

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

10 DECEMBER 2005

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WORK CANCER EPIDEMIC 'BURIED'

A new report has estimated that cases of work related cancer could be as much as four times the number attributed by the government, and suggests there could be as many as 21,000 new cases every year going 'unremarked'.

The research, brought out by the TUC-funded Hazards group, discovered that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), responsible for policy regarding workplace cancer, was using figures from a 1981 report written for the United States as a basis for its estimates.

HSE said: "Although, this estimate relates to the US over two decades ago, it is seen as broadly applicable to Great Britain today and remains the best overall estimate available."

But it has been found that the 1981 'Doll/Peto' report had major flaws. The figures estimate probable workplace-related cancer numbers of between 2% to 8% of the total, between 5,400 to 21,600 cases a year.

A second, more recent report by the University of Massachusetts has found that the percentage is more likely to be within the 8% to 16% range, or 21,600 to 43,200 cases.

Doll/Peto included only 12 regular workplace carcinogens while over 300 could be in active circulation. It counted only people under the age of 65 (most deaths occur after this age due long gestation periods) and largely ignored cancers in women.

The author of the Massachusetts report, Dr Richard Clapp, specialises in communities with toxic or radiation hazards. He stresses that the problem is not going to be a short-term one. He

said: "The numbers of cases of asbestos-related cancer may eventually decline, but there is so much historical exposure and so much asbestos still in buildings, that it will take a while. Likewise, for pesticides that cause non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"Lots of chemical carcinogens are used in high-tech industry. The semiconductor manufacturing process still involves solvents such as methylene chloride and trichloroethylene that are probably human carcinogens, for example."

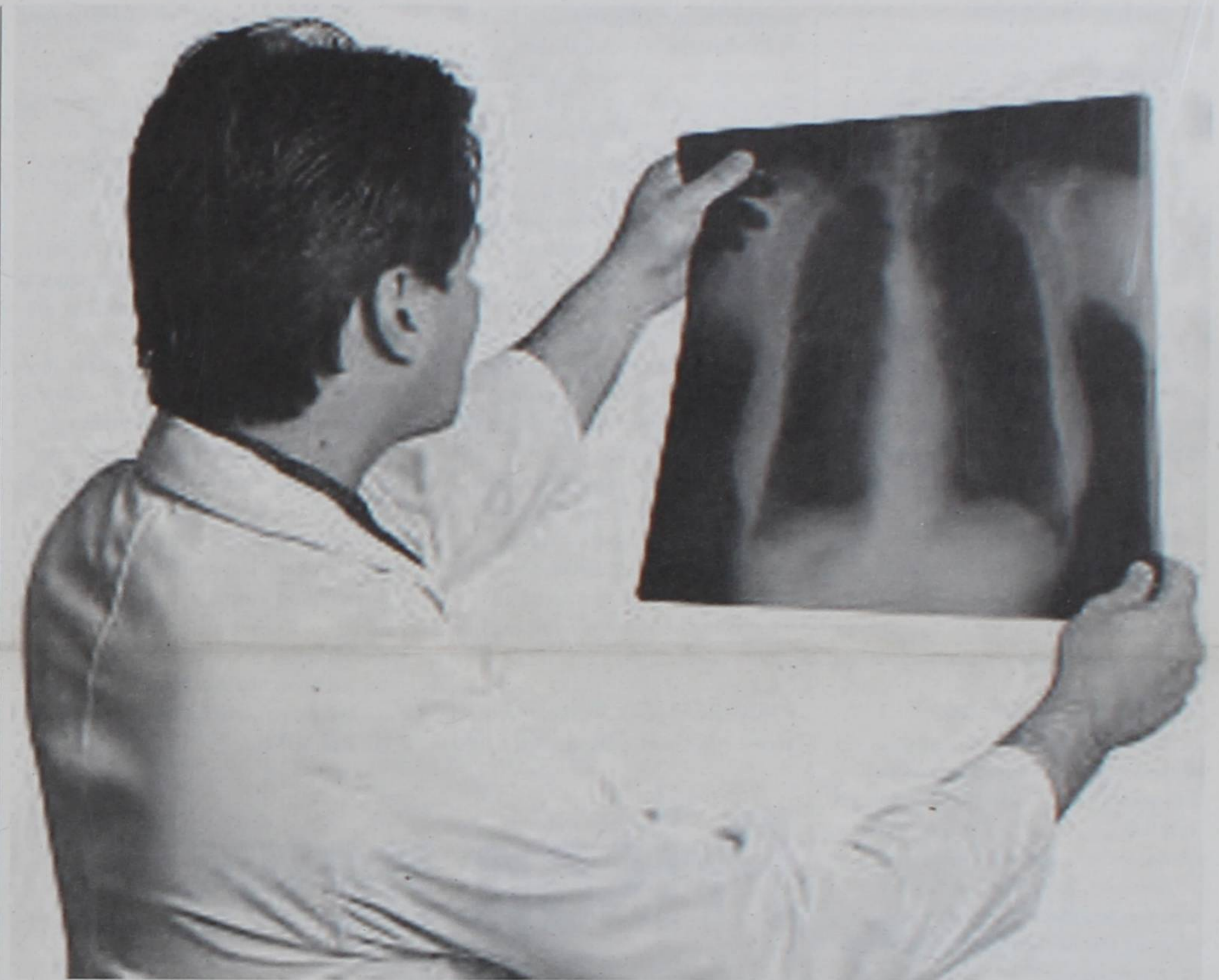
Under the 2001 Stockholm convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), which include carcinogenic compounds used in industry and agriculture, 12 countries including Britain are supposed to have implemented a system to manage POPs for the sake of public health.

Only three countries have failed to meet this requirement, Britain, Ireland and the US. It is thought this failure is costing lives.

Co-author of the Massachusetts report, Molly Jacobs, said: "Many known or suspected carcinogens including solvents (such as benzene, methylene chloride) and metals (chromium, arsenic, cadmium) continue to be used in industrial applications and in consumer products.

Even though science has uncovered numerous cancer risks to occupational and environmental exposures, what's more concerning is the over 75,000 agents in US commerce that remain untested."

"Comprehensive cancer prevention programmes should eliminate exposures



from all known risk factors, not just lifestyle factors. Since the solutions to preventing occupational and environmental exposures are a political landmine requiring changes in the way society produces and consumes goods, we believe that cancer prevention

organisations have simply ignored these factors."

Anecdotal research by anarchist Robert Allen, published in his books *Waste Not Want Not* and *The Dioxin War*, showed that from the 1950s and well into the 1990s government and

industry scientists were aware of the impact on workers from industrial pollutants.

"Communities and workers in Britain and Ireland have long suffered the consequences of exposure to carcinogens,

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LABOUR GOES NUCLEAR

Tony Blair has come under pressure from green groups after expressing support for the possible expansion of Britain's nuclear programme in a speech to the Confederation of Business interests.

Following a report which said that nuclear provision would drop from 20% today to 4% in 2050 as existing plants close, Blair announced that a review will be taking place on the issue of future energy provision. He said: "It will include specifically the issue of whether we facilitate the development

of a new generation of nuclear power stations."

A coalition of anti-nuclear groups however have stated that any nuclear plan would be too expensive, unsafe and pollutant to implement.

In a statement, Greenpeace said: "Renewables are a real option for today. They can fill the energy gap by reducing it. Seven per cent of the electricity we produce is lost in transmission to its point of use."

Nuclear producers have said that plants could be built without public subsidy for the first time should nuclear plants be given the go-ahead.

However, parallel requests from the industry that the government provide a 'floor' for energy prices have raised suspicions that more nuclear stations would end up hiking prices for all.

One major plank of the change of energy direction is that nuclear energy is

regarded as a greener and more reliable source of energy than other providers.

But green campaigners point out that taking mining and refining costs into account, nuclear power is only 10% less pollutant than coal.

Greens say renewable technology could already be providing an answer. Britain has more potential wind power sites than anywhere else in Europe.

Solar power is also likely to be able to play a greater part, according to one industry observer: "[There have been] dramatic increases in solar cell efficiency through the usage of quantum dots, allowing them to receive energy from more of the spectrum (the infrared section as well as the visible section)."

A poll has shown that a large majority of people do not support a larger percentage of UK energy needs to come from nuclear power.

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PERM DISASTER?

A group based in Perm, central Russia, have reported that on 4th November there was an ecological disaster in an illegal rocket dismantling site near the town.

Perm, which has been the centre of Russian military operations for nearly 300 years, has courted massive controversy in recent years due to the placement of a nuclear missile dismantling site just outside the commercial hub.

Igor, reporting from the area, said: "All details of the disaster are carefully hidden, but apparently the fuel storage of an inter-continental ballistic missile exploded, burning or damaging a number of surrounding buildings in the territory of Scientific Research Centre Polymeric Materials (NII PM)."

"It is not known whether people have been hurt."

The area gained public attention in 2004 when radical environmentalist group the Rainbow Keepers, along with

Autonomous Action and others, held a protest camp against the facility.

Alongside local protesters, the Russian group demanded the ending of the dismantling programme in the location, following over a year of pressure from groups throughout Perm.

The group explained at the time: "Each of these missiles is a small-scale environmental disaster. The project was initially to be sited in the Nevada desert, but this plan was cancelled because of fears it would hurt the area's endangered tortoises."

Permission for the site to be used for dismantling purposes ran out in July of this year, but appears to have been ignored.

The plant had been operating since February last year, working to dismantle six ICBMs. It would have been done at the specialist nuclear facilities near Votinsk, but Perm was \$50m cheaper.

ISSN 0016-0504



Vol 66
No 24

Home and away

Rape denial

Women who are raped while drunk may not be able to take their attacker to court after a new ruling by a high court judge.

Prosecutors said they could not continue after the woman said she was too drunk to remember whether she originally gave consent to the man or not.

Justice Roderick Evans told a jury at Swansea Crown Court was told that "drunken consent is still consent".

In common law it is regarded as rape if a woman is unconscious through drink when an attack occurs, and under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it was made clear that consent must include the 'freedom and capacity' to make a choice.

Persimmon to cut jobs

Persimmon has celebrated becoming the largest building group in the UK by announcing the closure of 11 offices at the group it has just bought out.

Several hundred jobs will go at the enlarged construction giant, which now has the capacity to build 20,000 new homes a year.

Based in York, Persimmon said there was 'huge overlap' between its offices and those of Westbury Homes, the company it has just acquired for £643m.

Persimmon were recently embarrassed after receiving an 'award' for the most badly designed housing development in Northern England, at the Villa Real estate in County Durham.

The builder was attacked for building 'identikit homes', and over its character, roads, parking and pedestrianisation, construction environment and community at the affordable housing development.

Directors will retire at 60

According to the TUC, eight out of ten of the UK's top companies provide directors with pensions that can pay out in full at 60 and are worth, on average, 26 times those of most employees.

Moreover, directors' final salary pensions are most likely to build up twice as fast as the most common rate for employees in final salary schemes. The directors of the UK's 100 most important companies have amassed pensions worth a total of £0.9 billion which, on average, would pay out £167,000 a year if claimed now. This is over 26 times the national average of £129 a week and over 30 times the average public sector pension.

The research, based on annual reports of 50 of the UK's leading companies, found only one which expected executives to word to 65. (See page 5)

Student loan blacklist

Following its introduction of student loans to replace the grants system and the imposition of top-up fees on the student population, an intention to heavily penalise defaulters has been announced.

The Student Loan Company have requested that they be allowed to pass on the details of students who have been unable to pay back their loans to credit companies, thus blacklisting them in the eyes of major institutions until they had repaid the loan in full.

The move could impact on over 100,000 people who have been unable to keep up with their repayments, barring them from holding any other debts including mortgages and credit cards.

The move is thought to be linked to a more general shift in policy, with the Department of Work and Pensions having announced plans to share more government data, such as on state benefits, with the private sector.

Around the world

• **BRAZIL:** A new report by Amnesty International has found that discriminatory 'public security' policies have concentrated violence and human rights violations into Brazil's shanty towns.

Tim Cahill, on Amnesty's publishing the report, said: "Despite the fact that people living in Brazil's poor communities are many times more likely to be victims of violent crime, Federal and State authorities invest little to nothing in their protection. The public security budget allocation has been done on the basis of repression and discrimination effectively 'criminalising' poor communities as a whole."

Mr Cahill cited the example of 14 year old schoolboy Douglas Brasil de Paula.

Douglas was playing pinball in a bar. João da Costa Magalhães was sitting at the door of his house. Elizabeth Soares de Oliveira was working in her husband's bar. Rafael da Silva Couto, a 17 year old schoolboy, was on his bicycle. All of them were shot dead by a 'death squad' in the Baixada Fluminense District of Rio de Janeiro on 31st March 2005.

"The killing of 29 people in the Baixada Fluminense is one of the consequences of a public security strategy that has abandoned the country's poor and sentenced all Brazilians to crime and violence," said Cahill.

• **NEW ZEALAND:** Workers from stores across Auckland walked off the job on

November 23rd to join the world's first Starbucks strike, held on Auckland's counter-culture café strip, Karangahape Road, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

What began as a small protest by workers from one store became a city-wide strike when Starbucks workers heard that managers would be brought in to cover the shifts of the strikers.

More than 30 workers spontaneously walked out from 10 different Auckland Starbucks stores to join KFC, Pizza Hut and McDonalds employees, and around 150 other supporters outside the Karangahape Road store.

A union organiser said: "Our campaign isn't just about fair pay at work, it's about social justice. Poverty wages are increasing the gap between rich and poor and increasing other social inequalities. The majority of low paid and minimum wage workers are women, maori, pacific islanders, disabled, youth, students and new migrants.

"The minimum wage is now the most important determining factor for low paid workers. Raising the minimum wage to \$12 now, removing youth rates, giving secure hours and other minimum entitlements would be the first step towards reclaiming what entitlements workers have lost and alleviating poverty and inequality."

• **SOUTH AFRICA:** Political prisoner turned anarchist Abel Ramarope has died in prison, after a long battle with chronic asthma.

Abel was imprisoned as a member of the Pan-African Congress for his role in the struggle against apartheid but, through contact with the South African chapter of the Anarchist Black Cross in early 2004 he began to develop a great interest in anarchism and devoured any reading material he could get hold of.

Despite a decade of humiliation and abuse at the hands of the authorities, when Abel became an anarchist almost two years ago he was filled with a hope and belief in a better future.

In prison he began to organise a clandestine reading and study group on anarchism, educating prisoners about the real nature of the prison system, and set about organising to expose the corruption of the ANC and the Amnesty Commission; which denied amnesty to political prisoners and freedom fighters of the apartheid era who were not affiliated to the ANC leadership or were not part of the South African Police or South African National Defense Force during the times of struggle.

Jonathan, from the South African Anarchist Black Cross, said: "It was an honour and a privilege to have know Abel and, inspired by his enthusiasm and commitment to exposing and expelling the lies about the role and function of the prison system - that of protecting and upholding class society - with the aim of destroying them both, we will not rest until every prison has been razed to the ground."

• **ZIMBABWE:** Harare saw a confrontation between peaceful demonstrators and police on World Aids Day, as marchers were ordered to disperse.

As Freedom goes to press, five of the organisers of the day's protests are still in police custody. They are Munyaradzi Gwisai (International Socialists Organisation), Mao Nyikadzino (National Constitutional Assembly), Sostain Moyo (Zimbabwe Activists Against Aids) and Anna and Gladys from the Women Aids Support Network (WASN).

Police had previously given clearance for the World Aids Day march and the gathering in the Africa Unity Square, but later rescinded permission once the march had started.

One marcher said: "This is clearly a matter of setting up a trap and way-laying people on the way. The success of today's action is very inspiring. Hundreds of us marched on the streets of Harare singing and raising our banners. People carried banners demanding access to ARVs and demands from the Action Against Poverty.

"These included living wage for workers, fuel, affordable sanitary pads and baby milk, and reduction of taxation. People were also calling for transparency on the Aids levy."

Lawyers from the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights are trying to get the arrested marchers released.

Prison news

• **Milan Rai released:** After a short stint in HMP Lewes, anarchist author Milan Rai (pictured in action below) has been released. He was jailed for refusing to pay a fine imposed for criminal damage related to his anti-war activities.

In an email to supporters he said: "A very big thank you to everyone who sent cards and messages to me. While inside, I was writing daily notes - thoughts about activism, movement-building and civil disobedience."



• **Jim Robbins moved:** Class War prisoner Jim Robbins has been moved once again, this time to England's most inaccessible nick, HMP Dartmoor. Originally built by Napoleonic POWs, Dartmoor has been repeatedly recommended for closure, and is swathed in mist and freezing cold for much of the year. Jim is no stranger to 'The Moor', and has taken his transfer as stoically as ever, but is sure to appreciate letters and cards of support. J.A. Robbins, KJJ588, HMP Dartmoor, Princetown, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 6RR.

• **Keith Mann released:** Long-standing animal rights activist and serial ALF prisoner Keith Mann has been released from jail early, after serving 6 months of an 18 month sentence imposed after he allegedly threatened an animal abuser in court. Keith will have to wear an electronic tag for the remainder of the sentence. While vivisectionists condemned Keith's release, and the *Daily Telegraph* dubbed him "a ruthless fanatic", he will almost certainly be more disturbed to learn that one supporter recently referred to him as "the Bjorn Borg of the animal rights movement"! Good luck Keith!

• **Steve Marshall denied vegan diet:** US eco-defence prisoner Steve Marshall, who is remanded in custody charged with destroying equipment belonging to a river-polluting quarry company is being denied a vegan diet by his

captors. Since Steve is a strict vegan who refuses to eat any animal products, his health is being endangered by the unwillingness of the prison authorities to comply with dietary requirements. Please write urgently to Facility Commander Captain Jim Turney, Multnomah County Detention Centre, 1120 SW 3rd, Portland, OR 97204, USA, asking him to address this situation and provide Steve with a proper vegan diet. You can also send letters of support to Steve at: Stephen Marshall, 691374 MDCD, 1120 SW 3rd, Portland, OR 97204, USA.

• **Saverio Pellegrino moved:** Italian Lecce defendant, Saverio Pellegrino, who is being held on remand accused of various actions including sabotaging Esso petrol pumps in protest at the war on Iraq, targeting the cash machines of a bank which has links with an immigration centre, and targeting Benetton in support of the Mapuche tribe in Chile, has been transferred to a new prison. His new address is: Saverio Pellegrino, Via Prati Nuovi 7, CAP 27058, Voghera (Pavia), Italy.

• **Dessie O'Hare:** Despite his clear eligibility for release under the Good Friday Agreement, Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) prisoner, Dessie O'Hare remains incarcerated. Dessie, who was a member of the IRA before joining the INLA, was dubbed 'The Border Fox' by the press, and has

been in prison since 1988. While most other INLA prisoners were released several years ago, and the INLA has recently declared a permanent ceasefire, the Irish government have so far refused to comply with their obligations as regards Dessie O'Hare. For more information contact The Release Dessie O'Hare Campaign, 392 Falls Road, Belfast, BT48 6DH.

• **Finnish prisoner:** Antti Rautiainen is a Finnish Anarchist imprisoned until 6th January for refusing to pay fines imposed due to his refusal to do military service. Send letters of support to Antti Rautiainen, 471/05, Jokelan Vankila, pl 70 05401, Jokela, Finland.

Xmas cards to prisoners: For most prisoners the 'festive season' simply means more bang-up, suspension of visits, even worse food than normal, and a painful reminder that they have spent another year away from their friends and families. Even for the non-religious, a card at Xmas is a kind thought at what is for many a particularly dark time.

Please make an effort to send a card to a prisoner or two. You can find addresses for anarchist and other political prisoners on the Brighton ABC site at www.brightonabc.org.uk and addresses for miscarriage of justice prisoners can be obtained from mojuk@mojuk.org.uk

compiled by Mark Barnsley

News

Don't look now...

Two men could go to prison for leaking a document, but it's not the one originally suggested

Two men have been brought to court, accused of leaking a secret document.

But bloggers have revealed that it's not the one suggested originally by the mainstream media.

David Keogh, a civil servant, was charged for making a "damaging disclosure of a document relating to international relations."

Leo O'Connor, a former legislative researcher, was charged with receiving a document which he knew, or had reason to believe, was protected against disclosure by the Official Secrets Act.

In a 15 minute hearing, the two spoke only to confirm their names.

The court case follows the well-publicised leaking of a transcript in which US president George W. Bush is alleged to have suggested the bombing of the Al-Jazeera head office in Qatar.

Following the leak's allegations appearing in the *Mirror* newspaper, Attorney General Lord Goldsmith has warned editors that they could also face prosecution under the Official Secrets Act for disclosing the contents.

But after reports originally circulated throughout the mainstream press that O'Connor and Keogh were being prosecuted for a memo called 'Iraq in the medium term', which was published in May, online weblog Blairwatch have alleged that the BBC's 'government sources' may have been trying to bury the memo.

MP Peter Kilfoyle told the bloggers that the *Mirror* leak and *The Times* leak were from "completely different sources".

Ringverse, for Blairwatch, said: "The point of our post was to confirm that these two memos are quite separate and despite what 'government sources' were saying to the BBC, that there isn't, and

never was any link between the the al-Jazeera memo as reported in the *Mirror*, and the leak to *The Times* that was published last year.

"We suggest they thought that by feeding the BBC a false story to dampen down the press speculation, and taking advantage of the OSA they could hide the fact that the al-Jazeera memo ever existed, and give us a non story."

When questioned by reporters over the case, Blair said: "Look, there's a limit to what I can say - it's all *sub judice*. But honestly, I mean, conspiracy theories..."

The row over the memo blew up shortly after the last issue of *Freedom* went to press. Two sources leaked a memo to the *Mirror* newspaper suggesting that following highly damning reports by al-Jazeera on the destruction of Fallujah, citing hundreds of deaths at the hands of US forces, the US were livid.

Rumsfeld said of the Fallujah reports: "I can definitively say that what al-Jazeera is doing is vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable."

His words came a day before the alleged conversation between Bush and Blair, where the President was said to have been talked out of ordering the attack.

A spokesman at the White House said of the memo: "We are not going to dignify something so outlandish with a response"

The situation further inflames speculation that two prior bombings of al-Jazeera offices, in Kabul in 2001 and Baghdad in 2003, might have been deliberate.

A spokesman for the channel said: "If the report is correct then this would be both shocking and worrisome not only



to al-Jazeera but to media organisations across the world."

The station added that if the leaked memo was authentic, "it would cast serious doubts in regard to the US administration's version of previous

incidents involving al-Jazeera's journalists and offices.

Of the two sources cited by the *Mirror*, one says Bush was joking, while the second said it almost certainly wasn't, pointing out that recorders would be

unlikely to record jokes.

Over 200 bloggers have signed up to an online pledge to publish the details of the memo, should they be passed on. The editors at *Freedom*, of course, concur. Publish and be damned.

Three meetings and a tragedy

Manchester Anarchist Bookfair

The bookfair took place on 3rd December, featuring stalls from groups across the northwest. The event saw a reasonable turn-out of stalls but disappointing attendance numbers.

Jack Ray, who manned a Freedom stall despite problems which led to stocks being stranded in Leeds for the day, said: "It was a fairly good day, mostly the usual suspects though."

St Agnes destroyed

The oldest squatted premises in Britain have been forcibly evicted after a long battle with the council.

The community at St Agnes Place in Kennington, South London, has been forced out after hundreds of riot police launched an assault on 29th November.

One supporter said: "The houses have already been gutted out, all the gas and water pipes are being pulled out. Staircases have all been removed. The architect who carried out an official structural survey of the houses found

them to be in no worse condition than any other Victorian terraces in London. He stated they were robust and easily restorable for not too great a cost."

The St Agnes website is still being updated regularly, see stagnesplace.net/index.php for more information.

NAN in Newcastle

At the end of last month, the Northern Anarchist Network held their latest meeting in the Bridge Hotel, Newcastle upon Tyne. Dave Douglass, a former NUM official, gave an eloquent talk on the importance of workplace struggle from his perspective as a revolutionary Marxist, but "emphatically not Leninist".

During the meeting, CWU shop steward Dave Chapple suggested that activists could get a job in a supermarket, lie low for a year and then get active in the union as a means of re-energising involvement in workplace struggles.

The approaching 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War was also discussed, as Manchester TUC

and the International Brigades are joining together to mark the occasion.

The next NAN meeting will be in the New Year, call Harry on 01422 842 558 for more details.

Climate range

A major demonstration on climate change took place on 2nd December, with several thousand marchers turning out to pressure the government on global pollution.

Common themes were that absolute limits needed to be set on CO2 production, personal consumption has to be reduced, and that more fossil fuels need to be left in the earth. Warnings came that Blair was about to abandon Britain's current policy on global warming in favour of a more pro-Washington stance.

Points of view came from speakers from Rising Tide and Globalise Resistance.

It's claimed that this was the biggest UK demonstration on Climate Change to date.

Executive stress relief

Major children's charity ChildLine has agreed a merger with the NSPCC after financial difficulties came to a head earlier this month.

In October, *Freedom* broke the news that ChildLine was considering major cutbacks at its operations in Newton Abbott, amid questions over the charity's financial stability and high number of directors.

Following the revelations, the charity brought forward its announcement date for major changes, having completed negotiations for the merger.

ChildLine, a free 24-hour service for children to call if they are having problems, will continue as a service within the NSPCC, working alongside the bigger charity's own 24-hour line, which will be aimed at concerned adults.

One source inside the company said: "Department mergers are the main thing people are worried about at the moment. It's not too bad on the face of it. We had 'team' meetings with our individual directors, mine was repeating

what had already been said. However, radically different messages were given to other teams by their directors, so much so that a fair few staff members were close to tears.

"When we were all together we were told 'no compulsory redundancies'. Later that day, people were told 'your job's only guaranteed until May'."

Both Chief Executive Carole Easton and the Director of Personnel will be forced out under the deal, while founder Ester Rantzen will be renamed as 'President of ChildLine'.

In an open letter to staff, Carole Easton said: "The ChildLine trustees [have] agreed formally that ChildLine and the NSPCC will join their services - which will give us both greater financial security and the potential for a much more rapid expansion of our services to meet the needs of children."

The NSPCC's budget is £112m, compared to the £14m budget of ChildLine, a factor which Easton said would provide security for long-term planning.

News

Militant month

The end of last month saw major strikes in Italy and France, reports Rob Ray

The 24th November saw the end of a rail strike which forced the French national railroads monopoly to start negotiations with unions, just a day before one million Italians went on a one day strike over governmental economic policies.

The three largest labour confederations in Italy saw workers come out for their second one-day general strike in a year against Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's wide-ranging cuts in the budget.

Companies, transport and mail services were all heavily affected by the Italian strike, with airplanes grounded across the country. National airline, Alitalia, had to cancel more than 250 flights while it is estimated that a minimum 40% of all rail routes were closed.

Around 100,000 people marched in Milan, while a further 80,000 took to the streets in Rome and Palermo saw 30,000, these being the three largest of over 120 marches in towns and cities.

The strikers have attacked cuts in funds for education, medical care, scientific research and aid to local governments which could reach \$23.4bn.

Pensioners' rights groups also joined the march, expressing their anger at recent adjustments to the state pension which have hurt incomes.

However, the most controversial measure is Berlusconi's plan to repeal a section of Italy's labour law to make it easier for companies to lay off workers, which unions say will threaten hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Every orchestra in Italy played a requiem at 8:30 p.m. to express their solidarity with the strike.

France meanwhile saw the end of a major transport strike which shut down two-thirds of the rail network, having won a pay rise and a repeated promise that French rail network SNCF would not be privatised.

The government estimates it has lost between 20-30m euros during the rail dispute alone.

The government has sold 15% of the national electric company EDF to private investors. The SNCM, the ferry service between Marseilles and Corsica, has been totally privatised, even though the unions involved put up a long and hard struggle. The ferry strike lasted 24 days, and Marseilles, one of the major ports in France, was blockaded for an additional 14 days.

A coalition of unions struck public transportation in Marseilles, both bus and metro, for 46 days, to prevent privatisation from being pushed through. The last union on strike went back to work 25th November after some of the other unions involved had started working. Since the unions signed no agreement, it is possible they can resume the strike. The union leaders say this standoff is a setback.

Some of the more militant unions in the French national railroads (SNCF) called a one-day strike 22nd November over issues such as night work, outsourcing and additional employment.



The Piazza Navona in Rome was filled with thousands of demonstrators on the day of the strike

Railroads in France provide much more intercity transport than in the US. This was the sixth strike on the SNCF in a year.

Only one out of four railroad workers (according to management), or one out of three (according to the unions) struck. While the right-wing media in France

crowded over the decline of union power that these figures on strike participation indicate, the SNCF management has started to seriously negotiate on the union's demands. These repeated one-day strikes have cost management a lot of money.

The government has just come through three weeks of unrest across the *banlieus* in all major urban hubs, and has faced warning strikes by hundreds of thousands of people over low pay, high unemployment and falling living standards.

Latvians overboard!

A dispute over the proposed sacking of 500 Irish ferry workers in favour of low-paid Latvians from eastern Europe has taken a twist after the Latvians in question have said they won't take the jobs.

So far only 70 Latvians have signed up to replace workers for Irish Ferries, who have gone on strike over outsourcing fears and commandeered two ferries in ports in Wales.

The trained sailors, mechanics and floor staff are refusing to work for the £5.67 wage being offered, and sources in Riga, where recruitment is taking place, have said Irish Ferries will have to 'try elsewhere' if they want people to work for that money.

Late last month staff working for Irish Ferries barricaded themselves in their ferries The Isle of Inishmore, which was moored in Pembroke Dock, and in the Ulysses, which was docked in Holyhead, against Irish Ferries' outsourcing plans.

They had been given an ultimatum by the company saying that they could either accept drastically reduced terms

or be replaced by cheaper European labour.

It is alleged that the barricade began after Irish Ferries attempted to smuggle security men into the two ferries, to remove militant unionists on board. However, the men were foiled and engineers barricaded themselves in the engine room, stopping the ferries from moving.

One SIPTU activist, (the union involved in the dispute) said: "It is unfortunate and regrettable that the SIPTU members of Irish Ferries have been left with no other alternative but to resort to this desperate but principled and very admirable and brave stand."

"It must be causing the leadership and bureaucracy of SIPTU an unwanted headache of migraine proportions. The direct action that the Irish Ferries workers have taken has shown that the Industrial Relations Act of 1990 should never have been even contemplated nor considered acceptable by our trade union bureaucracy when it was both

discussed and finally introduced as legislation.

"This dispute has stripped bare the myth of social partnership."

Shore staff at the company have also voted in favour of supporting strike action by a 3 to 1 margin, though this option is to be 'held in reserve' in case the situation continues to deteriorate.

Eight rallies for 9th December have been announced which will take place across Ireland, as *Freedom* goes to press, in support of the striking ferry workers.

Teaching and civil service unions have informed the government that some of their workers may not be able to attend work, as they will be at the rallies.

SIPTU members in Dublin have decided not to handle any Irish Ferries ships for the moment.

Outsourcing has been a growing problem for Ireland in recent years. Manufacturers have seen 40,000 jobs lost over the last three years, mostly to low-cost economies.

CNT fire strike settled

Following a nine day hunger strike, CNT members in the Spanish fire brigade have chosen to accept a deal, but have not ruled out further action.

A CNT spokesman said: "The fireman of Caceres decided to accept the most recent proposal, two more firemen for Plasencia and one in reserve, 260 euro per month more for two years, but without the recategorisation of group D."

The strike, which saw 155 firemen go on hunger strike as part of a major showdown between the firefighters and bosses, was counted as an overall defeat.

During the last union elections the other unions signed a number of agreements. According to the CNT, workers felt betrayed by the position adopted by these unions. These workers went on to form self-organised assemblies.

The CNT was drawn into the dispute following the workers' actions, and immediately launched a solidarity campaign.

Francisco Sources, regional spokesman of the Spanish Socialist Party PSOE, in statements to the mass media, attacked the strikers and refused to lend support.

The CNT said in a statement at the time: "The CNT will not tolerate tolerate the insensitivity shown by the PSOE and the other trade unions."

The dispute follows a much wider ongoing policy of attacks on open-ended collective agreements and open-ended contracts won as the Franco regime collapsed.

These have guaranteed wages will rise with inflation and protect other conditions and rights. Workers can also receive a state pension at the age of 60 after 15 years work and the unemployed can receive up to 42 months benefit.

But these gains have been consistently undermined by mainstream unions, who signed an agreement called the Toledo pact in 1997, allowing the government to introduce more temporary contract work to the country.

Feature

Long in the tooth

Iain MacKay reports on the hypocrisy of blaming public workers for company pension-gouging

Gordon Brown has questioned the deal agreed by the Government to allow public-sector workers to continue to retire at 60. While Downing Street and the Department of Work and Pensions insisted that the deal with the unions would not be unpicked, the unions, who called off a strike when the deal was struck, renewed their threat of industrial action.

Brown raised the pro-business standard addressing a CBI conference in London. He was worried that the recent public sector pensions deal will prove too expensive in the long run. The fear of the CBI is that state pensions cost taxes, and company pensions cost profits.

What is particularly galling about the pensions issue is the hypocrisy. It was staggering to see a CBI spokesman twittering on about "unfairness" on the news or hear the director of the British Chambers of Commerce arguing that "what we are going to end up with here is two nations. That will create real resentment in the workforce."

Employers warn of a 'two-tier' pension system and John Sutherland, the CBI president, opined that the government "must treat all equally and fairly. It cannot expect private sector employees to work until 67 to finance the pensions and early retirement of public sector employees who retire on inflation-proofed final salary pensions at sixty. Society can no longer afford such schemes ... and such inequality is unacceptable."

The CBI made no comments about the existing 'two-tier' pensions system, that exists between bosses and workers.

Apparently, it thinks that this society can afford the millions paid to the bosses. In 2001, it was announced that UK bosses were the best paid in Europe, earning an average of £509,019 a year. Meanwhile, the UK's manufacturing employees have become the lowest paid in the developed world.

Of course the CBI is not arguing that private sector workers should receive the same deal as bosses. Nor even the same one as public sector workers. No, rather than level up, all workers are to have their pension deals levelled down and they are using the issue to divide workers against each other.

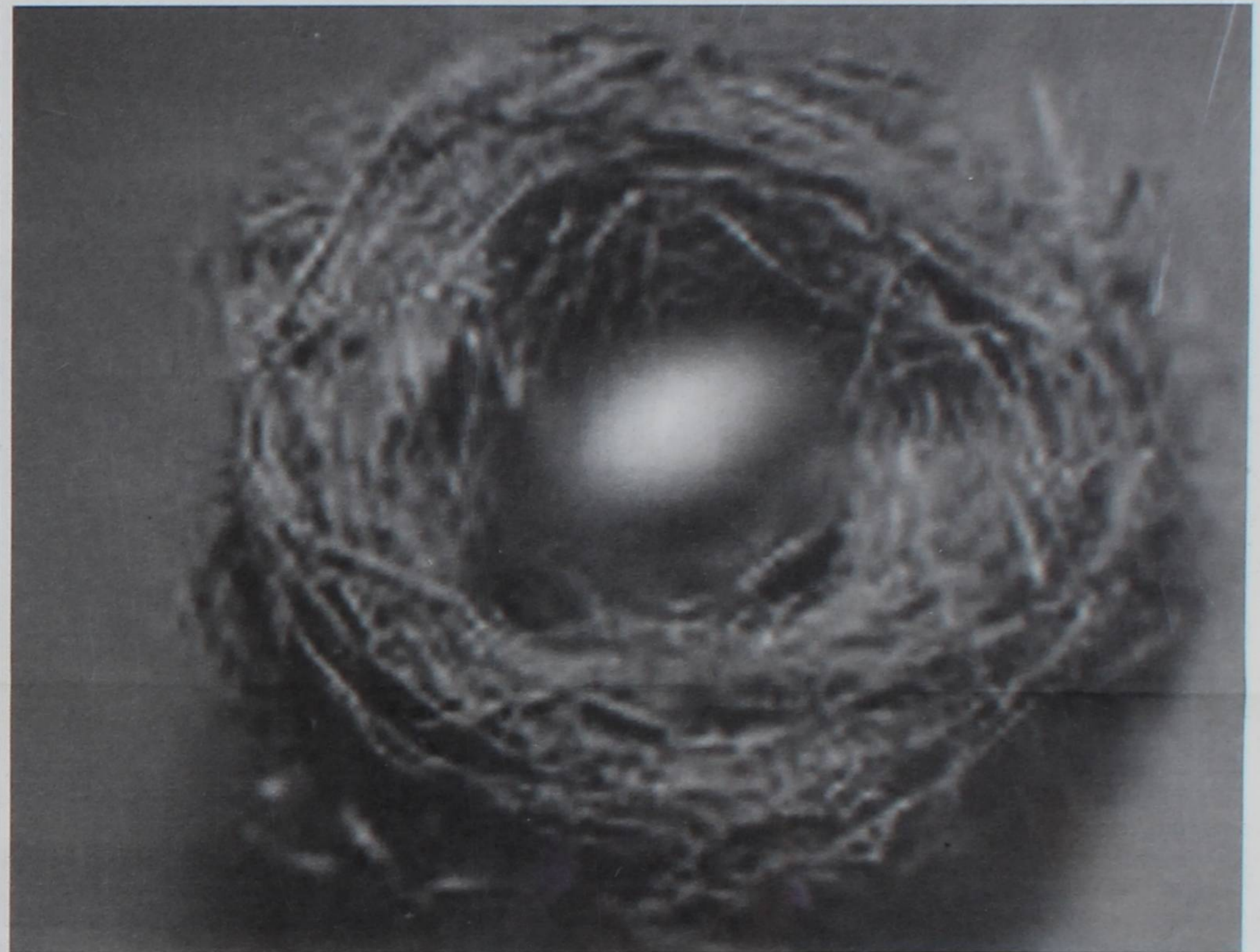
The last thing that the private sector wants is its wage slaves wanting a better deal and so they want them to help bring down their more fortunate fellow workers down to the level the bosses think is best.

Given this, the imposition of a later retirement age in the public sector would strengthen the private sector's hand as it attempts to enforce the same on its workers.

Thus the bosses' real worry about the 'two-tier' system – if public sector jobs have better pensions than private industry will have to provide the same.

In February 2003, it was reported that two-thirds of the workforce were now earning less than the average wage, up from 60% ten years previously. The rising wage inequality was as a result of huge pay deals for executives and directors. Top pay has been increasing faster than for the rest of the workforce.

The CBI president did not rally against other forms of inequality, at the unfair-



ness inherit in 23% of UK wealth being owned by 1% of the population or that the wealthiest 10% own more than half the wealth. Nor did he ponder why 'society' cannot afford to pay for pensions but has enough to invade Iraq, impose ID cards or replace Trident.

Finally, it does seem strange that the CBI, representing as it does the private

sector, should lecture the public sector on this issue. After all, private pension schemes proved to be completely.

Nor should we forget that it was the Tories who advocated these schemes after breaking the link between state pensions with average earnings in favour of the Retail Price Index.

In summary, the so-called pensions

'crisis' is really a battle. It is between the priorities of capital and those of human need. It is a case of what we need to live and not whether the system can afford it. If enough pressure is generated from below, then what can be afforded will change accordingly – as will what people want and the kind of society they wish to live in.

Practical Anarchy

Elèuthera is an anarchist publishing co-operative based in the heavily industrialised city of Milan, in the North of Italy. It is operated by the same group that organises the Centro Studi Libertari / Archivio Giuseppe Pinelli, named after the anarchist railway worker who was thrown from a Milan Police Station window in 1969.

The co-operative developed from the activities of a group of anarchist activists who came together in the 1960s.

In the '70s they become increasingly convinced that the political realm was becoming less and less open to intervention and debate, so decided to concentrate on the social sphere. The group was both militant and articulate, and was able to engage with wider intellectual currents beyond the anarchist movement.

Elèuthera grew out of a need to promote anarchist ideas outside the ghetto of the anarchist movement so that

anarchist ideas would start to circulate in the wider culture of Italian society.

Its members were convinced that there was a widespread interest in anarchism and they wanted to find a way to put these ideas into circulation for serious debate.

From that starting point they took a calculated decision that it was necessary to get anarchist books into the general bookshops rather than just see them circulated within anarchist circles.

When they started Elèuthera in the late 1980s and early '90s it was comparatively easy to gain access to commercial distribution networks, but it has gradually become more and more difficult as the big publishers have attempted to squeeze smaller publishers out of business through their ability to offer larger discounts and well-financed sales promotion.

Consequently the Elèuthera co-operative has to devote an increasing amount of

time and energy to distribution. This has limited the level of other activity at the Pinelli Centre.

Nevertheless, Elèuthera has managed to establish a distinctive identity within Italian publishing. Their books are frequently recommended on course reading lists and attract the interest of the mainstream media.

Years of hard work, determination and effort have paid off. The two original members of the co-operative have increased to seven and there are now more than 150 titles in the Elèuthera catalogue, including works by Noam Chomsky, Murray Bookchin, Kirkpatrick Sale, Jacques Ellul and Colin Ward.

Recent books include Italian translations of Tim Jordan's *Direct Action*, Sean Sheehan's *Anarchism* and Colin Ward's *Water*.

Other new titles include a book on the Zapatista rebellion, and Carlos

Amorin's *The Dirty War Against Children* – the story of Sara Mendez, a young Uruguayan anarchist living clandestinely in Buenos Aires, with her young son Simon.

Captured by the military she spent five years in prison. When she was eventually released in 1981 Simon was, like many other children, officially 'disappeared' and forced to live under a new identity.

The most popular books tends to be on architecture and urbanism, and the application of anarchist ideas to social organisation – the kind of topics pioneered by Colin Ward in Britain – books which are not overtly anarchist, but look at anarchist ideas in action. One paradox that they have not been able to resolve is that whereas big publishers are able to sell books on anarchism in large quantities, the anarchist movement finds that its books on anarchism sell in only limited numbers,

usually within the anarchist milieu.

Elèuthera's books that speak to a readership about applying anarchist ideas to everyday life now and in the future sell very well. Subjects range from art and literature to sustainable cities, technology, surveillance, and from social space to libertarian education.

Average print runs are often quite small – only 1,500 copies, but their best-selling title, by the French sociologist Marc Augé, has sold more than 20,000 copies.

Augé has identified a space within capitalism that he defines as 'no space' – impersonal, soulless places such motorways, airports, shopping malls, around which capitalism is increasingly organised and within which people lose their identity and their concept of space.

People are only connected to these spaces in a uniform and bureaucratic

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 66 Number 24

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

Ah here at last, end of the road for the year 2005 of a meaningless Christian calendar, and a long cycle it has been.

It seems to have been a year of some growth for the anarchists, though as always, conjecture, sniping, disputed numbers and bragging make this a difficult conclusion to prove.

We have certainly seen no major victories, not in the 'tearing down' of ideological fences or in our direct actions. We didn't shut down G8, weapons continue to be produced using our money, and the laws used to contain us grow ever more treacherous to navigate. Despite our best efforts to inform, provoke and explain, we remain as kittens mewling next to the roar of the factory.

But our numbers have multiplied, and more resources – with both physical social areas and online communities taking advantage of the incredible technologies that we now have – are available.

There is cause, we think, for optimism, as useful and dedicated people are making their presence felt everywhere. 2006, perhaps, could be even more mixed.

A merry Christmas, and a happy New Year to you all, and may the festivities usher in some sense to these crazed times.

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 14th January 2006 and the last day to get copy to us (see contact details above) will be Friday 7th January.

Incapacity

Iain MacKay's piece (Labour's great incapacities, Freedom 29th October) betrays some confusion regarding the condition of many people on Incapacity Benefit (IB). Using the terms Incapacity, invalidity and disability interchangeably doesn't help.

In trying to make his case that Labour are fudging the true unemployment lines by manipulating statistics, he first states that people on IB are "ill", then says "to get a real idea of unemployment, you need to count both registered unemployed and those claiming invalidity (sic)."

This seems to mean that either Labour are themselves hiding unemployment by keeping people on IB – something he accuses the Conservatives of, or that most claimants are using their claims as a ploy.

Given the actions of the government since 1997, and more recent statements by ministers, the former is a non-starter. This leaves only the latter conclusion, of which Labour ministers would, no doubt (if only in private) be happy to endorse; namely that most claimants are workshy and in need of a kick up the arse.

By way of clarification, the figure of 2.7 million claimants has in the recent past been challenged by the head of the Disability Alliance as misleading, since it is one thing to claim and another to have your claim accepted, or later disallowed.

More importantly, I understand that the largest single stated reason for incapacity is mental ill-health (something people, in general, are reluctant to admit to), with depression/anxiety to the fore.

Anyone close to the fields of counselling or psychotherapy, or familiar with GP's patient lists, will be aware of the amount of emotional disturbance that exists even among the working population.

It is also becoming clear that a significant level of sub-clinical distress is becoming normative for a considerable proportion of the populace as a whole, across the generation bands.

It would be unsurprising if, at any given time, a number of those sufferers who find their condition unsupported while still engaged in paid work were to stage a therapeutic withdrawal from activity the conditions of which may be implicated in their distress.

In order to understand Incapacity benefit levels, you don't need statistic-wonk theories about figure manipulation. You only need to look at the psychosocial realities of life under late market capitalism, in a society with no coherent narrative of what it is, what it wants, or what is possible.

Incidentally, under the Conservative government it was never my experience (in an area of relatively high unemployment, at the time) that people were offered the 'easy option', so to speak, of incapacity rather than unemployment benefit. Would that it had been so.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Many of your subscriptions are due for renewal at this time of year, and it would save a lot of extra work if you could renew early. To find out if this means you, this issue is volume 66, number 24, so if the address label has the number 6624 above your name it means your sub runs out with this issue and is due for renewal. If the number is 6701 then it runs out next issue, and so on. Many thanks in anticipation.

Instead I and others were threatened with loss of benefits for crimes such as not attending job interview sessions – even though we had not been offered an interview. It was only when my depression reached a level which made impossible for me to continue trying to jump through their hoops, that a more understanding 'adviser' told me to see my GP, something I had been trying to avoid, rather than embrace.

I'm sure that Iain MacKay meant well, but, in trying to find new ways to attack the government, we should beware of inadvertently helping them to defame those already in difficulty.

Frederick Clancey

Pension scraps

Over the last week, more divisive misrepresentations from the government have appeared regarding public sector pensions.

They have attacked the '85' rule which they wish to see abolished. The rule states that where an employee's age plus his/her years of service is equal to, or greater than 85, then they are eligible to retire. The example given, by the government, is that of a person aged 60 with 25 years service retiring on full pension.

This is not valid. A person may be able to apply to retire where the 85 rule is complied with, but unless a cost saving can be made by the employer, i.e. their post will be deleted on retirement, they will not be granted leave to retire.

Additionally their level of pension will be restricted to be commensurate with their number of years service, i.e. not a full pension. I personally know of people who are over 60 and who have more than 40 years of service who have been refused permission to retire, even though each further year of service does not contribute to any further enhancement of their own pension entitlement.

Dave

Capitalism at work

If some are to be believed, the American economy is going from strength to strength. Bouncing back from economic recession, growth is strong. Yet if the economy is doing well, actual Americans are not. Worker's wages are may have been rising in nominal terms, but in real terms they are falling behind due to rising inflation.

Wages for the most recent quarter were 2.3 percent lower, after inflation, than workers received a year before. The average pay for an hour's work has less purchasing power than it had four years ago – when the current business cycle began.

This comes as no real surprise, as weak wage growth has marked the US economy for decades. However, the trend has worsened under Bush. In the last year alone, one million people have been added to the 36 million Americans living in poverty. The most favourable government surveys show real pay for an hour's work rising by less than one percent a year between 1979 and 2003.

This is not to say that US workers are not productive. Productivity has grown steadily in the US but wages have not.

According to capitalist economics, the wage is dependent on the contribution of labour to production. Rising productivity, in other words, should be matched by rising wages. Yet since the late 1970s, wage growth has lagged behind fast-

rising US productivity.

The difference between productivity and wage increases is important as this is where fatter profits are made. Productivity, in bourgeois economic theory, sets the limit to wage increases. Sustained increases in wages in excess of productivity growth would result in a profit squeeze or, perhaps, inflation (as bosses try to recoup profits by raising prices). This is, of course, considered a bad thing.

Yet there is no reason why wages cannot lag behind productivity growth, particularly if workers are weak and unorganised. This is precisely what has been happening in America.

Capitalist economists argue that things can get better only with more of the same kind of policies that have been implemented for the past 25 years. Why they should now suddenly improve living conditions is not explained.

Also suggested is that workers gain an education to pave the way for individuals to boost their earnings in higher levels. Yet such an increase in supply for skilled work, while rational on an individual basis, is self-defeating collectively as it will drive down wages generally.

What is significant over the last quarter of a century is the weakening of worker bargaining power. The decline of union membership is the most noticeable sign of this, along with a reduced level of collective struggle.

Both have had a significant dampening effect on wages and rising inequality as unionised jobs and/or militant workers boost wages generally as other industries have to compete and so have to provide better pay and conditions.

Simply put, working conditions and pay can only be improved when workers organise themselves to improve them. Yet continually having to fight for a share in the wealth you create but do not own is hardly the best alternative to stagnating wages and working conditions.

This is why anarchists argue that workers should organise not only to improvements under capitalism but also to end that system once and for all.

Anon

Elèuthera

page 5
manner and creative social life is not possible within them.

In addition to Elèuthera's publishing activities the co-operative based around the Pinelli Centre also produce a popular topical monthly magazine *A Revista anarchica*, which is sold throughout Italy (even in many commercial newsagents as well as left-wing bookshops) and *Libertaria*, a magazine with longer more reflective, analytical articles.

There is also a regular bulletin, which narrates a 'living anarchism', related to the lives of ordinary anarchists, so that it features biographies of ordinary activists, rather than the great names of anarchism.

In particular they have been keen to publicise the activities of the anarchist resistance to Italian fascism, which has largely been written-out of the 'official' histories.

So far 23 issues of the bulletin have been published, and full pdf versions are available online.

Martyn Everett

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Work cancers

page 1

while the state and industry has lied and covered up the truth – all the time pretending that there is a safe level of exposure.

"The bottom line is that there isn't a safe level, which is why some countries are phasing out the more dangerous pollutants and resorting to cleaner technologies.

"Workers have paid with their lives, mothers have miscarried and given birth to stillborn babies, children have suffered unimaginable illnesses, and chemically sensitive people have been treated like lepers – all this to protect the profits of the corporates which produce these poisons.

"It's over now, their lies and their cover-ups have been revealed and they can no longer hide behind their dishonest and faulty science. It's also time to pay up and more importantly rid the workplace and the industrial zones of these quiet killers."

Rob Ray

Labour nukes

page 1

In the Mori poll, which was widely reported as a victory for the government, the question was asked:

"To what extent do you support or oppose the government's current policy of keeping open the option to build new nuclear power stations in the future?" to which 39% were actively in favour and 28% didn't have an opinion.

But a second question reflecting the government's likely policy, said "To what extent would you support or oppose the building of new nuclear power stations in Britain to increase the proportion of nuclear energy that we use?" This saw 29% actively in favour, with only 7% strongly so.

FREEDOM

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Quiz answers

- The oil from a drought resistant tree of the Moroccan desert, which fills many ecological niches as well as providing oil for cosmetic and culinary uses. Its tree is also much prized by goats.
- Donald Duck. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart showed how the comics were aimed at reproducing an American world view in 'How to Read Donald Duck'.
- On the political compass (www.politicalcompass.org) it's the only place to be!
- The Federation of Yiddish-language Anarchist Groups of Great Britain and Paris.

REVIEW

Richard Alexander believes Chomsky on Anarchism is challenging, and an excellent insight into the famous academic's views

This book is a collection of essays by and interviews on anarchism with the man who has recently been voted the most popular intellectual in the world, (not that he was very impressed by that).

The bulk of the items have been published elsewhere but some are presented here for the first time.

Chomsky himself does not consider himself an anarchist theoretician (someone who creates theories about anarchism) but rather an intellectual who is an anarchist and who is prepared to give his views on subjects from an anarchist perspective.

Chomsky makes it clear that he stands very much in the tradition of the classical anarchists, in particular those that emphasised collective (as opposed to individualist) solutions to problems.

He is refreshingly non-sectarian, being generally supportive not only of both the anarcho-communist and anarcho-syndicalist strands of anarchism but also the more libertarian elements of Marxism, especially council communism. Chomsky takes a deliberately pluralistic position as he considers the question of the best forms of struggle and the reconstitution of society to be open questions, there being no long-term successful anarchist societies to draw from, and as the situation is different in various places and economies, it is unlikely that any single solution can be applied to all situations.

Chomsky is also a classical anarchist inasmuch as he sees his anarchism as standing at the meeting point of the two main liberatory tendencies from the European Enlightenment: liberalism and socialism. Indeed he makes many references to figures such as von Humboldt, Kant and Schelling, alongside the American democratic tradition.

Chomsky also holds a position on 'human nature' which states that there are certain elements to it, which are invariant (and therefore universal) which puts him in opposition to those who consider human nature to be

'tabula rasa'. His views on human nature are also crucial to his project of trying to understand human linguistics, which, in return – because it based on laws of regularity – allows for the freedom to create.

One of the most interesting essays in this book is his well-known discussion of liberal scholarship in the matter of the Spanish Civil War, which first appeared in his book *American Power and the New Mandarins*.

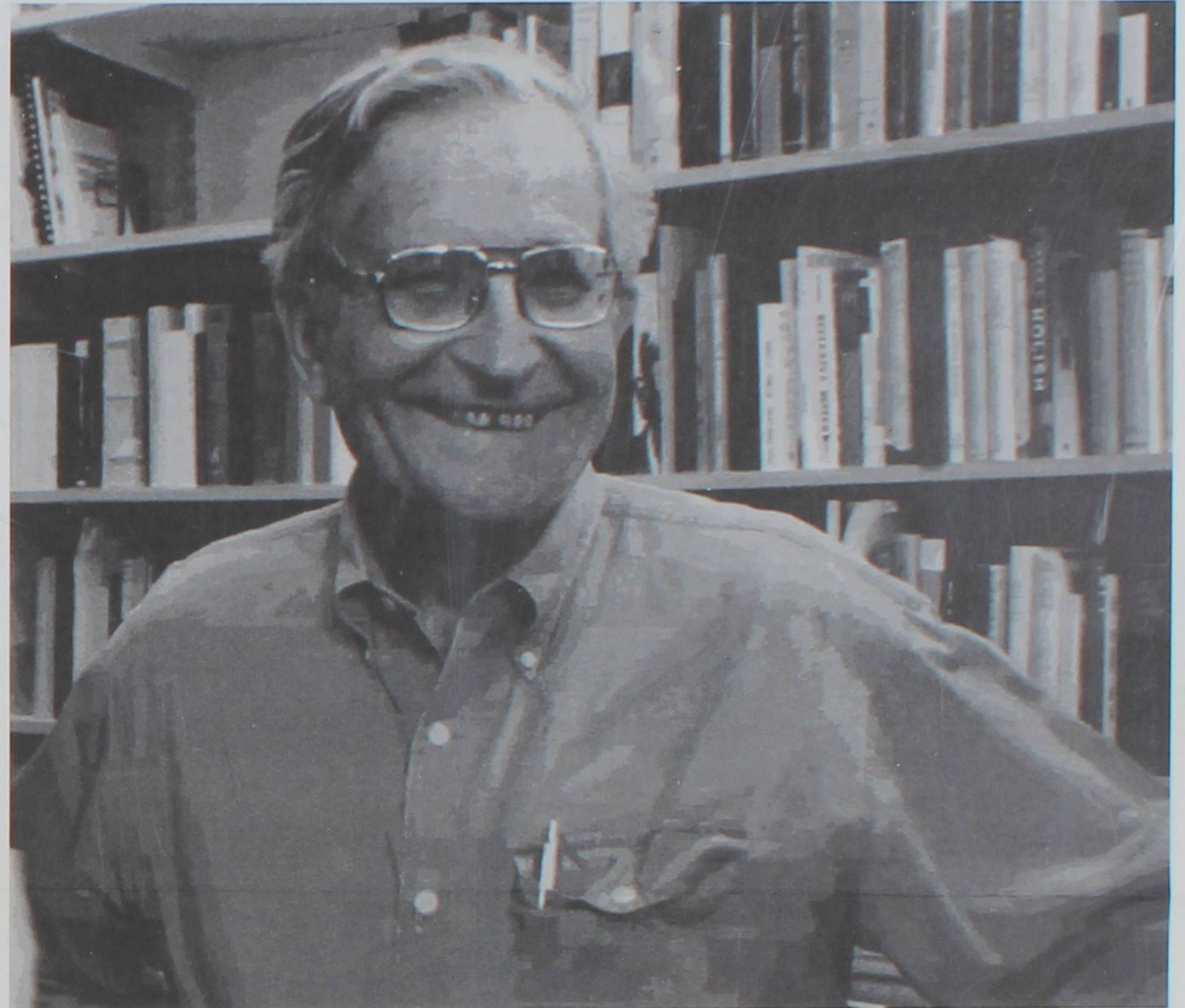
Chomsky shows up the ideological bias in mainstream liberal scholarship, which renders it incapable of comprehending the nature of the anarchist inspired resistance to the military coup and the associated social revolution. However, the essay is now nearly 40 years old and there has been a huge amount of writing on the topic published since then. One looks forward to a similar essay looking at more recent writings.

Alongside the more familiar pieces there, those such as a talk he delivered at the Glasgow Conference on Self-Determination and Power in 1990 which hasn't been published before, which initially situates his ideas on freedom within a specifically Scottish framework which makes for interesting reading.

He also approvingly quotes from Bertrand Russell – well you would too if he said that anarchism is "the ultimate ideal to which society should approximate". Chomsky also goes into one of his favourite riffs on the subject of the manufacture of consent and the evils of the foreign policy of the government of the United States of America.

No change there then.

Indeed one can argue that Chomsky has been consistent in his political stance since the 1960s, which is not to say never has anything original to say in later essays and interviews. But equally there is inevitably a fair bit of repetition involved when reprinting eleven items spread over nearly 40 years. One aspect of Chomsky's 'anarchism' has given rise to some



debate over the years and that is his pragmatism, which at times seems to be little different than a form of radical liberalism.

For example he votes in local and national elections, if he considers his vote may make a difference – to keep out an overtly reactionary candidate or to vote in local referenda on important issues. Equally there is advocacy of strengthening the state in certain areas if this can help build community-based services in opposition to more privatised profit based ones.

Whilst these ideas may seem heretical to more orthodox revolutionary

anarchists, they can also be seen as the exercise of responsible citizenship in the 'limited and deficient forms currently allowed.

So should you spend your hard-earned cash on this book? Well, AK Press have done another excellent production effort on it, and you won't find a better collection of Chomsky's writings on anarchism anywhere else.

The price seems reasonable for the type of book and so if you haven't already got most of the essays in your existing collection of Chomsky's books then I'd recommend buying this one.

However, be aware, you won't be

getting much that is particularly original in the way of anarchist theory or history, and the level of writing is way beyond 'Anarchism for Dummies'.

What you do get are a series of essays and interviews, which, hopefully, will challenge and inform and entertain (Chomsky has a very dry wit). Perhaps the only criticism I could make is that the book would be improved by a name and subject index.

Recommended if you don't already have the main essays.

Chomsky on Anarchism by Noam Chomsky, published by AK Press, £11, is available from Freedom Press.

BOOKS

Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap

by Eithne Quinn
Columbia University Press, £15

This superb book presents a fascinating and comprehensive account of the development and mainstreaming of what came to be called gangsta rap.

Showing how and why the political engagement of preceding American civil rights, Black Power and soul/funk generations shifted towards a disillusioned and apparently individualistic culture glorifying drugs, violence and misogyny.

The author convincingly shows how, from its origins in the urban blight of 1980s California, the class-conscious Crips and Bloods

LA gang-related realism of NWA, Eazy-E, Ice Cube and Dr Dre cross-fertilised with African and blues lyrical traditions of trickster, badman and pimp (represented for example by Ice-T, the Geto Boys and Tupac Shakur) – challenging for commercial supremacy hip-hop subgenres such as the party pop of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, rock crossovers like Run DMC and the Beastie Boys, and the more explicitly politically conscious Black nationalist afrocentricity of Public Enemy, A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul.

Integrated into the historical texture is the parallel emergence of new forms of industrial structure and organisation prompted by the entrepreneurial guerrilla tactics of independent record labels grass-rooted in neighbourhood networks of enthusiasts and artists,

which succeeded in maintaining significant degrees of autonomy while simultaneously circumventing all corporate and state offensives to silence and/or recuperate them.

This puts into context more recent developments in the worldwide commercial takeover of MTV-style 'hip-pop', such as ghetto fabulous bling-bling aspiration (Puff Daddy/P. Diddy, Jay-Z, etc) and the grotesquely exploitative nihilism of 50 Cent *et al* and the proliferation of wannabe studio gangsters. However, Quinn's subtle and insightful analysis also consistently highlights the persistent presence of radical impulses and voices in the music and lyrics which sensationalist headlines, racism and pro-censorship coalitions conveniently ignore.

Of course, an academic study of the

production of cultural commodities and their intrinsic qualities can only speculate on how the music resonates with its audiences' lives in becoming popular, and Quinn resorts to concepts of subcultural superiority rather than social class in understanding rap's appeal.

This rather undercuts her implication throughout that hip-hop has gained and retained the affiliation of lower-class youth worldwide for over twenty years precisely by renouncing and travestyng both conformism to respectable social hypocrisy and the packaged taste sold to elitist niche markets by multinationals.

Major record labels are obviously primarily concerned with pandering to the pocket money of middle-class white kids seduced by stereotypical racialised

exoticism, and the profitability of the results dovetails nicely with the requirements of governments and sundry pressure groups for moral panics and scapegoats.

But the book rightly emphasises that, to those at the bottom of the heap, the ramifications of global postindustrial – as well as local dog-eat-dog – barbarisms are far closer to lived reality than glossy fantasy.

So rap's narratives represent postmodern folk tales of these benighted times – with all the violent exaggeration, ambivalence, desperation, potential and yearning this implies – for millions in the ghettos, estates, shanty towns and projects of every continent; and in the UK just as much as the US.

Tom Jennings

A Sideways Look

One of the reasons you find this little column on the back page, along with Wildcat and the quiz, is that it is 'comment'. Freedom allots its more prestigious front and centre pages to news and analysis. Quite rightly so, too. What I try to do with this column is to explore everyday things with a mix of comment, analysis and, on rare occasions, humour.

The role of comment is one that has grown in newspapers in the mainstream media in the last decade or two, as well as being a disproportionate amount of what's on the internet. Things like blogs, which are really just ongoing comment pages, are an attempt to democratise comment. All too often, though, they fall prey to the same problems that afflict sites like indymedia - easy acceptance of conspiracy theories, long rants and lack of quality control.

What happens with this column is that someone else (the editors) take a look - not just checking spelling, but making sure that I've not written a load of unsubstantiated rubbish, or just repeated myself. This in itself is a good discipline for the writer.

Some in our movement express concern that signing articles, even as a pseudonym, creates a cult of personality. While I think they have a point (and we don't have to delve too far into this paper's history to find evidence) I can't see me being offered any deals from the mainstream press. Far from it. I don't think any explicitly anarchist writer has been paid for their opinions for at least twenty years. It's worth noting that some people are paid for what are basically their opinions, though. Observer columnist Nick Cohen recently remarked that many star columnists earn more than the Prime Minister. No wonder he's so into property dealing!

But why is it that only some people get to air their opinions in mass circulation papers? Why not you or me? The answer isn't hard to fathom - we've got the wrong opinions (unless of course, you're the person paid by MI5 to read this, in which case you might not). Even publications lower down the pecking order will happily publish people who are shocking or newsworthy, but wouldn't touch someone who might actually have a point that's outside mainstream comment. London listings magazine Time Out even went so far as to employ Phil Howard, the Christian bigot who shouts through a megaphone at Oxford Circus and outside the Natural History Museum. He didn't last long, mainly because every comment was the same - usually involving Liverpool FC and Jesus saving, though not necessarily in the same match. I presume he's gone back to shouting at children. At the

same time, Time Out's coverage of grassroots campaigns and politics has dwindled while it chases after people who can afford to buy homes in Islington or the Borough. And this from a magazine which came from the sixties counter-culture and offered good coverage of the Angry Brigade and Persons Unknown trials.

Paid or not, comment is important. It can lighten news and create discussion. Maybe it's time you aired your opinions?

Svartfrosk

Blast from the Past

Taken from Freedom 5th December 1981:

The nuclear disarmament movement is reformist and constitutionalist rather than revolutionary and libertarian. All anarchists will find this criticism valid, but many of them will disagree with the conclusion that they should therefore ignore or even oppose the campaign.

On the contrary, such anarchists will continue to support the campaign for nuclear disarmament in the same way and for the same reason that they support other partial campaigns for various aspects of liberty and equality. It shouldn't be necessary to say why, but in view of what has already been said perhaps it is.

Briefly, if we think there is more chance of getting something than everything, we think there is more point getting something than nothing. The present campaign will not lead to revolution and will not remove the causes of nuclear weapons (or slavery or child labour or persecution of Jews or any other social or political evil), and if nuclear weapons are dismantled it will be done by nation states.

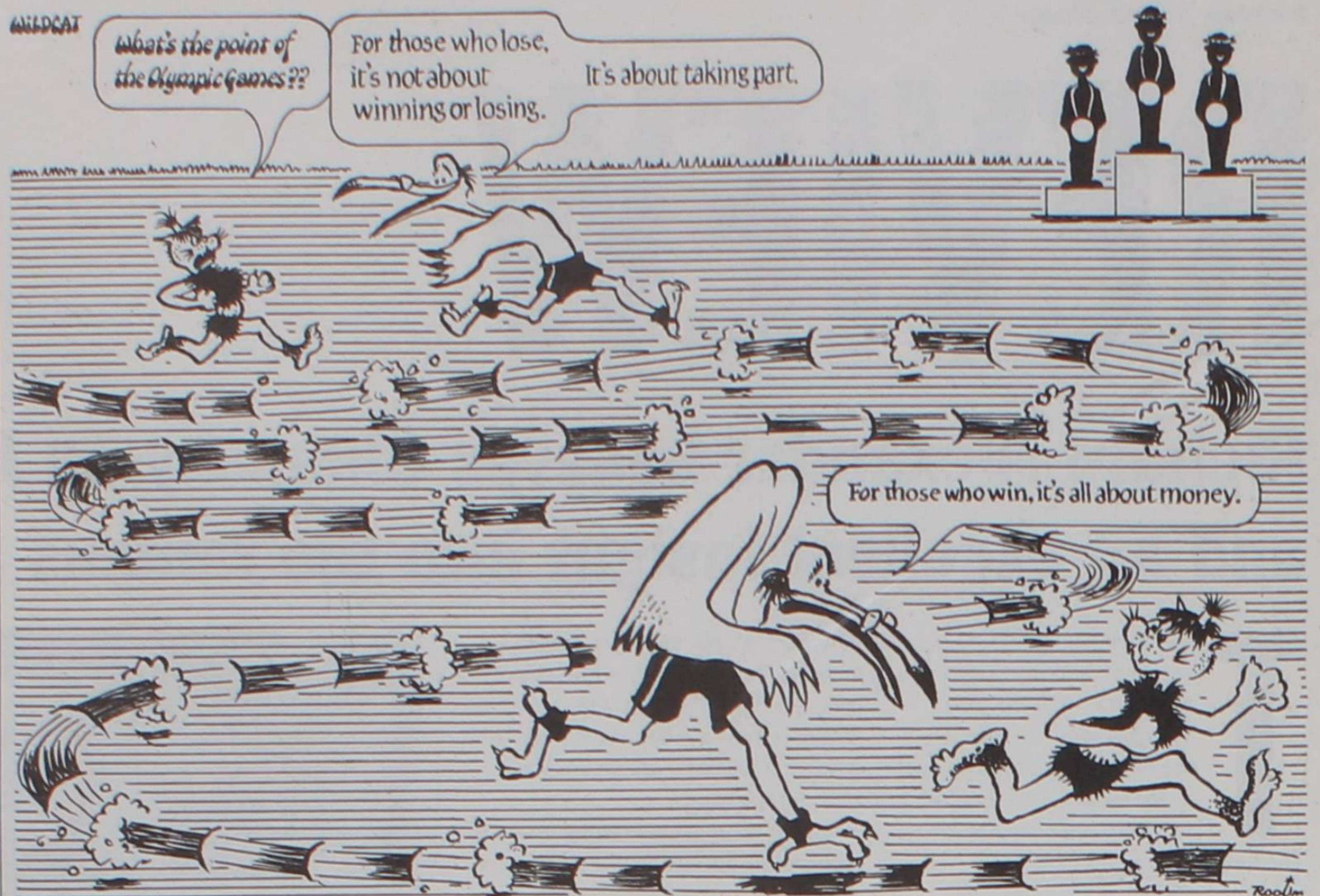
However, we are faced not with a simple choice between two extreme alternatives - doing nothing effective about the present situation, or working for a libertarian socialist revolution which will solve the present situation - but with a complex choice between a whole series of intermediate alternatives.

One of these alternatives is for us to take part in the nuclear disarmament movement, not trying to take it over to pull it apart, but trying to push it as far possible in a revolutionary and libertarian direction.

The quiz

1. What is argan oil?
2. What Disney comic prompted an anti-imperialist guide in Chile in 1971?
3. Where might you be south west of Gandhi?
4. Which anarchist movement was founded, perhaps a little ironically, at a conference over Christmas Day and 26th December in 1902?

Answers on page 6



Imagine If...

Santa's old bones creaked. He'd been at this gig a long time, since he was first signed up (some said sold out, but they were just jealous) to full-time service for the Coca Cola company in the 1930s.

They'd given him a makeover and told him "you're our best asset, you'll have a job for life with us." He hadn't realised how literally they'd meant it.

As a fictional character, he'd never been allowed in the unions (exclusivist bastards), and had never received any retirement package but that had been okay, he'd thought that his loyalty to the company would see him rewarded later.

But as it turned out, it had just meant they would keep using him for as long as they could - and considering he was a cartoon, that was a long time, longer even than old Mickey.

The two of them were sat in a couple of rocking chairs, taking their medication to try and ease the arthritis which always hit hardest when it was snowing. Through his drug-filled haze, Santa remarked: "These real people don't know how bad it is when you can't fight back."

Mickey nodded "Damn right! Why me and Donald were saying this just the other day, don't know they're born those real people. My copyright was supposed to run out decades ago but will they give me a goddamn break? Nooo, they just keep raising my retirement age. Smile for the public Mickey! Pah!" Mickey spat on the floor.

Santa nodded glumly "If only there was a revolution". Mickey agreed.



Listings

until 16th January Art Not Oil exhibition at The Bongo Club, 37 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh (thebongoclub.co.uk or 0131 558 7604) see artnotoil.org.uk or nationalpetroleumgallery.org.uk

until 23rd December Heresy, a seasonal open-access art exhibition at Selfishes, 65 Essex Road, London N1, 2pm to 9pm, details from 07092 805720 or 07050 614804

5th January Ken Campbell impro show at the Performance Club, Inn on the Green, 3 Thorpe Street, London W10, see newagenda.demon.co.uk or call 020 8670 1232

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

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

12th January Right to work march for asylum seekers living in Scotland, meet 10am at YMCA, Petershill Drive, Glasgow, to march to George Square for rally, contact scottish-infosarco@excite.com

14th January Public meeting to help organise the Climate Camp which will be in the north of England in late summer, 11am to 6pm at Bridge 5 Mill, 22a Beswick Street, Manchester, email climatecamp@yahoo.co.uk or see bridge-5.org/map.htm

14th January Abergavenny Women in Black Silent Vigil from 11am until noon at Red Square (opposite Ottakers), Abergavenny, please wear black, contact 01873 55760 or katrinagass@yahoo.co.uk

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
28th January South West Peace Conference: An End To Nuclear Fission? help to highlight the nuclear industry and its damaging effects, at Upper Guildhall in Plymouth from 9am to 7pm, for info contact 07904934142 or mark@scantlebury8205.freemove.co.uk
8th February Save council housing, mass lobby and rally from 12 noon at Central Hall, Westminster, call 020 7987 9989 or see defendcouncilhousing.org.uk
12th February ZineFest, a festival of zines, anti-corporate artwork, and diy publications at Basement Bookshop, 24 Lever Street, Manchester, for info email manchesterzines@riseup.net



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FREEDOM fortnightly ISSN 0016 0504