increase since 1997. Since that last increase, Senators have voted themselves seven pay raises totalling \$28,000 per year. As it stands, they earn \$162,100 a year and enjoy perks like health insurance, pensions and expenses.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, unskilled and non-unionised workers building the (government funded) Hoover Dam got 50 cents an hour from the government. This translates to \$7.89 per hour in today's money. In other words, the Republican politicians have decided that America's workers should get a minimum wage 35% lower than workers 70 years ago in the height of the worst economic crisis capitalism has faced. The Democrats, who proposed the increase, are more generous and think workers should get 21% less.

The standard argument against a minimum wage is that it causes unemployment by raising the price of labour above its market level. Ignoring the dubious theoretical and empirical basis for this claim, what this argument says is that the minimum market wage of blue collar workers in America (who make up 70% of the workforce) has to be substantially less, in real terms, than that in the 1930s.

Two conclusions are obvious. Firstly, workers cannot rely on the generosity of politicians if they want decent wages – they need to organise themselves and fight for them. Secondly, that capitalism needs to go.

# Prison news

## Seven arrests after Bookfair

Seven people were arrested in London after the Anarchist Bookfair. The incident which led to the arrests occurred in The Coronet, a large Wetherspoon's pub a few doors away from the Bookfair venue, when a small group of people decided to start playing techno on a portable sound system. They were asked to turn it off by others in the pub, and by the manager who threatened to call the cops, which he eventually did.

As the sound system crew scuttled away down Holloway Road, the cops turned up and were far more aggressive and violent than their numbers allowed for. While they weren't able to seal off the pub at this stage, they immediately began trying to arrest people and lashing out with their batons.

Inevitably, there was a reaction to this, and one of the bully boys was left in tears, with the police vehicle also being attacked.

Unfortunately, as police reinforcements arrived rapidly – many wearing full riot gear – a number of people were injured, and seven, including an Indymedia volunteer and a member of Leeds ABC, were arrested. All were taken to Islington police station, and eventually released the following evening on bail. Some people have already been charged, and others may face further charges when they answer bail. See Indymedia for ongoing information and

details of possible solidarity pickets in support of the Bookfair Seven.

## Harold Thompson attacked

Long-standing anarchist prisoner Harold H. Thompson has again been attacked in prison by the Nazi Aryan Brotherhood. He suspects that racist prison guards colluded in the attack, as in a previous incident when Harold was more seriously injured.

Please send Harold a card or letter to wish him well.

Harold H. Thompson #93992, Northwest Correctional Complex, 960 State Route 212, Tiptonville, Tennessee 38079, USA. For more information on Harold see <http://freespace.virgin.net/simon.russell/>

## Jose Delgado on hunger strike

In October, Jose Fernandez Delgado was forced onto a 13-day hunger strike because of his ill-treatment following the termination of the Aachen trial.

From Jose: "I am kept like an animal in here. They woke me up at one o'clock at night in my cell in Aachen and brought me to a transport vehicle. They did not explain anything to me and said that I couldn't take anything with me. After that they brought me here (to Cologne). To the high security department. Back to complete isolation. Without books, without a dictionary that helps me to communicate with the guards. I went on hunger strike. My personal stuff,

letters, papers, etc., were not given to me and I did not have any addresses to write to. Although I am still in investigative custody, they wanted me to wear prison clothes. I resisted against and sat for days naked in my cell, only with a blanket. I only have paper and a pencil, nothing else. After seven days I refused to drink as well. For four days, I demand my human rights. I am classified as a terrorist. Also the judge had given me the written permission to phone my mother. They did not allow me that either. They put me in a cell where they can observe me better. I got two heart attacks because my condition was so bad. After that I went to the medical department where they tested everything. None of my demands was granted. Only on Tuesday I began to eat and drink again. I lost a lot of weight and my legs are completely thin."

Jose needs our support, our solidarity, our anger.

The prison administration: phone 0049 (0)221 59 730, fax 0049 (0)221 5973-223, email [poststelle@ja-koeln.nrw.de](mailto:poststelle@ja-koeln.nrw.de)

The Aachen judge: Richter Nohl, c/o Landgericht AZ 52 KS 22/04, Postfach 52034 Aachen

Jose Fernandez Delgado, AZ 62 KS 22-04, Landgericht Aachen, Postfach, D-52034 Aachen

## Repression against Rafa

One of the Barcelona Six prisoners, Rafa

Gaspar, who has been on remand in the notorious Spanish FIES units for more than two years now, has recently been facing increased repression. Rafa and his cellmate Javi (a GRAPO prisoner) have been isolated because of their protests against the prison regime, and they have been beaten up. Rafa has been sentenced to two isolation periods of 32 days each, and as he continues to resist, expects further repression.

Prisoners in other Spanish jails are already showing solidarity by organising exercise strikes, and solidarity from outside the prison walls is needed urgently. Rafael Tomas Gaspar, C.P. Madrid III Valdemoro mod.6, Carretera Pinto a San Martin de la Vega, km.5, Cp.28340 Madrid, Spain.

## Prisoners in 22 jails given keys to cells

With the soaring British jail population rapidly approaching 78,000, and prisons full to bursting point, the Prison Service are currently having to accommodate prisoners in temporary accommodation built within the grounds of 22 existing jails. The 'modular units' are made of wood with a steel frame, and because of the increased fire risk, the Prison Service have been forced to issue prisoners with the keys to their own cells.

It is to be hoped that overcrowding in prisons can be reduced by some of these prisoners escaping.

compiled by Mark Barnsley



# News

## Adrift in the markets

**An otherwise routine corporate deal could have disturbing implications for our company pensions, reports Rob Ray**

In the first deal of its kind, a major pension scheme has been spun off from its parent company to make the business more attractive to investors.

A 75% majority of the telecom equipment maker firm Marconi has been sold to telecommunications giant Ericsson for £1.2bn. But the £2.5bn pension scheme has been 'ring fenced' and set up as a separate entity on the stock market, re-branded as Telnet.

Of the money Ericsson have paid, approximately £675m has been put aside for the fund, with £185m paying off holes in its finances and £490m going into a separate account.

In return for this, the company was able to effectively cut all ties with the pension scheme, which has roughly 68,000 members, and no longer has any connection or liabilities if it goes under.

Companies have been particularly shocked by the size of the pension payment, as Marconi had only declared a £109m deficit in its accounts.

But business analysts have predicted that this will be the first of many pensions cut off from their parent companies, as major corporations search for ways to limit their liabilities.

Previously forced to find money through the sale of assets, or through paying substantially higher contributions, companies are expected to jump at pensions ring fencing, an idea imported from the US.

The end result, it is thought, will be the creation of a shadow stock market, with pension company shells being bought up by 'zombie fund' companies hoping to make quick profits.

If Telnet falters, the government's pension protection fund, itself under heavy criticism for being too weak to handle the crisis as it stands and the

subject of intense company lobbying to weaken it still further, will have guarantee the final salary pension.

There is likely to be little support for the shells once they appear on the market. One business writer explained in the Telegraph: "The gamble in this case seems to hinge on the suspicion that when the last pension is paid, there will be money left in the fund which could be distributed to shareholders. A vain hope, I should have thought, given the latest news about us all living even longer."

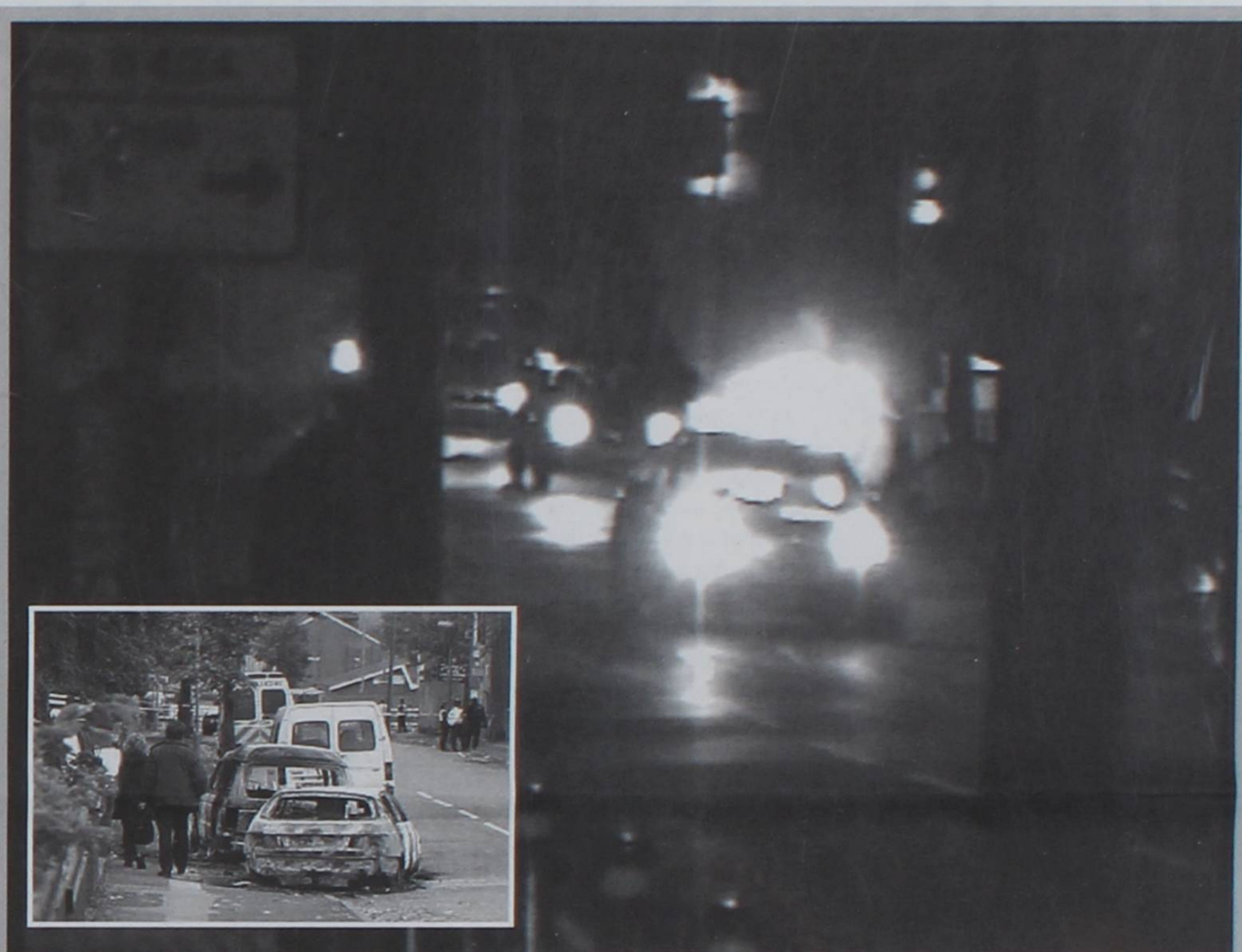
The sale of Marconi will have more direct results too. Ericsson have admitted that it is likely that approximately 1,500 jobs will go from the company, alongside the payment of a £4m windfall for its chief executive Mike Parton.

- David Blunkett has been replaced (see comment, page six) as Work and Pensions secretary by John Hutton.

Hutton, a staunch Blairite, is likely to continue his predecessor's plans to raise the age of retirement for new government workers to 65, and will preside over the introduction of a disability green paper later this year. The controversial green paper, which puts forward proposals to send one million disabled people back to work, will threaten withdrawal of incapacity and housing benefits.

He will also present the final report of the Pension Commission on 30th November, which is expected to raise concerns about the state of both public and private sector pensions.

The new cabinet member is likely to clash with the unions. Radical changes are urgently needed on women's pensions where only 30% qualify for a basic state pension and only 38% contribute towards a private pension, according to the Trade Union Congress (TUC).



A riot on Lozells Road in Birmingham has left one man dead and around 20 more injured after hundreds of people clashed.

Chris, from West Midlands Anarchists, lives a couple of streets away. He said: "The problems facing the Handsworth, Lozells and the surrounding community is that after 1985 (when the community fought against heavy-handed policing and extreme poverty in the area) the government gave out few funds.

"This has given rise people fighting over what little is handed out, and the promises of 1985 haven't been met. When I walk round the streets, there is always a sense of great frustration.

"Poverty, unemployment and the failings of the education system are the biggest faults but right now, the working class is fighting itself for the crumbs. It's always the same response from the state - send in the police, when it is investment in infrastructure and education which is needed."

## Terrorism bill

MPs have passed a draconian anti-terrorism bill through its first stage by one vote, after two liberal MPs and Respect's George Galloway failed to attend.

A major rebellion from Labour MPs was unable to stop the bill's first reading, after a last minute concession.

But the government have had to postpone a second reading on the bill, as it has been tacitly acknowledged that Blair no longer has enough support amongst his own party to push through the most controversial parts of the bill.

The bill is an attempt by the government to extend the number of days a suspect can be held without trial from 14 to 90 days. It follows changes in 2003 to the original seven day rule, and would represent a 1,300% increase in just two years.

Other aspects of the bill include the introduction of new terrorist offences of incitement or instruction, glorification of terror or 'attending a training camp'

— effectively barring many radical newspapers from supporting direct action campaigns and banning some training workshops.

Originally, this part of the bill was phrased in such a way as to allow arrests of people who did not intend to incite or glorify terror, which was amended to require proof of intent before the vote.

Foreign nationals also face the reintroduction of 'indefinite' incarceration if they cannot be deported.

The vagueness of the terminology has alarmed human rights groups and the judiciary, and it has been pointed out that those who criticise regimes in Zimbabwe, Burma And even America could theoretically fall foul of the 'glorification' clause.

Home secretary Charles Clarke has admitted that he had wrongly suggested that the Attorney General personally supported the bill's legality in relation to the Human Rights Act.

A Labour faction called the Campaign

Group, comprising a core group of 24 MPs, have emerged from the vote, pledging to destroy the bill if it is re-submitted.

An updated bill is expected to be submitted within days of Freedom's deadline.

- After the success of the Freedom to Protest Conference in London late last month, another Europe-wide initiative has been set up to promote civil liberties.

The European Civil Liberties Network, involving Statewatch from the UK, has been founded. They said: "We share common objectives of seeking to create a European society based on freedom and equality, of fundamental civil liberties and personal and political freedoms, of free movement and freedom of information, and equal rights for minorities.

"This entails defending, extending and deepening the democratic culture — a concept not limited to political parties and elections."

## Keeping active

Major events have been held over the last two weeks to highlight issues over ID cards and the right to protest.

A new initiative in Norwich, the constituency of Home Secretary Charles Clarke, was launched on 5th November to attack the imposition of ID cards on his constituents.

The meeting, which featured speakers from No2ID and Norwich Council, who have come out en masse against the proposal had a poor turnout but a decent impact. Matt, a speaker at the meeting, said: "Dr Ian Gibson, MP for Norwich North, was a major speaker, and Dr Jan Kim, an expert in 'bioinformatics', who was talking about holding actual DNA in databases and saying they would be surprisingly stable.

"There were two speakers from the national No2ID campaign, Chris Lightfoot and Martin Keegan. There were a series of talks and some videos shown. People were quite interested in

the talks and the speakers themselves are now better informed. It was a mixed result in the end."

Over a thousand people attended a special Critical Mass demonstration in London on 28th October in protest against restrictions on the event imposed by a senior London Metropolitan police chief.

The Halloween themed event, which sees cyclists mob major streets across the country to raise awareness of urban alternatives to motorised transport was ten times its normal size.

The high turnout is thought to be a direct response to last month's threat to make arrests unless the police were given notice of the route six days in advance.

One 'Masser' said: "One of the police I spoke to reckoned it's a career move by the commissioner, something to bolster his rep within the met and the government, a none event on the ground that might sound like a strong initiative on his CV."



# News

## Fuera Bush

### Latin Americans gather to bury the Free Trade Area of the Americas and send George Bush packing, reports Jack Ray

**D**emonstrations across several Latin American countries protested the Summit of the Americas and the visit of George Bush over 3rd and 4th November, with clashes between police and protesters in several locations. Up to 70,000 attended a march and rally in the Plata del Mar resort itself, where the summit was being held.

Inside the summit George Bush failed to convince many Latin American nations to restart talks on the stalling Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), with Brazil, Venezuela, Paraguay and Uruguay joining Venezuela in derailing the project. Vicente Fox, the President of Mexico vowed to press ahead with the treaty, but without the continent's largest economies progress will be difficult.

Outside the conference, a large group of 1,000 protesters broke off from the main marches to attempt to disrupt the conference, clashing with police. Thousands of officers had been drafted in for the occasion, with coastguards

#### What is the FTAA?

The Free Trade Area of the Americas was proposed in 1994 after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Basically an extension of that agreement, it will drop trade restrictions across the Americas and prevent 'unfair' laws from hindering corporate profits (like environmental laws and workers rights). In Argentina (and elsewhere) the social movements argue that the FTAA will empower corporations at the expense of workers.

and helicopters patrolling sea and sky. As security services forced protesters back with tear gas, young people responded with rocks and petrol bombs, targeting banks and multinational companies in the area, and meeting police batons with large sticks. In Plata del Mar 87 were arrested, with a further 13 detained in similar clashes in the capital Buenos Aires.

On the main demonstration around 40,000 marched in the rain, chanting 'Fuera Bush' (Bush out) and 'Fascist Bush, you are the terrorist', before 70,000 attended a mass rally at the Mundialista Stadium. Across the country there were 200 demonstrations, including one of 10,000 people in the capital and instances of the 'Piqueteros' unemployed organisations blockading roads and bridges. Elsewhere small groups attacked banks and the stock exchange in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, and demonstrators in Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Caracas and Quebec City burned US flags.

Argentine social groups also held a People's Summit on the 3rd November, with members of over 600 social, political and trade union groups gathering to seek alternatives to neoliberalism.

Before the summit, the authorities had prepared thoroughly for Bush's visit, covering US businesses in corrugated metal shields ahead of the marches, everything from Citibank to Blockbuster Video and drafting 7,500 police. Bush had been determined to push the FTAA at the conference, but the proposed treaty is unpopular in Argentina. Juan



Gonzalez, a trade union leader said "We are here to say 'No to Bush' and 'No to FTAA'... We don't have any confidence in anything he might propose here, whatever it is will only prolong hunger, poverty and death in Latin America."

Luis D'Elia, a piquetero, said "The idea

is to show the victims of imperialism that we want to put a stop to Bush's military build-up and his persistent threats of invasion around the world."

As the summit meeting dominated the headlines, a Buenos Aires landmark was under attack. The Hotel Bauen,

recuperated by its workforce after mass sackings in December 2001 threatened with repossession after legislators introduced a bill favourable to its former owners. The hotel is known as a space where social movements can organise and is a strategic centre point in the city.

## USA roundup

### Not my country

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani has stated before the United Nations that: "I categorically refuse the use of Iraqi soil to launch a military strike against Syria or any other Arab country ... But at the end of the day my ability to confront the US military is limited and I cannot impose on them my will."

In other words, the elected head of the Iraqi state is saying that America has the power to decide whether Iraq can be used as a base to attack other countries. Moreover, he has no influence over such decisions.

The statement appears to support criticism of the US administration's claim that they had 'turned over sovereignty' to Iraqi politicians on 28th June last year.

The statement also undermines the validity of the 'democratic' elections of January and the recent referendum on the constitution.

### Tortured reasoning

Faced with a threatened presidential veto, the Senate has passed legislation

that would outlaw the "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment" of anyone held by the US.

In response, Vice-president Dick Cheney proposed a change so that the law would not apply to operations abroad or those conducted by "an element" of the US government other than the defence department. In other words, the administration, along with the head of the CIA, wants the CIA to be exempted and so be allowed to torture whom they like.

Tom Malinowski of Human Rights Watch said: "They are explicitly saying, for the first time, that the intelligence community should have the ability to treat prisoners inhumanely."

"You can't tell soldiers that inhumane treatment is always morally wrong if they see with their own eyes that CIA personnel are allowed to engage in it."

But even if the motion is passed, there are signs that it will be ignored. The fact that it is currently illegal for the state to hold prisoners in isolation in secret prisons in the US has not stopped the CIA placing them overseas.

Nor has the fact that the CIA's internment practices are also illegal under the laws of several of the host countries stopped the activity. Just like the US, these countries have signed the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and yet US interrogators there are permitted to use the CIA's approved 'Enhanced Interrogation Techniques', some of which are prohibited by the UN convention and by US military law.

One last thing. The CIA's most important secret prison is in Eastern Europe and is housed in a former Soviet-era 'compound' (i.e. gulag). Such are the ironies of history.

  
**media hacklab**  
Technology for social change,  
independent media, free software  
and open access IT  
Open every day  
from 12 noon to 6pm  
at Freedom  
84b Whitechapel High Street  
[www.hacklab.org.uk](http://www.hacklab.org.uk)

## Unionist murdered

**R**icardo Ramos, the leader of the Central Azucarera de Tarlac Labour Union (CATLU), has been murdered whilst celebrating victory in the eleven-month old Hacienda Luisita dispute. Ramos, 47, was shot dead on 25th October.

Ramos was serving his second term as 'Kap' of 700 sugar mill workers, who have been on strike since November last year and were the victims of the infamous Hacienda Luisita massacre. On 16th November 2004, riot police and army units attacked picketing mill operatives and sugar workers with APCs, machine guns and rifles, killing 14 and injuring 200 to allow the passage of sugar cane trucks into the mill.

CATLU have complained the ever since the massacre they have been subject to ongoing harassment by permanent army camps garrisoning 300 soldiers established in 9 of the 11 villages across the Hacienda. Two army sergeants were seen enquiring after Ramos a few hours before his murder, they were later arrested and released

without charge.

The union is pointing the finger at the mill management and the authorities, "He would risk everything for us. It can only be those who feel threatened by him and the union who would want to kill him". Spokesman Romeo Sarate described the murder as a "treacherous act by the Cojuanco-Aquino clan."

The night of his murder, Ramos had been celebrating the release of owed back wages with fellow workers, after the government had impounded company property to pay out approximately £260 to each worker. CATLU had been on the verge of concluding an agreement in the long running dispute for a daily wage increase and a £135 signing bonus. Ramos was refusing to sign until a similar arrangement had settled Hacienda Luisita Inc's dispute with agricultural workers in the United Luisita Workers Union (ULWU), he had said "unless the problems of ULWU are settled, we will also not allow the mill top operate. AS long as ULWU is on



## Feature

# Blood in the halls of power

**Julius Bergmann reports on the street murders and shambolic democratic process dominating in Haitian politics**

**O**ctober 2005: A man lies in a suburban street in Port au Prince. The patch of blood betraying the bullets entry point. People pass by. Children going to school, employed and unemployed passing through. All glance at the latest victim of Haiti's street violence and continue on their way. Another day, another body.

As Haiti lurches its way towards presidential and parliamentary elections the UN has accepted the responsibility of disarming and demobilising the gangs. An analysis of origins of the gangs reveals not only the problems facing the UN and the failures of the past, but also indicates that any failure on behalf of the UN will undermine attempts to give Haitians a respectable and safe future.

From the 'cacos' of the nineteenth century through to the Duvalier's 'Tonton Macoutes' Haitian history has been defined to a greater extent by private armies. Following the 1990 election victory of Jean Baptiste Aristide it appeared that Haiti was finally ready to abandon the hired thugs to history and take up a path of compromise and debate. The military coup of 1991 put paid to such hopes and, through the formation of several paramilitary groupings, returned to the tradition of brutal armed gangs.

During the period of the junta these paramilitary groupings were responsible for countless massacres and human rights abuses, in addition to intimidation of pro-Aristide elements. With the arrival of the US led 'Operation Uphold Democracy' in 1994 the paramilitaries faded somewhat into the background, but never disbanded. Following Aristide's return to the presidency these anti-Aristide paramilitary groupings reappeared, their numbers swollen by thousands of ex-soldiers resentful of Aristide's 1995 decision to disband the Haitian Army.

Aristide and his supporters meanwhile turned to their own gangs, composed in the whole of residents of those Port au Prince shanty towns where Aristide had worked as a priest and where the population are fiercely loyal to their president. As the political and economic crises became increasingly acute, the violence between the opposing factions increased and Aristide abruptly departed for the second time in his career, while US Marines and French Legionnaires arrived to separate the factions.

The gangs were however only separated. They retreated back into their communities, took stock and waited. As the elections approach the presence of several candidates with close links to some of the most notorious groupings, the low voter registration levels in pro-Aristide areas of Port au Prince and the probability of a return from exile of former dictator Jean Claude Duvalier don't bode well for peaceful elections. Should the result

not prove acceptable or should Haiti have no new president to swear in on 7th February, it is accepted that gang rule will return to the streets of Port au Prince.

The international community's response to the gangs and their guns is contained in Security Council Resolution 1542 which authorised the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to help secure a safe and stable environment. Among its duties MINUSTAH is mandated to:

"Assist the Transitional government, particularly the Haitian National Police, with comprehensive and sustainable Disarmament, Demobilisation and Re-integration (DDR) programs for all armed groups, including women and children associated with such groups, as well as weapons control and public security measures."

Despite this obligation, and an acceptance by the international community that the gangs and their guns are a destabilising influence in Haiti, MINUSTAH has officially managed to collect just 65 of the estimated 200,000 illegal weapons in Haiti and the gangs continue to operate with virtual impunity.

While it is all too easy to accuse MINUSTAH officials of simply enjoying the view from their poolside restaurant, three factors must be borne in mind when considering the disarming process in Haiti: the consequences of the US-led 'Operation Uphold Democracy' which restored President Aristide to office in 1994, the political and economic situation in Haiti and the failures in MINUSTAH's approach to its mandate.

Despite evidence of the atrocities committed by the paramilitary groups and their potential to further destabilise Haiti, 'Operation Uphold Democracy' had no mandate, nor budget, to disarm. This was largely a sop to the Clinton Administration which found itself somewhat reluctantly drawn into events in Haiti. Clinton had a general dislike of risking US lives in far flung fields, however under international pressure to do more to help with the situation in Bosnia, he could not refuse to help in Haiti.

The CIA however had used the paramilitary groups and their predecessor gangs as information sources during the years of both Aristide and the Junta. To go into Haiti and actively disarm people with whom they had closely worked would have been, at best, insensitive. And so the Americans negotiated a resolution that limited itself to restoring Aristide without any commitments in respect of the paramilitary gangs. Although some 15,000 weapons were collected these represented, in the main, handguns from private individuals and no effort was ever made to forcibly disarm the gangs, far less persuade the paramilitaries to disband. Many of the gangs in Haiti today are the successors of these paramilitary groupings and the weapons they bear



are often ones that weren't collected in the 1990s.

If gangs are to be broken up and demobilised the gang members must be offered alternatives. In an economy such as Haiti's there is very little that can be offered and, in a society devoid of any form of functioning social structures and with endemic corruption, there can be no guarantees that any demobilised gang member won't be forced back into the gangs. Furthermore the control exercised over the gangs by 'politicians', businessmen and criminals means that, until ways are found to break the hold these elements on Haitian society, full demobilisation cannot be an option. While the responsibility for such a change must lie with Haitians themselves, the international community could do more to encourage and guide the country on its way.

Despite the political, social and economic problems in the country, MINUSTAH's main problems are self-inflicted, for all their relationship with the Haitian National Police (HNP) and their approach to tackling gangs has had the effect of alienating the general public and hardening the attitude of the gangs against MINUSTAH.

Since Aristide's departure elements of the HNP have become increasingly politicised and all international agencies, with the exception of the UN, are united in the opinion that sections of the HNP are responsible for serious human rights abuses and extra judicial killings. At the

start of the MINUSTAH mission the UN were slow to get a grip on the situation with regards to the HNP and, so it appeared, were barely prepared for the task that awaited them. Philadelphia-based advocate Thomas Griffen, who undertook a trip to Haiti in November 2004, six months into the MINUSTAH mission, describes observing joint HNP/MINUSTAH operations which, without either a common radio system nor language, quickly descend into chaos with MINUSTAH "just doing the same as the HNP".

The brutality of elements within the HNP and the UN's apparent reluctance to take action to either curb the excesses or even investigate complaints against individual officers has undermined confidence in the HNP among the population. Where a population which is already suffering under economic hardships have no confidence in the police, there is even less incentive to give up their weapons. MINUSTAH's inability to control the HNP is directly responsible for the lack of confidence.

MINUSTAH create further problems for themselves with their approach to disarming the gangs. The 'pro-Aristide' gangs are generally based in the unpaved, nameless streets of Port au Prince. MINUSTAH's approach to tackling them is to seal off an area and then rush on in. Every time the soldiers are greeted with gunfire and every time MINUSTAH return the fire. Civilian casualties are the result and a further shattering of

confidence in the UN the consequence. The victims of this violence are further alienated by MINUSTAH's apparent lack of action against the 'anti-Aristide' gangs, which are generally composed of ex-soldiers and have influence within the interim government. The government has agreed to pay compensation to the soldiers if they disarm, but many want nothing more than the reinstating of the army and are maintaining arms.

MINUSTAH appear to have handed responsibility of the former soldiers to the government, much to the anger of those who are victims of their actions.

Port au Prince is no Baghdad. The citizens are free to move around and, so far as possible given the social and political situation, the city functions. But the risk of violence is never far away. Since Aristide's departure in February 2004, some 500 people have lost their lives to the violence, in addition to the many more who have died unnecessary deaths as a result of the breakdown in society.

While no one expects MINUSTAH to cure Haiti's gang problems by itself, their efforts so far have had the effect of strengthening the gangs' positions and discouraging disarming. The international community accepts that the presence of the guns and gangs are a serious problem in modern Haiti, and one that needs to be tackled if Haitians are to have a safe future. Where 'Operation Uphold Democracy' failed in 1994, MINUSTAH cannot be allowed to fail in 2005.



# Commentary

## FREEDOM

Volume 66 Number 22

### 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

After another late issue, the time is drawing nigh for us to have a bit of a well-deserved break over Christmas in two issues' time, and a recharge should do us all good.

On the subject hinted at last week, that there would be a bi-monthly opportunity for members of our glorious movement to vent their spleens at one of our elusive editorial team, there has been a bit of progress.

Having consulted the bulging diaries of the collective, we have determined that at least one of us will be available on the 15th January (oh all right, that's the day someone was coming round to tidy the office up a bit).

You'll be welcome to come along to have a chat about the way things are going, the door is likely to be locked against the ever-present hordes of Whitechapel Art Gallery fanatics but don't let that put you off, a quick buzz or knock should do the trick.

On a different note, we are proud to announce that the Advisory Service for Squatters have at last finished their office, which is now open for business 2-6pm, Monday to Friday.

As their new next door neighbours, we wish them the best of luck, it's always nice to have more people around the place (that does of course apply to all our readers as well).

### 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 26th November and the last day to get copy to us (see contact details above) will be Friday 18th November.

### Sporting comrades

Harold Barclay evoked Chomsky in his suggestion that sport is on a par with giant corporations (Freedom 1st October) needs to be challenged. Having played sport all my years I don't feel I am or have been aggressive to anyone as a result, rather the contrary.

Games involving a ball have a long history and were recorded in China as early as 2,500 years ago, in medieval Europe, street football was banned as a menace to the public with the rules of football being established in 1863.

Perhaps I am the only anarchist football referee there is, perhaps that makes me strange anyway? But on being taken to watch Bristol City in the 1950s by my father I was captivated by the spectacle and atmosphere and have played ever since.

Here in Bath a few thousand men and women play football each weekend rather than indulge in some passive pass time and engage with each other in a sporting and almost comradely manner. Of course the usual confrontations take place but these are few and far between and tend to be highlighted by those who get off on pointing out conflicts.

Capitalism bastardises everything it touches including sport, but this is no reason to condemn the innocent.

Brian Maynard

### The means shape the ends

David Blunkett has resigned, again. Sadly, like the last time, it was not provoked by a sudden awareness of how terrible his authoritarian neo-liberal policies were but due to personal indiscretion. So launching a war of aggression based on lies and spin is not considered worthy of resignation but financial ambiguities is. But what can you expect from New Labour?

There is a lesson to be learned from Blunkett's rise and fall. It is a striking confirmation of anarchist theory. Faced with arguments that the labour movement should stand in elections and win political power (a tactic labelled as "political action" by Marx), anarchists reply in three ways.

Firstly, we argue that winning elections would replace socialism as the movement's goal and, consequently, socialist principles will quickly be jettisoned.

Secondly, it is doubtful any genuinely socialist government would ever get elected as any socialist politicians would become reformist.

Thirdly, that that capitalism will not allow itself to be voted away. The state

machine would undermine any socialist government, as would economic pressure from big business. If all else failed, a military coup would be organised.

In other words, rather than change the system, the system would change them. As Bakunin correctly predicted, when "the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment ... will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them." In this, history has proven him, not Marx, correct.

The descent of Marxist social-democracy into reformism and opportunism confirmed our worse fears. The recent failures of Lula's government in Brazil can be added to the list, as can the fate of David Blunkett. For those with long memories, Blunkett came into politics as a left-winger, a socialist.

In the 1980s he attacked Thatcherite policies as head of what he proudly called the "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire". By the 1990s, he was advocating them and, after 1997, implementing them. Like so many in the New Labour project, Blunkett started his career on the left only to reject his principles in the pursuit of office.

This is quite a turn around, but one which should come as no surprise to an anarchist. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. Some socialist politicians remain true to their ideals. That these are rare can be quickly seen by the fact most people could name them!

Given this long and sorry history of betrayal, any sensible person may consider basing your political strategy on the handful of exceptions to the rule rather than the rule itself would be silly. This has not, of course, stopped Marxists from repeatedly pursuing Marx's course. The SWP and its RESPECT front are just the latest in a long line of such attempts. Unsurprisingly, the SWP has lurched to the right and have consistently betrayed their own ideas within RESPECT in order to gather votes.

Yet again, Marxists are proving anarchists to be correct.

Ultimately, though, the means shape the ends. If your means are based on working in authoritarian and bourgeois institutions, can it be any surprise that the ends are the same? That David Blunkett went from socialist to neo-liberal should come as no surprise. What is surprising is that in this day and age so-called radicals are urging us to use the same means in the strange hope they will lead to different results.

anon

### Many causes

Following on from the front page story on ID cards, I made an interesting discovery about the anarchist movement's supposed answer, Defy ID.

Having made a quick check on their website, and on Indymedia (useful if only as a limitless repository of all activism anywhere, no matter how small a demo it might have been), I could find nothing. Not a dickie. Is the group dead? Have the members all been locked up? Since getting a reply a while ago suggesting that because of preparations for the G8 the most active members had cut back in their involvement, the entire group appears to have become moribund.

And so, it seems, we get back to being a bunch of unorganised, disparate no-hopers.

The liberal, UKIP-supported No2ID meanwhile goes from strength to strength, with massive public support, and regularly updated news and research on the subject.

Undeniably, mainstream support is a major factor in the success of one and effective dissolution of the other.

However, I would suggest a deeper malaise here, that of subject-hopping. I doubt the people who so enthusiastically set up Defy-ID have disappeared altogether.

What is more likely, as they themselves said, is that they developed other priorities. Doubtless those are important too.

But so is every big political topic. You could hop from one to another almost daily and never get through all the worthy causes we are faced with trying to work on today.

Sadly, it seems that along with locality, most of the anarchist movement has only a passing relationship with its partner, stability.

I use Defy-ID only as an example, but it could apply to almost any anarchist group, almost anywhere. To coin a phrase, Where art thou, continuity?

The founding of a new group isn't difficult. Get five or ten people round a table, think up a catchy name, design a banner, maybe make a website saying 'We'll update daily!' and stand in a town centre talking to bored shoppers.

The continuation of a long-term project through thick and thin is a lot more difficult (though not impossible, there are honourable exceptions), because when you get right down to it, it's boring.

It's boring handing out leaflets to people who don't care. It's boring rehashing the same old arguments. It's much more fun to find something even more important like the G8 and go after that for a bit, you can come back to the last project later, after all.

But it doesn't happen like that, and suddenly, when something big happens and people are all fired up again, you remember. Are you not ashamed of your flighty behaviour?

Of course not, you worthy bastard. You're saving the World, right?

Rob Ray

### Homeless

page 1

"We call it the Decent Homes scandal" says Matthew Gillick a co-operative tenant living on Allington road for over 12 years. "I need a roof over my head not a fitted kitchen."

Leaseholders have been presented with demands for payment of between £17,000 and £22,000 toward refurbishments to comply with the standards. Brent council have said they would provide loans, with interest, to leaseholders. They will not accept any independent quotes. Leaseholders are left with council quotes that include 50% administration charges.

### Ramos murder

page 4

strike, we will stay here with them. We, the mill workers, care for the hacienda farm workers."

Ramos has also been instrumental in opposing the building of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway Project which was to eat up 77 hectares across six villages in the area. A campaign of blockades and protests had led to offers (refused) of a £12,500 bribe to allow the motorway's construction.

### Los de Abajo

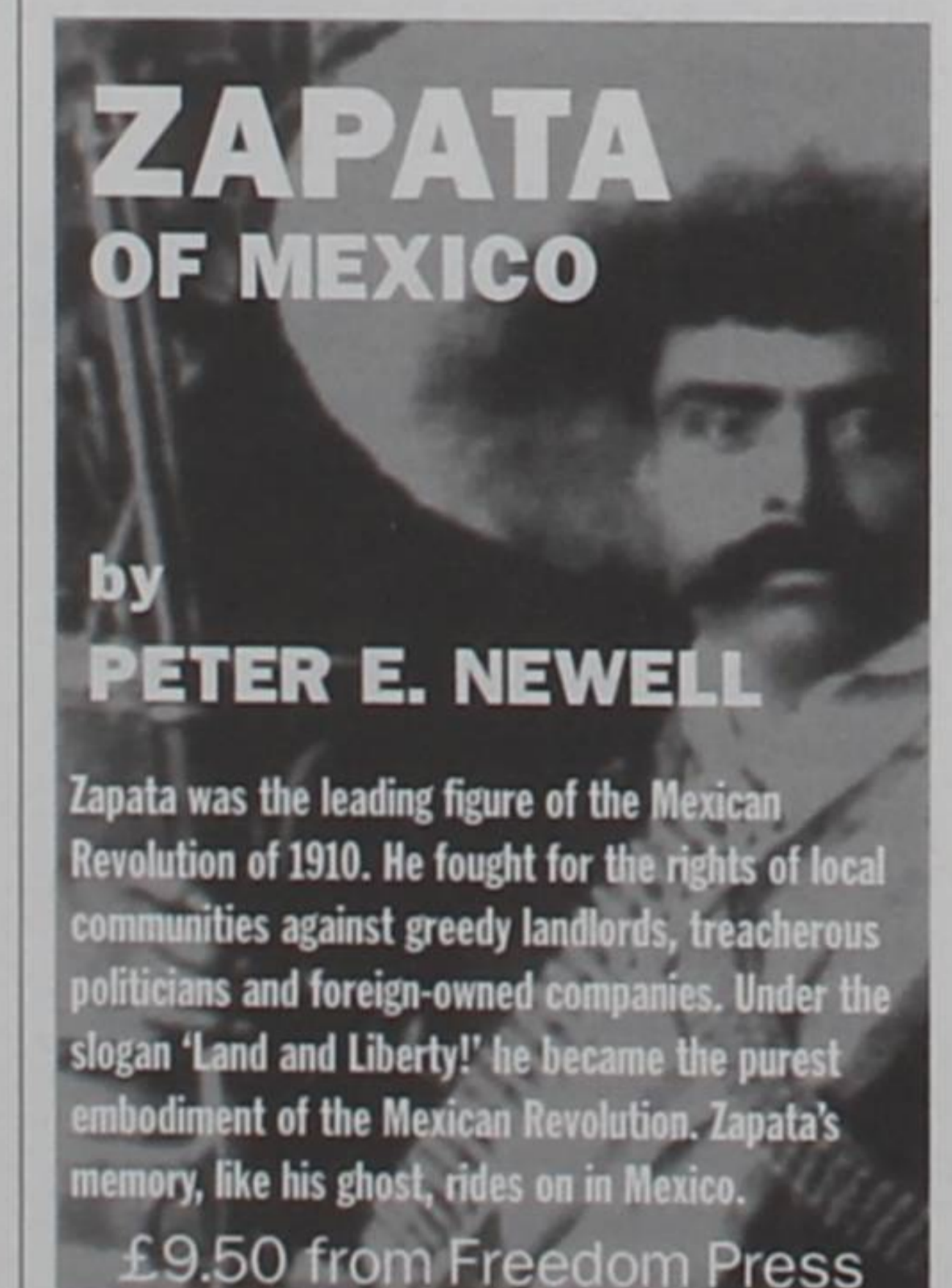
page 7

many are explicitly and boldly political, such as 'Señor Judas' which is written against the corruption of the police state hand in glove with high level organised crime against the interests of honest working people. Another song 'Joder' treats the theme of how civil society in Mexico gets 'screwed over' by mercenary death squads payrolled by government and multinational corporations. Despite the powerful political content, all of this is far from preachy but rather through the accessibility and passion of their music giving a poignant voice to the interests of the dispossessed. It was heartening to see the local crowd give the middle finger to a figure of George W. represented in effigy, as well as raise a number clenched fists and cheer in solidarity at the cry of 'Viva Zapata!'

The band's name translates as 'Those from Below' (a classic of Mexican revolutionary literature) and they are veteran supporters of the Zapatista movement which has fought for the legal recognition of the rights of the indigenous people of Mexico as well as showing the world a participatory non-hierarchical way of achieving political change. Liber explained that the popularity of the Zapatismo as a social movement is grounded in a widespread loss of faith in the integrity of politicians. For their part Los de Abajo have played concerts for the Zapatista guerrillas and guerrillas in the mountains of Chiapas, and also used their performances (and they have played to crowds of 300,000 in Mexico) to raise money for food and medicines for the poverty stricken peoples for whom the Zapatistas advocate and for whom indeed they have been forced to fight (see chiapaslink.ukgateway.net, ezln.org and mexicosolidarity.org).

For one rainy night in Ipswich we were privileged to share in the spirit of Zapatismo and the powerful creativity of these musical fighters for freedom, democracy and justice. Truly a night to remember. Try to see them live, buy their music, be inspired.

Figaro Haszek



### ZAPATA OF MEXICO

by PETER E. NEWELL

Zapata was the leading figure of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. He fought for the rights of local communities against greedy landlords, treacherous politicians and foreign-owned companies. Under the slogan 'Land and Liberty!' he became the purest embodiment of the Mexican Revolution. Zapata's memory, like his ghost, rides on in Mexico.

£9.50 from Freedom Press

### Quiz answers

1. The Moroccan Wall of Shame, as it is known to Sharawis, or the berm, as it is known to Moroccans. It divides the territory of Western Sahara, occupied by Morocco after Spain pulled out and contested by the Saharawi inhabitants organised in Polisario. And yes, it is longer than the Great Wall of China.
2. A woman from Guantnamo.
3. Seven million.
4. Santos, so called because of the militancy and libertarian character of its workers' movement.

**Journalists & writers wanted**  
to write on global news/politics, protest, direct action, social movements, music, free parties, art etc...  
from an anarchist, free-thinking, non-hierarchical libertarian left standpoint  
email us at: writers@dogmanet.org



# REVIEW

## Dave Douglass finds the frank and brutal stories behind Queen Coal a moving but historically weak recollection

This is an immensely moving book. In some ways though, the title and the cover photo of Women Against Pit Closures is rather misleading. This isn't so much a book about women in the miners strike of 84/5, but a snap shot biography of five women who participated in that strike as activists. It tells their stories, their lives up to and after the great strike in their own words.

People looking for some Hovis nostalgia, of quaint happenings on cobbled streets will be in for shock. So too those who have convinced themselves that class doesn't really exist anymore and everyone is bathed in a kind of middle class security blanket. Life for these women was often brutally harsh, and their words are equally frank and stark. The work traces the lives of the women in the run up to the historic clash and how they featured within it and where they all stand now since it is over.

The book is compiled and authored by Triona Holden, a young journalist of the period and accomplished writer and broadcaster. At the time her sister was married to a militant Barnsley miner and she herself worked at the Sheffield Star, in the heart of the South Yorkshire coalfield.

This is not a history of Women Against Pit Closures, or 'women of the coalfields' *per se*. There are features of women's involvement, the struggles over roles and perceptions over which women argued constantly and invariably split over. Was it a 'Ladies' support group or a 'womens' support group'?

This was a vexatious issue, as was whether to work in the kitchen or go on pickets and tub thumping around the country. Most communities split along these lines too, with women generally doing one role or the other and sometimes in spite of each other. Many pit communities boasted more than one Women's Support group, and it had nothing to do with location, but everything to do with politics and perception and the struggle for ideas now out in the open of debate and struggle. None of this is really touched on here.

Women Against Pit Closures was a thoroughly indigenous movement in the mining communities. I was therefore baffled by the reference to "those who were parachuted into the coalfields, and once the action was over headed back to their middle class London homes to

write their PhDs." We none of us know of anyone who meets this description, unless Triona is referring to herself or one of her friends.

Triona is to be congratulated on bringing these women back together in print and allowing them to have their say in their own way. I have however criticisms of Triona's own perceptions in attempting to outline the strike, its causes and the position in post '84/85 mining communities.

She makes no attempt to challenge the press misinformation peddled at the time of the dispute and repeats many of the myths, saying for example: "Arthur Scargill called for a walk out - there was no national ballot" (page 2 introduction). The strike started in Yorkshire - where incidentally there had been a ballot a couple of years before in anticipation of impending closures.

The Yorkshire miners voted at mass pithead meetings and welfare mass meetings to strike in defence of jobs and in particular against the closure of Cortonwood Colliery. Arthur wasn't in the Yorkshire Area during this period. He had no mechanism whatever to 'call for a walk out' and didn't speak at the meetings which decided to do so. The decision *not* to have a national ballot was decided upon by a national delegate conference representing every pit and workplace in the mining industry.

She also has an unfortunate turn of phrase which alludes to the well known 'common sense' conclusion that all this, pit closures and job losses, defeat of the NUM were somehow preordained. She calls it "the inevitable passing of their way of life" and says "they were drowning in a dying culture". It wasn't inevitable at all of course. The strike as it was came to within a gnat's bollock of winning - and defeating the whole Thatcher scheme, not just the pit closures - on at least three occasions. This is evidenced by subsequent research and not least the biographies of MacGregor and Thatcher herself.

Triona also gives a very confusing impression as to the chronology of the struggle against closures and in defence of pit communities especially by the women.

Her book starts at the end so to speak, with a recent small protest against the closure of the last of the Selby super-pits Riccall. The Selby Coalfield closed last year after mining a hundred million tonnes of coal in twenty years, but abandoned twice that much still virginal and untapped. She contrasts the small



assembly with the mass protests of 1984-85. However, she leaves out completely the resurgent mass struggle of 1992-93 when women, if anything, played a much more leading role than they had in 1984-85 and took the initiative from the union.

Talking of a photo of Cortonwood pickets February 1985, she says: "It was taken in February 1985 at the end of the dispute - a time when it was clear the government had won. The world in which these people had lived was coming to an end: nothing would ever be the same." Well if she is talking of the Cortonwood mine and perhaps something of its community that may be true, but it wasn't true of the miners or the industry. To this extent Thatcher had actually failed. By 1987-88 there were still well over 100,000 miners in the industry, more than 80% of whom belonged to the NUM supplying up to 90% of all power to the national grid. Our way of life was not coming to an end in 1985, not overall anyway. This would require a further offensive against the miners, this time launched by John Major in 1992-93.

I must say that despite the realities depicted by the women folk themselves the author tends to give contemporary

events rather a rose coloured spin, like it all worked out well in the end.

"The women say their 'public enemy number one', Margaret Thatcher, is a case in point. As she wiped away tears when she got the sack as Prime Minister, the mining folk felt they had the last laugh. They delight in the thought that the property boom, nascent in Thatcher years, has benefited their communities. It has meant that the more historic and traditional pit villages have become gentrified. The humble homes that miners struggled to hang onto through the strike are now worth many times what they were in 1984-85. They had no idea that they were sitting not just on coal mines but gold mines as well."

In the odd rural pit community this might be the case though it is rare, it is however overall a rather selective reflection. Most people visiting the former pit communities of Britain, from Scotland to Barnsley to Wales, see not 'gentrified' villages but the deprivation, the poverty and run down communities rotten with hopelessness, unemployment, the black economy, anti social crime and drug addiction.

Overwhelmingly former miners are living on benefits and their children if they are working at all are in dead end

jobs, or else have moved away. They top the list for ill health, infant mortality, premature death and chronic disease. True, the backwash of the southern property boom, creating a property shortage, has meant even the humble pit house has risen in value maybe by a factor of five over the last fifteen years. But that's not the point. Who wants to move to a pit village with no pit and no work in a community which has lost all hope?

The only folk buying houses here are the same folk who have always lived here.

I have no wish to nitpick Triona's work, this is a good initiative and a good book if looked at mainly from the lives of the women telling their own stories, which is anyway its point. It is disappointing that even someone like Triona, who is clearly moved by the strengths and lives of the women she has studied, did not take time to set right the background history and subsequent events in which those women engaged. As biographies of working class fighting women, well done; as a social history of the miners struggles, look elsewhere.

Queen Coal - Women Of The Miners' Strike by Triona Holden, Sutton Publishing, £20

## LOS DE ABAJO: MUSIC FOR FIESTAS AND REVOLUTION

One by one band members gradually took the stage to the steady sound of a deep electronic heartbeat. Then followed a thunder of complexly interwoven live percussion, fused with deep growling basslines, explosive brass, funky guitars, ethereal synth noodling and cross-rhythms of turntable scratching.

Within moments the crowded ballroom dancefloor was heaving to the hypnotic Latin American rhythms underpinning

the fiery mixture of musical styles that made up the set of the dynamic Mexican ten piece band crowded onto the tiny stage. From that point we were swept along in a fiesta with a political consciousness, or was it just a little glimpse of revolution with a groove ('revolution con pachanga' as el Che said).

The venue was the Manor Ballroom, in of all places, Ipswich, and hats off and much praise must go to Howard

and Martin of Peppery Productions ([www.peppery.co.uk](http://www.peppery.co.uk)) who have pioneered the bringing of top flight world music artists to perform here in this hitherto cultural back of beyond.

Before the show I chatted with lead singer, guitarist and songwriter Liber Teran who told me that Los de Abajo were formed 13 years ago in Mexico City, influenced by '90s Latin-Basque leftist agit-pop band Mano Negra and

Mexico's original latino-rock fusionists Café Tucumba. Songwriting comes organically from four of the ten band members while musical arrangements are built up from everyone's inspirational approaches to their distinctive sound, leading in all to a democratic, non-hierarchical creative process. This reflects the bands overtly revolutionary political stance. Liber tells me that the heritage of the band is one of social resistance to

undemocratic power, some band members being children of activists involved in Mexico's worker and student revolt against a fiercely repressive political regime in the late 1970s under which many dissidents were killed or 'disappeared'.

Liber continued to explain that while a number of their songs deal with more universal themes such as love and loss,



## A Sideways Look

Some of you may recall a struggle a few years ago around the building of a station near the Cutty Sark in Greenwich. There was some opposition to it, which, while ultimately unsuccessful, did win some gains.

Originally, the authorities wanted to knock down a block on an estate and a block of shops to build a station for the Docklands Light Railway that was being extended. It's actually a good thing that the line was extended - bringing extra public transport to a part of South London not otherwise well served. But the arguments from the campaigners against it were two-fold. Firstly, that there was another perfectly adequate stop in Greenwich which was being built anyway and wouldn't cause anywhere near as much disruption. And secondly, that alternative sites were there for the Cutty Sark station.

There were some residents on the estate who wanted to fight, though the Red Action member present was more interested in being rehoused somewhere nicer in the borough - a line that has changed since they started the IWCA. In the affected shops, there were some businesses such as Goddard's Pie Shop who had been in that location for over a century. They were bolstered by other locals keen to preserve the uniqueness of that part of Greenwich and squatters who occupied flats as they were decanted.

In the end, the campaigners lost most of what they wanted, though most of the historic shops were retained and Goddard's is still there. Over the top of the new station a new shopping centre was built, which was swiftly tenanted by the usual suspects who work so hard to make the British High Street so bland. In came McDonalds, Lloyds Bank, Boots, Wetherspoons, Ottakars and a mobile phone shop. Since then, Marks & Spencer have opened a convenience store and Subway are there for people who like a different kind of blandness.

One thing that hadn't occurred to me until someone involved mentioned it was that these outlets wouldn't have got into Greenwich's historic centre without this development. Planning controls in historic heritage areas tend to be quite strict. I'm not suggesting it was the sole reason for it, but it has contributed a lot to making Greenwich just like Anytown.

And the tide of corporate blandness never stops flowing. One of the few pubs left in the centre that is actually a local boozer, the Lord Hood, with live music on some nights, is also threatened as part of yet another redevelopment scheme. I know we have our leisure time sold back to us but must the only choice be between branded corporate hell-holes and more vibrant places deliberately overpriced to keep the rabble out?

This picture is repeated all over the country - the planning laws are there to support corporate developments. A comrade tells me that there is a similar battle looming in Bury St Edmunds, where developers want to the convert

the Cattle market site to a department store. Opposition to this development centres around the Knights of Saint Edmund, who are threatening to unleash the thousand year old curse associated with the saint against the developers, Centros Miller and Debenhams.

Svartfrosk

## Blast from the Past

A very different France is portrayed in Freedom, 12th November 1955:

Since August 1953, when a general strike of public services hit the general public right in the middle of the holidays but did not affect private industry in any way, no agitation of any size about wages and conditions had shaken France.

By a policy of promises, of appointments on duly fixed dates to re-examine the wages problem, and of creating numerous semi-official boards for conciliation and negotiation between wage earners and employers, the governments of Mendes-France and Edgar Faure had prevented the onset of any new attack of social fever.

Nearly two years passed without any serious struggles in the most important industrial sectors. From time to time a collective agreement was signed in one branch or another; with infinite precautions prime ministers 'authorised' the employers to 'regulate' wages; and interminable joint discussions brought together trade union delegates and employers' representatives.

This all-round slumber was put forward by some as a sign of working-class moderation, by others of the communist party aligned with the easing of international tension, and by some other observers as an expression of French decadence.

## FREEDOM ANARCHIST BOOKSHOP

84b Whitechapel High Street

London E1 7QX

tel/fax 020 7247 9249

OPENING HOURS

Monday to Saturday

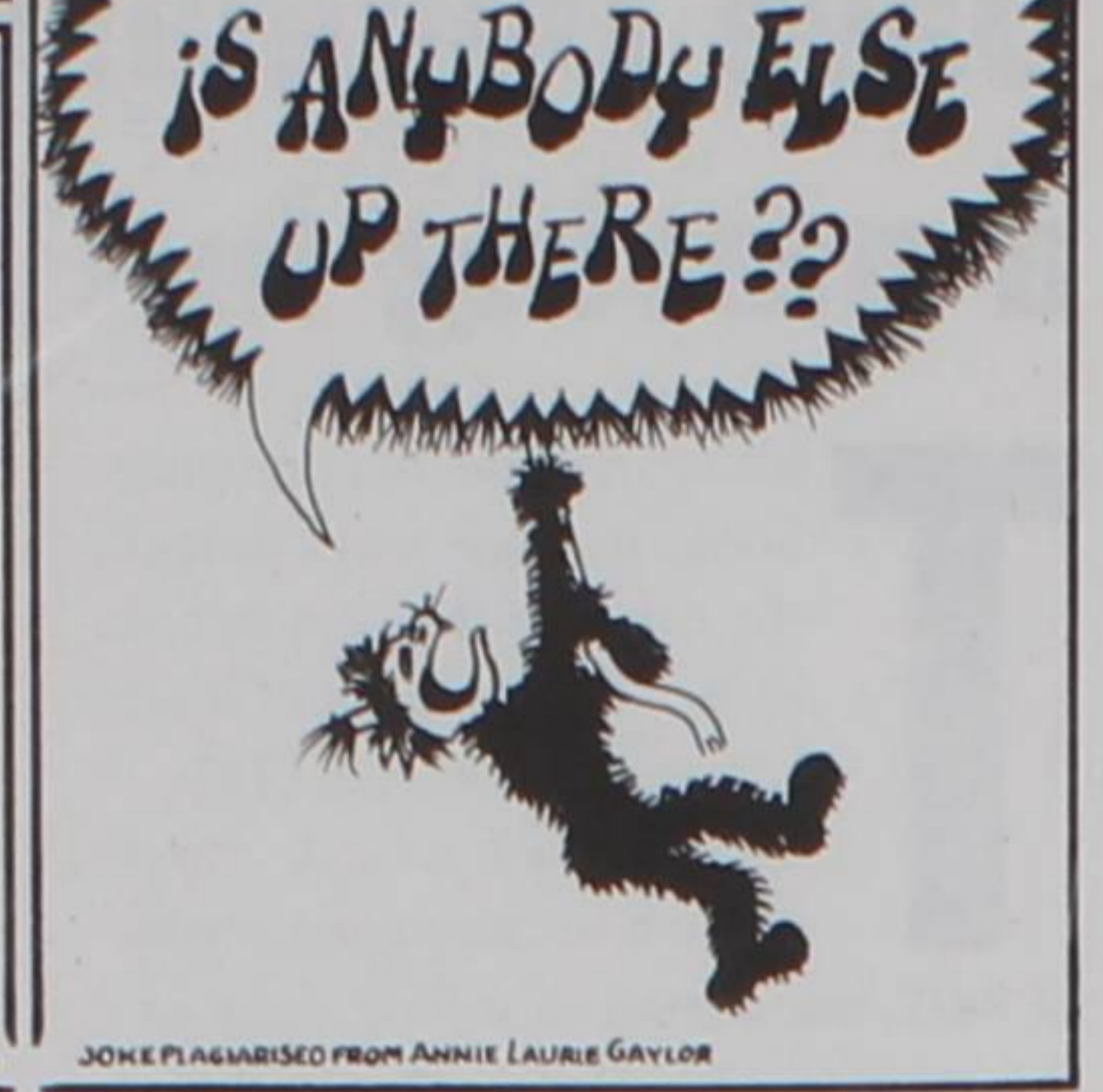
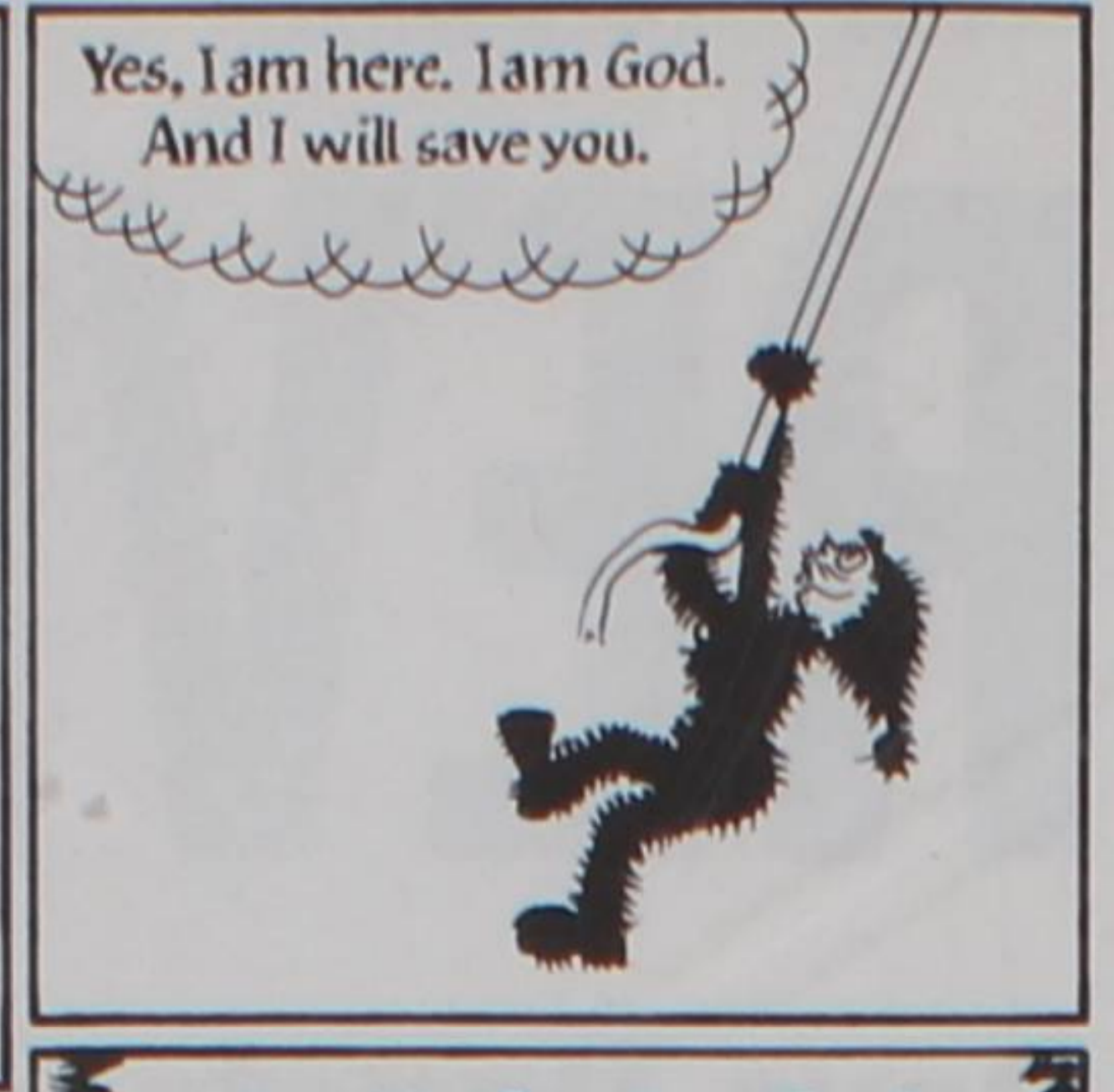
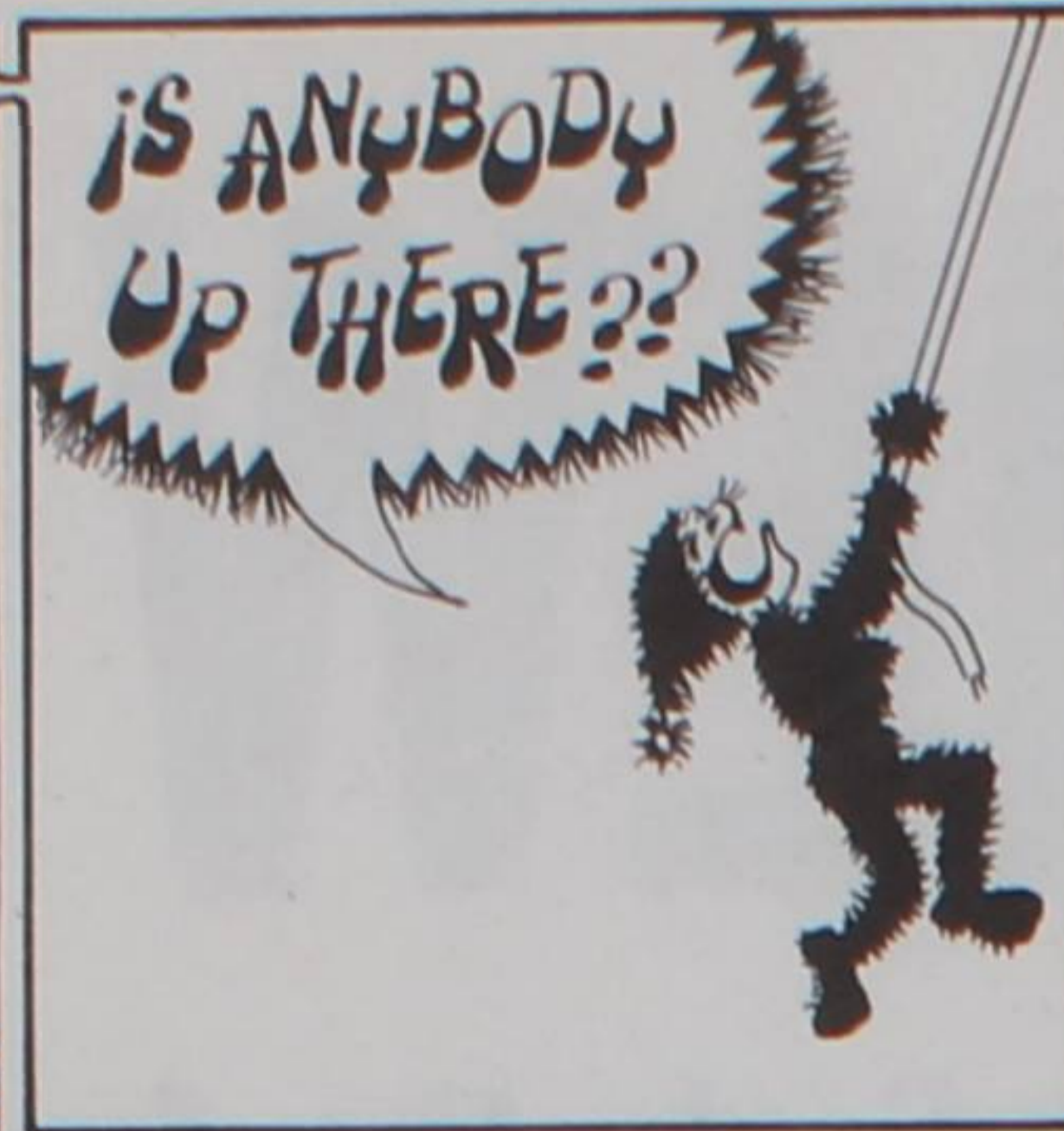
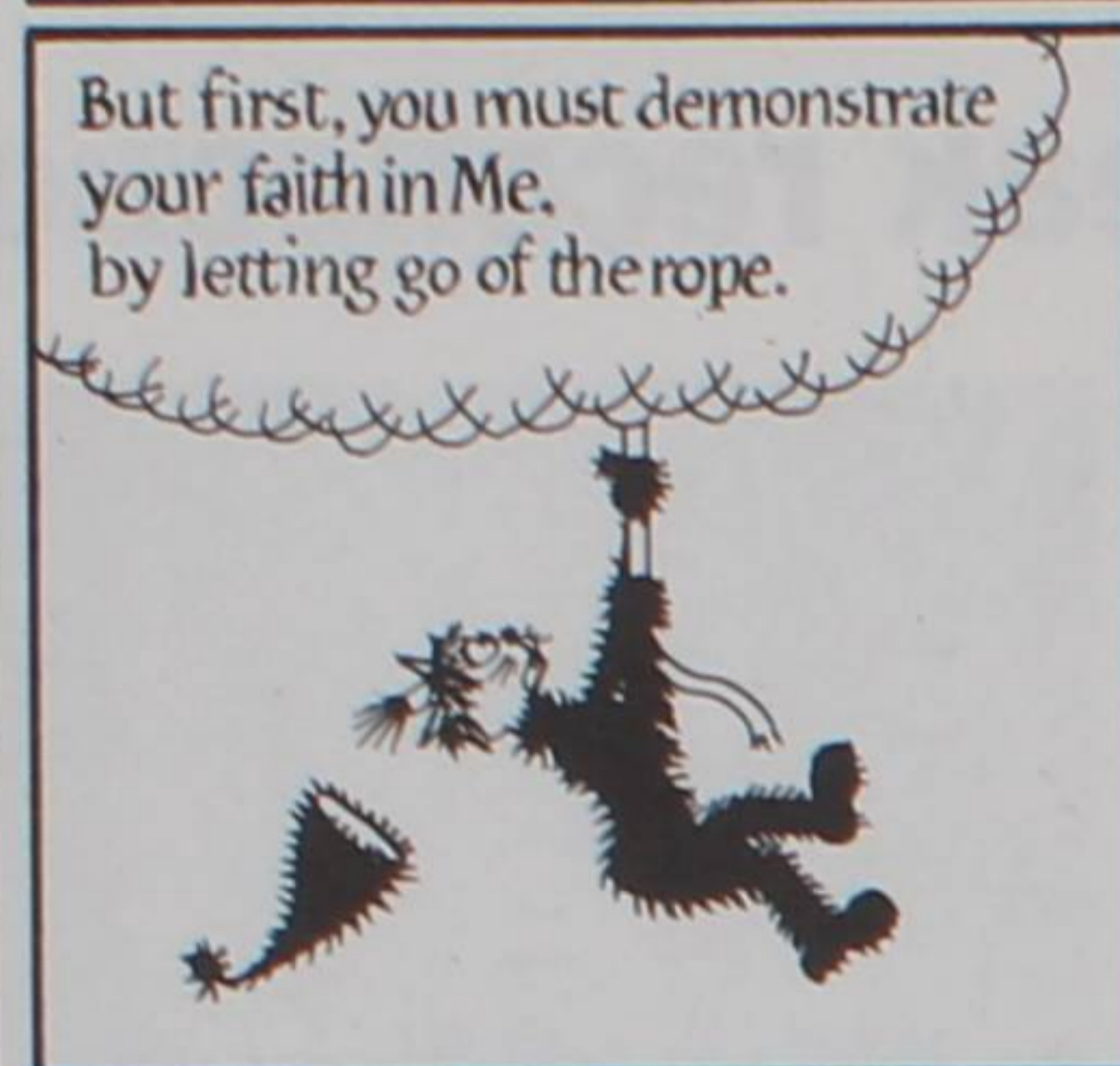
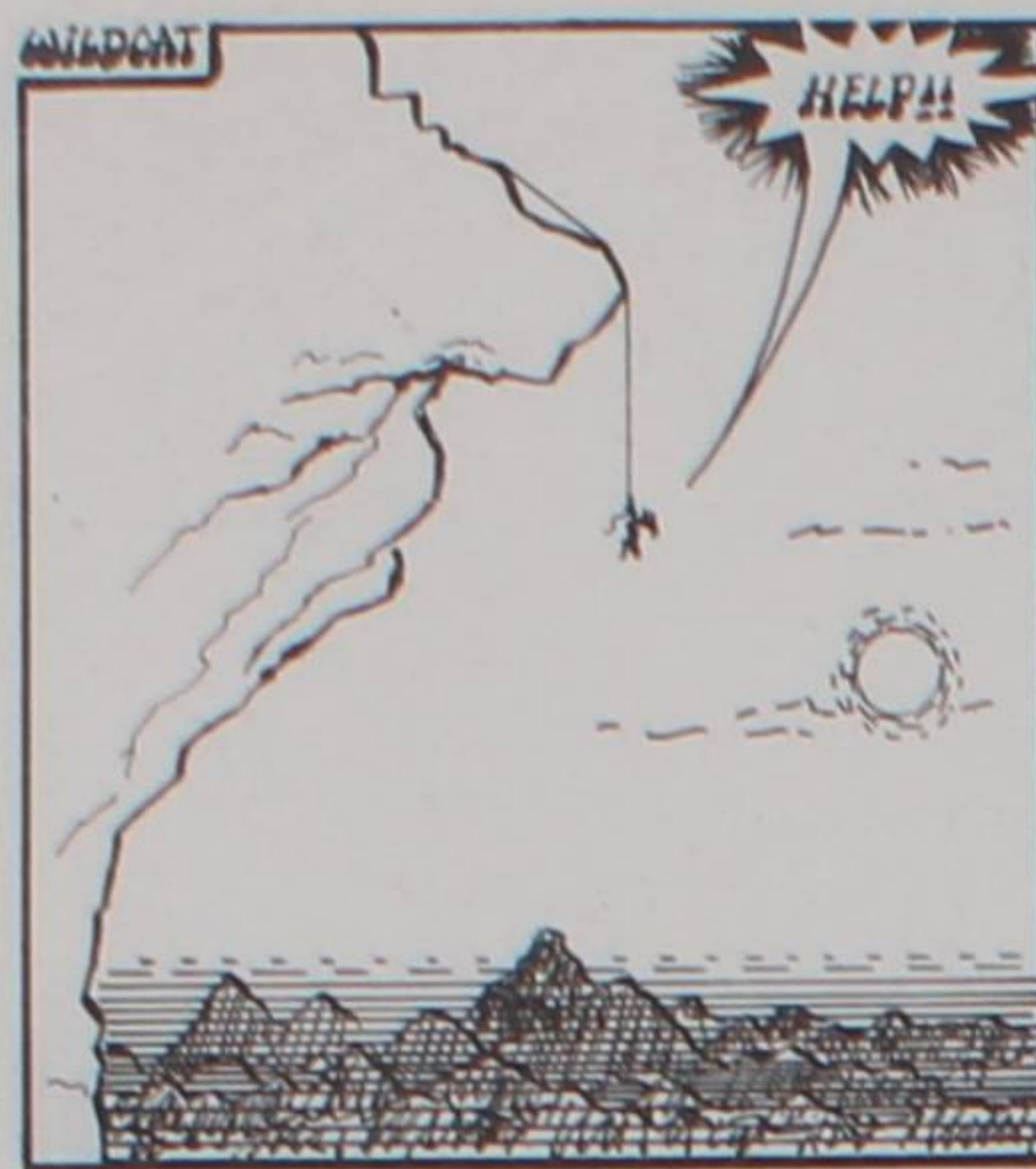
from 12 noon to 6pm

You can also use our mail order service or order books online via our website [www.freedompress.org.uk](http://www.freedompress.org.uk)

## The quiz

1. What is the longest continuous wall in the world?
2. Perhaps the most famous Cuban song is Guantanamera, with lyrics by the poet José Martí. But what does Guantanamera mean?
3. According to public sector union Unison, how many unpaid days overtime did local government workers put in during 2004?
4. Where was the 'Barcelona of Brazil'?

Answers on page 6



## Obituary

### Alexandre Christov

Alexandre Christov spent his life fighting for social justice. He was born behind the iron curtain in the village of Yanovo in Macedonia (now Bulgaria), and he grew up in a rural mountain area.

As a young man he was sent to prison - a concentration camp where he was set to work in a uranium mine. His crime: standing up to the communist authorities and inspiring others to join him.

Eventually he escaped and, with a heart-wrenching decision that tore at him throughout his life, he left his beloved homeland in search of freedom.

Alexandre was a poet and a journalist. He lived in Brazil, France and then England. He had two children, two grandchildren and a great grandchild.

For many years he published the Macedonian anarchist journal Narodna Volya (The People's Will), which was printed in London until the break up of the Warsaw pact and is still being printed and published in Bulgaria.

The printers Aldgate Press remember him as an ever friendly and ever enthusiastic man. He never left without shaking everyone's hand and urging them on.

All his writing expressed a burning passion to activate the will of the people to stand up for their rights and to live humanely. He will be sadly missed.

May his spirit be ever free!  
Alexandre Christov: born 14th February 1929, died 20th October 2005.



## Listings

12th November Northern Anarchist Network Conference from 11.30am to 5pm, The Bridge Hotel, Castle Square, off Side Street, Newcastle, for details contact Harry on 01422 842558

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](http://newagenda.demon.co.uk/perclub.html)

22nd to 24th November Weekend of action against Rolls Royce Raynesway, Derby, see [derby.peacepages.co.uk](http://derby.peacepages.co.uk) or [tridentploughshares.org](http://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](http://newagenda.demon.co.uk/perclub.html)

25th and 26th November BeyondTV International Festival, Swansea, see [undercurrents.org/beyondtv](http://undercurrents.org/beyondtv)

25th November Buy Nothing Day, see [buynothingday.co.uk](http://buynothingday.co.uk)

26th November Adverts and Their Enemies, a day devoted to the art of subvertising with workshops, discussion and practical tips from 12 noon at The Basement, 24 Lever Street Manchester, see [www.dosummat.org.uk](http://www.dosummat.org.uk)

29th November Airline executives will be in London for an international conference to discuss expansion of the aviation industry, so why not greet them when they gather for their Gala Dinner - dress formal and meet at 6pm, Tower Bridge, see [planestupid.com](http://planestupid.com) or email [actionupdate@hushmail.com](mailto:actionupdate@hushmail.com)

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](http://globalclimatecampaign.org) or

[campaigncc.org](http://campaigncc.org)

3rd December Annual Dutch Anarchist Bookfair 11am till 6pm, De Kargadoor, Oudegracht 36, Utrecht, The Netherlands, see [www.kargadoor.nl](http://www.kargadoor.nl)

6th December No2ID will debate with Andrew Burnham MP (Home Office Minister) about the need for ID cards, 7pm at City College, Pelham Street, Brighton.

17th December Free market, Manchester city centre, see [dosummat.org.uk](http://dosummat.org.uk)

7th to 8th January Newbury reunion, 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](http://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.ik.com](http://alternatives2prison.ik.com)

## Introducing...

Aspire

Community and social collective

Based in Leeds, Aspire organise squatted non-profit community centre gatherings. The temporary centres host workshops, discussion groups and information forums, as well as a café and kids' space.

A member of the collective said: "Our latest project will open somewhere in Leeds from the 17th to 20th November, and will include skills workshops for squatting, green living, direct action and solidarity, plus more."

Website: [a-spire.org.uk](http://a-spire.org.uk) will be updated once the centre is open.

## SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Send to Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

- Please start a NEW subscription to Freedom for ..... issues
- Please RENEW my subscription to Freedom for ..... issues
- I enclose a donation
- I'd like to pay by Standing Order and have completed the form (see right)

I enclose £ ..... payment (cheques payable to Freedom Press please)

Name .....

Address .....

Postcode .....

## STANDING ORDER FORM

Please return to Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

To the manager (your bank)

Bank name .....

Bank address .....

Postcode .....

£ ..... each month/quarter/year (delete as appropriate) starting on (date) .....

Name(s) of account holder(s) .....

Account number ..... Sort code .....

Signature .....

For bank use only

Please pay this sum to Freedom Press, account number 82946905, sort code 72-00-05, Alliance & Leicester Commercial Bank plc, Bridle Road, Bootle, Merseyside GIR 0AA

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Inland	Europe	outside Europe (surface)	outside Europe (airmail)
<b>Freedom (24 Issues) half price for 12 Issues</b>				
Claimants	16.00	-	-	41.00
Regular	20.00	29.00	29.00	46.00
Institutions	28.00	36.00	36.00	46.00
Supporter	48.00	60.00	60.00	72.00

Get in touch with us for details of bundle rates.

Note that we have a new 'supporter' sub rate.

You can also use the Standing Order form to ensure that your subscription always gets paid on time, or if you want to make a regular donation to Freedom.

All prices are in £ sterling.

You can now subscribe online at [www.freedompress.org.uk](http://www.freedompress.org.uk)

FREEDOM fortnightly ISSN 0016 0504