

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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## MENTALLY ILL ABANDONED

As cuts to the National Health Service deepen, the mentally ill are being left to fend for themselves in what could be a crisis much worse than Margaret Thatcher's botched Care in the Community scheme.\*

Reports are rampant that health authorities are making savage cuts to their psychiatric services, while a review of the NHS suggests that psychiatric care has never been more crucial to British society, especially to the over-65s.

The review, a collaboration between the Healthcare Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection and the Audit Commission, sought "to assess the progress of the NHS and local authorities in meeting the standards set out" in the National Service Framework for Older People.

It makes for grim reading. With one in six of Britain's population over 65, the proportion of mentally ill, believed to be one in five of the adult population, are facing a difficult future.

Living Well in Later Life, which was compiled with data from ten communities, reveals that those over 65 with mental health problems will not be living well. As Britain's population continues to age – by 2051 a quarter of the population will be over 65 – services for the mentally ill are diminishing.

In this environment, the three commissions fear for over-65s with mental illness. "There are poorer and less integrated services for older people with mental health needs compared to

those people with mental health needs aged under 65," they state in the review.

"The out-of-hours services for psychiatric advice and crisis management for older people were much less developed, and older people who had made the transition between these services when they reached age 65 said there were noticeable differences such as poorer quality, fewer services and less support."

The commissions insist that "all aspects of mental health services for older people need to improve" and that "person-centred care" be available to everywhere, irrespective of their age. There has to be, the commissions state, a "a whole systems approach to the commissioning of integrated mental health services for older people".

But the NHS is in trouble, and these recommendations may well fall on deaf ears. Despite access to a budget of £92 billion, it has a deficit of £800m. Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Health, insists the workers are to blame for rising costs. New pay deals for nurses, porters, care assistants, doctors and others are, she said, "costing rather more than anticipated".

"The fallout is hitting the mentally ill," said one carer. "They are being abandoned, it's as simple as that."

Philip, an Irishman who came to England several years ago because the psychiatric care is better than in his homeland, said: "It's not as good as it was."



Hundreds of striking public sector workers march through Nottingham city centre during the day of action over proposed pensions changes on Tuesday 28th April 2006. For a full roundup of what happened in the pensions strike in other cities around the UK, see page 3.

Richard Cross

\* Care in the Community: In the mid 1980s the Thatcher government started a process known as Care in the Community. Her government were told by a report that people in the Victorian-style asylums were a disgrace to modern, civilised society and could be cared for in the community through various

domiciliary supports. The placing of hopelessly disturbed people in a society they could not cope with started in earnest. The safety net for these people was cut away. By the mid-1990s ex-psychiatric patients had swollen the homeless figures. Suicides, and murder by disturbed, dangerous people started to appear

on the inside pages of the national media. When Jonathan Zito, a nice white middle class man, was killed by large black Christopher Clunis on the London Underground the scheme started to get a bad PR profile. Care in the Community was shut down.

Robert Allen

## ELECTRICIANS 'BLACKLIST'

A former top director for a major electrical contractor has come forward with over a thousand names he claims were gathered for four of Britain's biggest constructors to blacklist electricians from their sites.

Alan Wainwright, a former director at Haden Young, has set up a blog publishing 1,087 electricians' names, along with the first two letters of what appear to be their national insurance details.

Wainwright's move has come as part of a constructive dismissal claim against his former employers, and he is asking for employees on the blacklist to contact him if they have been affected.

At least five companies are directly implicated if the list is proven accurate:

Haden Young, fellow Balfour Beattie subsidiary Balfour Kilpatrick, Carillion Plc, Crown House Engineering and Drake and Scull Engineering are all named in Wainwright's blog.

The existence of such a list has been rumoured for some time, as several major disputes in recent years have seen unionists and militants subsequently unable to find work in the booming industry.

Controversy over the lists has raged in electricians' circles however, with anomalies casting doubt on the truth of the publication. One source close to electricians in Manchester said: "He [Wainwright] has been in a very senior position in the company. He claims he was fired for expressing qualms about the blacklist. On the Jubilee Line extension, it was a big thing in the '90s, and has a lot of names on it, but at one meeting it was pointed out that 15 people on that list are scabs. It could be that it's not a proper blacklist, or could be just incompetence."

One list however has strong parallels to a major industrial tribunal case brought

against pharmaceutical giant Pfizer by electrical workers. The company, which famously produces the drug Viagra, was taken to task by 140 workers, 80 of whom subsequently took them to tribunal.

The 'Pfizer' list, which features over 200 names, has all 80 of the workers' names on it, making it highly plausible that the list is genuine.

Wainwright brought out three lists based on events at troubled projects. Two, regarding the Royal Opera House and Pfizer projects during and before 2000, were allegedly compiled by Balfour Kirkpatrick and passed to Drake and Scull Engineering. The third and longest list referred to the Jubilee Line extension project, circulated in August of that year, and is the longest with over 550 names.

Wainwright, who claims to have helped run the list during his employment, said in his blog: "This is based on procedures I have undertaken in the workplace in previous roles and information that has come to my direct attention."

See [blacklistedelectricians.blogspot.com](http://blacklistedelectricians.blogspot.com) for the full list and Wainwright's explanations.

## LA LUTTE CONTINUE

Unrest over the 'First Employment Law' in France has intensified with up to three million marching across the country in mass demonstrations on 26th March, maintaining momentum with further blockades and occupations of schools, universities, roads, railways, train stations, etc., in the following days. The government is still determined to press ahead with the legislation, with the Constitutional Council approving the laws and President Jacques Chirac promising to sign a slightly modified version.

Strikes also brought much of the public transport system to a halt during the official day of mobilisation on 26th March. The five largest trade unions have planned a further one-day mobilisation for 4th April. Opposition to the reforms is reported to be growing, with 83% of the French public wanting the laws suspended, 62% 'in solidarity' with the protesters and De Villepin's popularity plummeting.

Clashes with police over the past few weeks have become a regular occurrence. Following the largest national demonstrations CRS riot police clashed with protest-

ers in Paris, Rennes, Dijon, Toulouse, Lille, Grenoble, Vannes and Brest. Eyewitnesses have testified to the brutality of police tactics and the use of plain-clothes snatch squads. Cyril Ferez of the SUD-PTT union is still a coma following alleged police violence and neglect.

High school and university students have continued the protests following the national demonstration, with 69 universities and more than a 1,000 high schools affected by anti-CPE protests. Blockades have been organised through general assemblies of students. On 30th March more than 2,000 invaded the Gare de Lyon train station. Federations of these general assemblies have called for the protesters to step up actions, rather than waiting for union leaders trailing in their wake, "we won't tolerate the unions, trailing in the wake of the movement since its beginning, imposing upon us, the precarious (students, workers, the unemployed and all those who fight against the conditions that they have to live in) the form or the means of a struggle which has only ever belonged to those who fight" said one group of assemblies.

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# Home and away

## Green fuels are go

The first Biodiesel forecourt in Manchester, a not-for-profit collective which opened earlier this year, has begun selling 100% pure Biodiesel from its garage.

A member of the co-operative said: "The current price is 92.9p per litre: we hope to get the price down to below supermarket price within a couple of weeks."

Green Gold Biodiesel is currently running a membership scheme for the new fuel. Only members of Manchester Biodiesel Co-operative will be able to buy it, with fees currently at £10 for a year.

Freedom has been following the progress of the co-op, which opened in January. Various businesses, along with a major Manchester bus route and some council vehicles, have signed up to use the group's 5% biodiesel mix.

Biodiesel, made from renewable sources, is cleaner and better for diesel motors than fossil based fuels.

You can find Green Gold Biodiesel at 100 Fairfield Street, Manchester. For more information call 0845 373 2769, or see greengoldbiodiesel.co.uk

## No amateurs please

The National Union of Journalists has passed a controversial resolution to deny support to news services which don't distinguish reporters from citizen journalists.

The news is of particular import to small and independent news services such as Freedom, Libcom, Black Flag and Indymedia, which rely heavily on the work of volunteers with no formal qualifications.

The decision, taken at the NUJ's Annual General Meeting, stresses that "the union retains its commitment to diversity of views and pluralism in the media, and its commitment to support journalists and ethical journalism in particular in non mainstream media, political newspapers and magazines, and in alternative media."

The union called on its Ethics Council to look at reports involving direct action, and seemed to threaten withdrawal of the union press card from journalists whose role in events was seen as 'blurred'.

The resolution instructed the union NEC "not to lend support to organisations that do not recognise the importance of distinguishing between the role of reporter and the role of participant."

## More water hikes

Bills have risen again this month, as water companies continue to gain above-average price increases in requests to Ofwat.

Household customers in England and Wales will see a 5.5% rise in prices, an average of £15 a household.

According to the Water regulator, the price rise will, like the other price rises before it were supposed to, lead to safer, cleaner drinking water, and pay for the 'rising costs' of transporting waste away.

Cost changes vary between providers, with Anglian Water's rises in line with inflation, and South West Water getting a £39 increase.

Freedom doesn't wish to sound cynical about this, but what rising costs exactly? Leakage from pipes has gone down in the last few years, the pipes themselves are static, while technology has been brought in to increase efficiency - which surely is supposed to drive prices down, not up...

# Around the world



**BELARUS:** On Saturday 25th March in Minsk a new wave of protests broke out and finished with a brutal clash with the police.

The arrest of 460 people in a protest tent camp on Friday morning had provoked the population and strengthened the general protest mood in Belarus. More than 5,000 people gathered on Saturday in the centre of Minsk for a demonstration which had been announced. The authorities opposed the protest with all available police forces, special services and the army.

On the Sunday, special forces of the interior, army and OMON dispersed a demonstration using tear gas and unknown weapons. There are reports of dozens of people heavily brutalised and seriously wounded. The people arrested have been transferred all around Belarus since Minsk jails are full.

Belarus has been the subject of major pressure from the USA over the recent re-election of President Lushenko (pictured above). The controversial figure, who protesters claim rigged recent elections to get an 83% vote, has used violent tactics to retain control in the area. Supporters of the president point out that he has largely resisted attempts to impose a neo-liberal agenda on the state, which has left the welfare system largely intact and the economy stable.

Anarchist groups in the region, including the banned anarchist publication Navinki, have called for the toppling of Lushenko.

**BOLIVIA:** Bolivia's President Evo Morales has called on airline workers to

end protests which have brought air travel to a near standstill in major cities.

Employees from the country's main airline, Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB), are demanding its nationalisation.

But Mr Morales has ruled out that possibility. The Bolivian state already holds a 48% stake in the firm.

Earlier this year, the government intervened to end a strike over wages and pensions. However, that intervention was declared illegal by Bolivia's Constitutional Court, and the airline's majority shareholder, Ernesto Asbun, regained control of the company.

The latest protest at the country's airports has affected air travel in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

Many of LAB's more than 2,000 workers accuse Mr Asbun of trying to bring the airline into bankruptcy as a prelude to forming a new company.

**GUATEMALA:** According to a new Amnesty report, since President Óscar Berger (pictured below) came to office in January 2004, thousands of rural families in Guatemala have been evicted from their homes. Most of them had been occupying land to protest against violations of their labour rights or were living on land where ownership was disputed.

During many evictions, security forces used excessive force, resulting in beatings and other ill-treatment, the destruction of homes and property, and, in some



cases, killings.

The evictions have also been marked by inadequate provision of basic safeguards, including alternative housing and food. In some cases, those being evicted fought back, with deaths and injuries on both sides.

After over 30 years of internal armed conflict, the 1996 Peace Accords that formally ended the conflict included key commitments from the government on land issues.

On coming to power, President Berger symbolically relaunched the Peace Accords. More than two years into his administration, the provisions aimed at addressing the underlying causes of agrarian disputes are yet to be implemented.

Deference by government authorities to the demands of landowners and impunity for human rights violations in the context of agrarian disputes has exacerbated an already desperate situation, according to the NGO.

**NORWAY:** An estimated 80,000 teachers left schools across Norway at noon on 30th March, on strike against changes in the time they must spend in the classroom. Oslo schools, however, were exempted from the labour action, which sparked controversy and prompted the organisation representing the townships that employ the teachers (KS) to try to halt the strike.

The KS claimed the strike was illegal and threatened to drag the teachers' union into court.

The surprise strike, announced just a day before, came as the teachers' union and the KS were negotiating new work rules that could order teachers to spend more time on campus than they do now.

**USA:** Between 500,000 and 1 million people filled the streets of downtown Los Angeles on 25th March (see picture below) to protest the anti-immigrant bill HR4437, which would make all 12 million undocumented people in the

United States into felons as well as anyone who aids undocumented people in any way.

Families, labour, civic, religious and political groups came out strong in a mostly Latino demonstration, overwhelming all the organisers' expectations. City officials are saying it is the largest demonstration they have ever seen.

Both the Mayor and the Chief of police attended the demonstration and voiced opposition to the proposed anti-immigrant law which is to be debated in the Senate being debated right now. This march came in the wave of many other large demonstrations against this bill taking place in Chicago, Washington DC, Arizona, and Missouri.

One observer said: "The [Latino] marchers wore white shirts [which] were a call for peace, for a stable, legal working relationship with the United States. 'No guerra, no racismo, no deportación', they chanted. After the march, thousands of people stood in line after line along the overpasses along the 101, waving flags and celebrating. The resounding honks of car horns rising up from below us was near-deafening."

Following the massive LA demonstration, students took to the streets on 27th to 29th March to protest anti-immigrant reform.



# Prison news

## Tomasz Wilkoszewski

Tomasz Wilkoszewski is a Polish anti-fascist who was jailed 10 years ago for allegedly killing a nazi. Having served 10 years of his 15-year sentence, he is eligible for parole and his hearing should take place very soon.

The international solidarity that Tomasz has received during his imprisonment has had a big effect in terms of his treatment by the prison authorities. Recently the prosecutor in his case publicly admitted that there had been mistakes in his case and that he should not have spent so long in prison.

While the signs look good for an early release for Tomasz, it is important to maintain pressure on the authorities, and to continue to support him.

More information on Tomasz Wilkoszewski and what can be done to help him at [www.brightonabc.org.uk](http://www.brightonabc.org.uk)

You can write to Tomasz at Tomek Wilkoszewski, Zakład Karny, ul. Orzechowa 5, 98-200 Sieradz, Poland.

## Birmingham Six demand apology

Paddy Hill, one of the Birmingham Six who was released on appeal 15 years ago after spending 16 years in prison for IRA pub bombings, is threatening legal action unless he receives an apology from the State.

Last year, Tony Blair apologised to members of the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven, two similar cases from the same period, but made no mention of the Birmingham Six.

Despite the convictions of the people in all these cases being eventually overturned, not one police officer has ever been charged with fitting them up, nor has any prison guard been charged with brutality in relation to their treatment while in custody.

## Italian anti-fascists arrested

On the 11th March, anti-fascists gathered in Milan, Italy, to form a counter demonstration against a neo-nazi march.

Approximately 400 people, mainly Italians but also some people from neighbouring countries, joined in the anti-fascist protest.

The police tried to prevent the anti-fascists from holding their demo and this provoked a confrontation. During the confrontation there were a number of incidents, which included both a McDonalds and a Nike store having their windows smashed, cars and a newsagent's kiosk were set on fire and there was an arson attack against a building belonging to a right wing political party.

The police responded by arresting 45 people.

## Josh Demmitt moved

American ALF prisoner, Josh Demmitt has been moved. His new address is: Joshua Demmitt, 12314-081, FCI Safford, Federal Correctional Institution, PO Box 9000, Safford, AZ 85548, USA.

## Crap arrest of the week

An animal rights activist was arrested in Singapore after dressing as a bear during a visit by the Queen. Jodi Ruckley was protesting the use of bear pelts for the ceremonial hats worn by the Queen's Guards. The thought of the Queen's visit being disrupted was obviously too grizzly for the Singapore cops and Jodi was arrested after only five minutes outside the presidential palace.

## Jailed for wearing a T-shirt

In America, a community activist was jailed for 45 days for wearing a T-shirt in court with a photograph of executed former gang-member Stanley 'Tookie' Williams and the word 'redemption'. Shareef Aleem was found in contempt for wearing the shirt during his trial on charges that he assaulted a police officer. Aleem apparently refused Judge Katherine Delgado's order to remove the shirt, citing his First Amendment rights.

# News

## Three laws to rule them all

### Rob Ray looks at the newly implemented acts which will curtail our freedoms for the new millennium

Royal assent cleared three of the most controversial new acts of the Labour government on 30th March.

The Terrorism Act, the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act and the Identity Act were all passed, following the latter's acceptance through the Lords a day before.

Each of the bills was bitterly contested by civil rights groups, but were nevertheless forced through with only small alterations.

#### Terrorism Act

The Terrorism Act creates four new criminal offences, which critics have said are so vague as to allow the arrest of almost anyone.

The new offences include 'acts preparatory to terrorism', 'encouragement to terrorism', 'dissemination of terrorist publications', and 'terrorist training offences'. The serving Home Secretary has powers to say what a terrorist group is.

In addition to the new offences, the Act, which extends indefinitely a 2005 act which had been given a one year lifespan to avoid long-term governmental abuse, allows:

- 28 day detention of suspects without evidence;
- warrants to search 'terrorist suspect' houses (in addition to the notorious section 44 allowing searches of protesters).

The bill was passed after minor concessions over the wording (to make 'glorification of terrorism' less vague) following a backbench rebellion.

#### Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act

The Act is designed to help implement the government's five year plan, which is closely modelled on current Australian systems.

Australia, which allocates the number of asylum cases allowed in any one year, is considered to have one of the toughest regimes in the world.

Provisions in the Act will restrict appeals for those refused entry to the UK, and introduce, like Australia, a 'points based' system requiring all migrants to display their skills before entry, and unskilled workers to be denied long-term status. English language tests will be compulsory for all permanent immigration.

The Act will also allow the government to deport anyone who it considers a 'terror risk', including any asylum seekers deemed a danger to national security. In addition, data-sharing between various police, customs and immigration units will be allowed, expanding the database system, while fingerprinting and biometric data retention on new asylum applicants is also to be rolled out.

Employers are to be discouraged from using illegal employees via an increase to fines, and the prospect of prison for 'knowingly' using illegal workers.

The Act also ends the right for successful asylum seekers to bring in their families, leading to fears that those at risk of torture at home will feel unable to leave for fear that their families will be targeted should they fail to gain entry.



#### Identity Cards Act

The most controversial of the three acts, ID cards were passed on 29th March after a brief battle in the Lords, and despite evidence from a wide range of sources that the scheme will be an expensive failure.

The LSE university have put the likely costs of ID cards at £12bn, taken from taxation and direct payments from the public. The cost will include the setting

up of a 'National Identity Scheme', including Biometric details (such as fingerprints, Iris scans and facial profiling) and other personal details on everyone in the country over the age of 16 by 2012.

The scheme has been condemned as a waste of time by university groups, commercial companies, security concerns and has been heavily criticised by banking groups, who have said consolidation of identity into single

cards will make fraud and terrorism easier.

Civil rights groups meanwhile have condemned the cards as open to corrupt practice, identity theft and corporate and governmental misuse.

Technology groups have said the biometric checking systems envisaged are not workable. The Act provides the government with powers to make ID cards compulsory at a later date.

## Show of strength

Well over one million people were out on strike on 28th March in what has been billed as the biggest single strike since 1926. Unions have since announced further strike dates, with rolling regional callouts from 25th to 27th April following the five-day meat inspectors' strike that took place from 2nd to 5th April.

Here's a roundup of what happened in some of the major towns and cities:

**Birmingham:** As many as 100,000 people came out across Birmingham, with the mood on the pickets described as 'jubilant'. Schools, residential services and waste collections were affected across the district.

**Brighton:** The traffic in Brighton was dead. There's a lot of Unison members in the town. Brighton university saw classes called off, and the binmen were noted as particularly solid. At least 15 schools shut, along with the main town library.

**Cardiff:** Hundreds of schools were shut, libraries, leisure centres and council offices were closed and rubbish collections halted. The unions agreed not to disrupt funeral services.

**Edinburgh:** Low picket turnout. Around 600 at the Edinburgh march and rally. It rained for almost the entire time but spirits were high. There were few buses. One estimate put strikers at 10,000 strong.

**Glasgow:** Union apologists for inaction and a failure to launch an all-out strike last year when the pension was actually under attack. Cops and media counted the march as at about 10,000.

**Leeds:** A two-hour lunchtime rally outside the city council's main offices - estimates of 800 to 1,000 people. There were 80 schools closed as teaching assistants were on strike.

**Liverpool:** Despite blustery conditions, the crowd was in good spirits as they listened to speeches from representatives of the NUT and Unison. The Mersey tunnels, Metro and around 30,000 workers all stopped.

**London:** Some 70% of all schools were closed as more than 100,000 workers struck, including workers in the capital's Fire Brigade control room. The Tower of London was closed and the Thames Barrier reduced to emergency staffing levels.

**Manchester:** Demonstration saw over 300 people. While the levels of participation may be small, the spirit of those taking part seemed strong.

**Newcastle:** Tyne and Wear Metro not operating and the Tyne Tunnel closed to private vehicles. Hundreds of schools across Tyneside, Wearside, County Durham, Northumberland and Teesside either completely or partially closed.

**Sheffield:** 40% of council building workers out, but the effects were kept to a minimum. 43 schools affected and transport severely hampered.

**Swansea:** Most schools and council offices in Swansea were shut, with picket lines outside many places. The general mood was really upbeat and positive.

- Unison has suspended its election campaigning for Labour while the dispute remains unresolved.



## Death inquest demand

The Somali community in Woolwich, who claim there is a police racist vendetta against their young men, are demanding an independent investigation into Woolwich police harassment.

At a picket of Plumstead Police Station on Saturday 1st April, the Justice For Nuur Campaign reiterated their call for an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Nuur Saeed's death "to establish the exact events of 10th January".

"The events surrounding Nuur's death are clouded with mystery," said a spokesman for the campaign group. "His family are simply demanding to know the whole truth. The explanation so far provided by the police simply does not add up."

"The police say that Nuur was in a house where they executed a search warrant in Plumstead on Tuesday 10th January.

"The police say he fell from a second floor balcony. They say they found him on the pavement."

Nuur Saeed was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich, later to Kings College Hospital where he

died of complications arising from a massive brain injury on 24th January.

The Nuur Campaign want the police officers involved immediately suspended from duty, "and not allowed to go back on the streets policing our community".

The Somali community in Woolwich are convinced that Saeed's death and that of Paul Coker, who died on the floor of a cell in Plumstead Police Station after being arrested by 15 police officers in his flat in August 2005, is part of an agenda to single out Somali youth.

"It is widely held that officers are engaged in a racist vendetta," said the spokesman. "Young Somalis are saying police are openly boasting they are out for revenge because two of the suspects allegedly involved in the shooting of WPC Sharon Beshenivsky in Bradford were Somali men with prior links to Woolwich."

Meanwhile PC Wayne Bell, from Plumstead Police station, was found not guilty at Bow Street court on 29th March of racism, following an Independent Police Complaints Commission investigation.

# News

## Ecuador's 'no' to the FTA

The government is looking shaky as blockades and protests spread across the country, reports Jack Ray

Protests against a Free Trade Agreement with the United States have left interim Ecuadorian President Alfredo Palacio's government looking precarious, as trade unions, indigenous groups and students mobilise against economic liberalisation plans.

Around the country, mobilisations called by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) on 13th March produced road blockades, which brought transport systems to a halt. Despite a lull four days later, protests intensified on 21st March, with the government forced to call a state of emergency, bringing out the military to dismantle barricades. Protests then switched the capital of Quito, with thousands of students demonstrating against the proposed trade talks with Washington. More protests are now planned for 31st March.

President Palacio was first brought to power after social movements produced similar protests in April 2005. Like his predecessor he was regarded as a left-leaning populist and was supported by indigenous groups, since then neo-liberal policies have seen his popularity plummet from above 50% to just 14%. Talks on a free trade agreement with the United States have proven unpopular with 62% of the population rejecting the plans. Opponents expect that trade liberalisation will displace thousands of subsistence and small farmers, whilst encouraging an influx of subsidised US agricultural goods. They cite a UN report

stating that "The Ecuadorian agricultural sector loses in any scenario. This includes the improbable case in which the US eliminates subsidies, supports and maintains its tariffs at zero. The net effect is marginally negative, but will impact especially subsistence and medium size producers in rice, corn (white and hard), meat and some dairy products."

Palacio's administration has reacted angrily to protests rejecting calls for a referendum and accusing Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez of funding the blockades, and accusing indigenous leaders of "destabilising democracy" and using "deceptive politics that seek to perversely tear apart the nation." The protests have cost Ecuadorian businesses \$223m.

Last month Palacio's government struggled to contain blockades of two oil-pumping stations, with activists demanding that more revenue be pumped into social programmes aimed at improving health and education levels. On 30th March congressmen attempted to appease protesters by hiking taxes on 'extraordinary' oil profits to 60%, a move that the Association of Ecuador Oil Industry is lobbying the President to veto.

One activist Alfredo Acosta said, "Basically, the rights of lawyers and bosses are above the rights of human beings." According to Acosta the treaty will result in "preferential treatment for North American investors, reduction of freedom in economic policy, allow for



Ecuador, inset Alfredo Palacio and CONAIE marchers



public services to be privatised, the extension of the rights of North American pharmaceutical companies, limit the rights of regional governments and allow mobility for capital and goods, without any relaxation in US immigration policy."

Indigenous federation CONAIE has reported the brutal suppression of many peaceful blockades around the country, with many hurt in the Quito demonstrations after clashes with the police. Blockades were suspended on 24th March "to protect the security of

indigenous towns and nationalities, after the brutal repression ordered by the Palacio regime, that has caused dozens of injuries - some of them serious - and dozens of arrests, as many by troops as by the national police."

## No fair go

Australian Prime Minister John Howard's new 'Work Choices' labour laws have now begun, with the impact being felt across the country. Within three days of the reforms coming into effect on 26th March, employers had already used their new rights to sack workers in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. In one incident, eight workers were reportedly laid off for union activities with no explanation for the dismissals and under the new legislation, no recourse to legal action.

The new laws entitle companies with less than 100 employees to dismiss workers for any reason, also effectively allowing larger employers to do the same for 'operational reasons'. Sharan Barrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) commented on the beginning of the new regime that, "today, Australian working families lose unfair dismissal laws, the strong award system, the safety net, the right to a minimum wage, laws that protect the right to collectively bargain, and laws that have ensured fair representation by unions at the workplace."

Despite, a \$50m marketing campaigns, opposition to the laws remains high, a 28th March poll by the ACTU showed that 70% felt the laws gave too much power to employers, and that 68% felt the laws showed that John Howard governed in the interests of big business rather than working people. Strong majorities also felt the new laws were a threat to all working families and wanted to retain rights to collective bargaining and unfair dismissal laws. 300,000 already demonstrated against the laws last Summer, with a further 500,000 across the country marching in opposition in November 2005.

Union leaders have announced more action to come with a national demonstration called for 28th June, and legal challenges being mounted by Labor Party controlled state governments. Brian Boyd, head of Victoria Trades Hall Council after describing the legislation as, "the most vicious and Draconian legislation that Australia has ever seen," said that "John Howard is now public enemy number one - we must get that man out of office."

The new legislation has prompted a new interest in workers rights in Australia with the reformist trade unions announcing a 70,000-member surge in membership in the year up to August 2005 - even when the campaign against these new laws was still in its infancy. Union leaders have also faced pressure from their own rank-and-file for a national work stoppage, rather than just a demonstration, with large petitions received from workers all over the country. Many have criticised the union bureaucracies and the Australian Labor Party for the lacklustre campaign.

The government is unrepentant, Employment Minister Kevin Andrews, asked if the new laws meant workers could be sacked for no reason, answered, "Look, people are dismissed every day of the year. There's not something new about this. I don't know how many people would be dismissed in any year, but it's not something new. There are some relationships that don't work out and that's the reality and I think we all know that."

## Water: a human right

Thousands of Mexican and international water activists gathered at the International Forum for the Defence of Water from the 16th to 20th March to discuss alternatives and resistance to neo-liberal water privatisation, in opposition to the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico City, which activists denounced as a business networking opportunity for water companies and the 140 national governments represented at the conference. A demonstration organised on the first day of the forum saw 16,000 protesters march in opposition to water sell-offs around the world, declaring access to water to be a basic human right - 26 were arrested following clashes with the police.

Across Latin America and elsewhere conflict over water supplies is intensifying. Many governments seeking foreign investment in infrastructure have been tempted to sell off water rights to multinational companies. Privatisation and deregulation has often led to massive price hikes, which lead to the poor being cut off from safe water supplies. This has often led to uprisings and protests

such as the Bolivian water conflicts in 2000, 2003, and 2005. After blockades and strikes, the new Bolivian government is now committed to returning water supplies to public hands and to some form of social management. Protesters in Mexico City promised more of the same. "We've been beaten, we've been jailed, some of us have even been killed, but we're not going to give up," said Marco Suastegui, who is protesting against a dam diverting water from the Papagayo River to supply the popular tourist resort of Acapulco.

Activists denounced the Forum as excluding the poor from a gathering about the future of their water, "The Fourth World Water Forum doesn't represent us," said Audora Dominguez of the Mexican Committee for the Defence of Water Rights, "It's a forum where you have to pay to speak. It's a forum where the poor aren't included."

Around the world 2.6 billion people lack adequate sanitation and 1.1 billion have no access to clean water supplies, resulting in the deaths of two million people each year.

## Feature

# A fulsome tribute

## The Kate Sharpley Library's in-depth look at Paul Avrich: a historian who listened to anarchist voices

**T**he death of Paul Avrich has taken from anarchism its finest historian. More than that the study of history has also lost one of its finest proponents because Avrich was also a great historian. If his work brought to life those who shared 'the beautiful ideal' it was because he used his considerable talents to treat his subjects with respect, thus avoiding the glib condescension that characterised much of what constituted 'anarchist history' in the academy. Avrich's work reflected his skills as a linguist, the absolute importance he placed on primary sources and his perseverance in finding them, an ability to sustain long, and sometimes fruitless periods of research and a writing style that enabled him to encapsulate his findings in a readable and engaging manner. Central to all of this was a consistent and rigorous insistence on accuracy. He went further, looked deeper and reflected more pertinently than others. He allowed anarchist voices, missing from history, to speak for themselves, with a minimal of authorial judgement or intervention, and much of what we know about the history of anarchism in America is due to the work of this one man.

His work on anarchism in Russia formed the first half of Avrich's published career. His first book, *The Russian Anarchists* (1967), was a model of what we would come to expect. Succinct, readable and yet packed with information reflecting Avrich's use of primary sources, it brought to English speaking minds a lost history. It also reflected, as much of his work would do, one of the primary tensions in anarchism, between those who search for organisational structure to support their anarchist ideas and those who are far more wary of any organisational apparatus. He treated the relationship of anarchism and violence with scrupulous fairness and rigour, an approach that ran throughout all of his writing, and reflected confidently the nuances and complexities of anarchism in Russia. He clearly stressed the constructive qualities of anarchism in 1917 and onwards, developing his earlier dissertation on *The Russian Revolution and the Factory Committees*. His work *Kronstadt 1921* (1970) destroyed the Bolshevik myth of Kronstadt being a counter-revolutionary centre whose vibrant revolutionary movement had long been dissipated. On the contrary, to Avrich, it was in effect a last ditch stand against the centralising, counter revolutionary excesses of Bolshevism. Again scrupulously documented, the work brought what had long been known in anarchist circles to a much wider audience.

His *Russian Rebels 1600-1800* (1972) continued his interest in the revolutionary heritage in Russia and, again, was unflinching in its examination of its subjects. His groundbreaking *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (1973) completed what we may call the first phase of his work. A collection of primary documents interspersed with appropriate editorial commentary it allowed the reader to see and read, often for the first time, the words of the Russian anarchists themselves. From the swirling and tremulous words of the Anarcho-Futurists to the Petropavlovsk Resolution of Kronstadt we see the reach and range of Russian anarchism.

In the preface to his *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine De Cleyre* (1978) a work in memory of Max Nettlau, himself a great historian of anarchism, Avrich writes of abandoning his project of producing a comprehensive history of American anarchism writing that "a fuller examination of the materials at my disposal, together with the discovery of new sources, aroused a growing sense of the complexity of the movement, of the richness and diversity of its history." The rest of his life would be spent exploring that complexity, richness and diversity. He also found his methodology. He would explore the lives of those who played a role in the movement because "From most existing accounts ... one gets little understanding of the anarchists as human beings, still less of what impelled them to embark on their unpopular and seemingly futile course. Anarchism, as a result, has seemed a movement apart, unreal and quixotic, divorced from American history and irrelevant to American life." His work on De Cleyre was a brilliant introduction to this complex and anguished woman. We quickly become aware of the fierce quicksilver mind she possesses and realise, through Avrich's deftness, that we are in the presence of some kind of greatness. Written nearly thirty years ago, it remains unsurpassed as a narrative of her life and an appreciation of the multi-faceted nature of her ideas.

His two greatest works now lay ahead of him. *The Modern School*, dedicated to anarchist librarian Agnes Inglis, (1980) is a jewel of a book. It describes a moment in American anarchist history where culture and militancy meet. Nearly every line drips with original research; the narrative is clear and precise, linking complex and apparently contradictory themes and helping the reader decipher them. If the work on De Cleyre has not convinced us, his work here makes it crystal clear that American anarchism was much more than Benjamin Tucker, Emma

Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. *The Modern School* rightfully re-establishes many lives previously lost to the historian as critical players in the attempt to create anarchy in America. Avrich is re-defining our knowledge, our expectations and our appreciations. It is a book to read and re-read and like all great works each re-reading teaches us something new. So too with his next major work *The Haymarket Tragedy* (1984), dedicated to Joseph Labadie, which continued the standard he had set himself. Using original sources he creates an unforgettable picture of anarchist practice and culture. It is the book on Haymarket, the book on late nineteenth century class struggle anarchism and culture and a volume to treasure.

*Anarchist Portraits* (1988) dedicated to Arne Thorne (a profound influence on Avrich) was a collection of essays on a wide range of subjects. All reflect Avrich's customary elegance. He is at ease writing about the Australian anarchist 'Chummy' Fleming as he is discussing Kropotkin's Ethical Anarchism. His essay on Jewish anarchism in the United States is essential reading while his sketch of Alexander Berkman's life remains a most valuable template. His essay on *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Italian Anarchist Background* was the forerunner of his *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (1991). Here again he looks at a critical event in the history of the left in America and through his biographical style brings individuals and their ideas to life. The remarkable human qualities of many of the anarchists are clearly drawn as well as their inconsistencies and flaws. The violence that runs through this period of history is portrayed straightforwardly without any attempt to judge or moralise. As a result Sacco and Vanzetti, and all the others who were in their affinity groups, are presented in their richness and complexity. A richness and complexity no one else had been able to reflect. A by-product of his biographical approach is that we are guided through the history of anti-organisational and insurrectionary Italian class struggle anarchism of the period, in a manner that brings life and meaning to its theory and actions.

Finally *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism In America* (1996). Many of Avrich's interviews with anarchist activists from the early twentieth century onwards are recorded here. It is essential reading. Of course memories will play tricks and Avrich's footnotes gently corrects errors. Yet this volume reminds us that anarchism is not just what we read in anarchist papers or in the pamphlets and books regularly circulated. Anarchism is also



Paul Avrich

those, who, by their actions, make up the movement. They sat and listened to Goldman speak. They went to the Modern School. They helped sell papers, financed comrades on the run, lived in the colonies, became jaundiced or never gave up. They put the stamps on the papers when they were mailed out. They gave life to words.

Much remains to be done to complete the work started by Paul Avrich (It is to be hoped that his long worked on life of Alexander Berkman will see the light of day) and we should finish by making some final comments on his legacy. Firstly he implicitly realised that we were still at the discovery stage.

Much spade work and slog still need to be done to discover anarchist history. We can, though, learn from Avrich's refusal to condescend to the people that made up his histories. He did not have a clever theory and try to prove it, a methodology that treats its subjects like chess pieces rather than people. Instead he preferred to let the facts and events guide him to any conclusions he might make. He did not judge and he did not try to explain actions that took place a

hundred years ago with the reasonings of today. For him the discovery and telling of the story was the most important thing and how well we and his subjects benefitted from that approach.

In person he was lovely and enormously helpful to all who came to him with questions. Students and activists and fellow scholars all benefitted from his knowledge. He must have known he was the gold standard, yet there was no arrogance, just a desire to share and help. He was spare with his criticism preferring to remain silent than chastise. If he offered praise and encouragement it meant the world to the recipient. One could ask for no finer praise from any source. When he began his studies Avrich was chastised by his tutor for studying those who had 'lost'. It is an interesting thought that his honest and thorough approach grounded in primary sources may well have given anarchists, should they choose to read him, some of the tools to succeed.

# Commentary

## FREEDOM

Volume 67 Number 7

### Anarchism

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

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

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

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

Freedom's editors wish to present a broad range of anarchist thought, and as such the views expressed in the paper are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.

### Angel Alley

It has been a fairly hectic sort of fortnight for the press, with some members of the collective on holiday, others running stalls at exclusive party locations, and a benefit gig for the hacklab collective.

Freedom is also soon (finally) to be bringing out its long awaited book list, for all you fans of our wares, and in progress at the moment is a new book by the German anarchist Erich Mühsam, written during his incarceration in the fortress of Ansbach.

This will be coming out in a similar timeframe to a reprint of the ABC of Anarchism by Alexander Berkman, one of the best short introductions available.

Aside from barely disguised plugs of our latest stuff, things have generally taken a fairly positive turn over the last few weeks (and not just because of our shiny new colour format), with a few returning and volunteering types coming forward. Due to shortages of time, not all of these have been contacted yet (be patient, we're desperate and, unless we lose the details, we'll certainly be in touch).

As for the building work next door, things are proceeding apace, there are now damn great foundation trenches where a workshop used to be, which will soon be full of concrete, as the big building takes shape.

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### Next issue

The next issue will be dated 22nd April 2006 and the last day to get copy to us (see contact details above) will be Thursday 13th April.

### Mountain mystery

I have found that very few people around Vernon, B.C. have got any idea about the origin of the name Anarchist Mountain, which is not far south of here, but one story is that it was named after an old Wobbly (IWW) and, of course, Wobblies once worked in the woods around here.

Harold Barclay

The Anarchist Mountain referred to here is in the Okanagan Valley area of British Columbia, Canada, as mentioned in the quiz in Freedom, 11th February.

### MP's Pension pickup

The MP's pension fund deficit currently stands at £49.5m having risen from £25.2m in 2002, and the taxpayer will pay the cost of this shortfall.

It has just been announced that contributions from public finance to this fund will rise from 24% to 26.8% to cover the deficit. Taxpayer contributions to the MP's pension fund is already more than four times the amount that currently goes into the average worker's fund.

This announcement quickly follows that on MP pay rises. An MP's salary will rise to £60,277 from £59,095, Cabinet ministers' to £136,677 from £133,997 and the prime minister's to £187,610 from £183,932.

This means that an MP, who is paid £60,277, and retires after 26 years service will receive an inflation proof £40,000 per year.

It is, however, a contributory pension. MPs will now have to contribute 10% of pre-tax income for 26 years to receive this pension which is calculated as 26/40ths of final salary. They can elect to pay a reduced rate of 6% per annum, but in this case will receive 26/50th of final salary. This is in comparison with the local government worker who contributes 6% of pre-tax income for 40 years to receive a pension calculated as 40/80ths of final salary.

In their fight with the unions, the government seem happy to infer that all local government workers retire at 60 on full pension. In reality the average retirement age is 64.5 years. Of those who retire early, 22% are forced to retire due to ill health. The average pension received is only £3,600, and for women this drops to £1,500. This average is more than 10 times less than an MP, and up to 100 times less than a CBI director.

The '85' rule that is currently at the centre of the public sector pension dispute does not apply to MPs. Instead they have the more favourable '80'

rule. This means that they can retire on full pension at 60 years of age if their age and service years total 80 or more. This is a strange situation, since the main argument against the '85' rule is that it fails to comply with age discrimination legislation, however this does not appear to apply where MPs are concerned.

Dave E.

### War crimes

Mid-March saw Bush reaffirm his strike-first policy against terrorists and other US enemies. Given the roaring success of its first application, Iraq, you would think that he be less prone to point to his bad decisions.

The reason is obvious: imperial goals. This can be seen by him also rebuking Iran over allegations it is secretly amassing nuclear weapons. That there is no evidence that the Iranian government is doing this seems not to matter. Why should it? It did not matter with Iraq.

But a concern for reality has never been much of a consideration for him or his cronies. As can be seen from the words of his national security adviser: "The president's strategy affirms that the doctrine of pre-emption remains sound and must remain an integral part of our national security strategy." Sound? After nearly three years fighting a war he declared won? At a cost of billions and who knows how many tens (hundreds?) of thousands dead?

Given that the UN Charter already allows a state to strike at others when a government has good reason to suspect of them of imminently carrying out an attack, it is clear that Bush is not referring to self-defense from imminent threat. Rather, he means that the US can go around invading any country he dislikes (and by past actions, he does mean this). That is a war crime both in US law and in international law.

Not that it has stopped US imperialism before, of course, but it is rare for a government to so brazenly declare its criminality to the world. It is a good job that Bush does not like traveling as precludes the possibility of him being arrested if he goes to Europe on holiday. Although, as Pinochet discovered, the state rarely turns on its friends – even if they are mass murdering scumbags.

Iain Mackay

### PCTs are mis-spending

The reported losses at the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are the result of massive senior management pay rises.

It was a poor attempt at role-play that recently revealed Patricia Hewitt, distinctly over-playing the humility card. The issue, of course, was the NHS budget deficit of some £620m.

The NHS has enjoyed a significant cash bonanza in recent years which has seen the total budget increase from £65bn in 2002/3 to a predicted £87bn by March 2006. It is the intention that the budget will grow further to £107bn by 2007 thereby bringing the UK in line with other European countries in terms of health expenditure.

Pundits have cited many examples of where the extra cash has gone. None appear however to have even bothered to take a cursory inspection at the massive increases that have been paid out to senior managers following the

Labour Government's introduction of Primary Care Trusts to run the NHS from 2000 onwards.

These are the very same senior managers, of course, who have been unable to manage the budgets they have been given.

Primary Care Trusts have at their core the highly desirable ethos of 'a patient led NHS'. Although the figures available for scrutiny are, strangely, incomplete, there are at present 302 PCTs standing alongside another 328 NHS, Foundation and Ambulance Trusts to make a total of 630 trusts running the NHS nationally.

Each of these Trusts is run by a Board of Directors alongside a team of Senior Managers. A minimum of £100,000 per annum appears to be the going rate for the Chief Executive with six or seven other Directors at £70,000 each even though in some cases these top-heavy organisations have only a few hundred employees.

And not unexpectedly it appears that each year the sum of money paid has continued to increase. For example remuneration for senior officers and members of the North Manchester PCT totalled between £330,000 to £410,000 in 2001-2002 and had risen by 31% in 2004-2005 to £425,000 to £540,000. Chief Executive Adrian Mercer earned between £95,000 and £100,000. Just down the road at Central Manchester PCT it cost taxpayers between £840,000 to £960,000 in remuneration for 2004-05.

Meanwhile at Oxford City PCT Jonathan McWilliam, Director of Public Health, saw his salary jump by over 50% from just under £100,000 in 2003-2004 to over £150,000 in 2004-2005. The result appears to be that each trust is now paying out on average around £150,000 to £200,000 extra in salaries a year since their establishment, a figure corresponding to well over £100m nationally.

But it is not only on salaries that those responsible for the running of the NHS have seen a massive hike. Pension entitlements have literally gone through the roof, money which could have been used to pay for more operations, more nurses and cleaner wards has been siphoned off to make sure that any senior manager forced to give up their already lucrative posts will not be forced on to the miserly basic state pension.

For example, Jonathan McWilliam had at the end of March 2005 already accrued a total pension at the age of 60 of £175,000, corresponding to a pension cash equivalent of £609,000. Yes, don't blink, that's £609,000! Oxford City PCT senior managers have accumulated a total exceeding £3.6m, a jump of over half a million from £2,970,000 a year previously.

At South Manchester PCT and nearby North Manchester PCT the leap was nearly £400,000 at each of them to a cash equivalent of £3,395,000 and £4,551,000 respectively.

No wonder the Trusts and the NHS are in dire financial straits because if these leaps of around £500,000 a trust are multiplied across all the trusts then that's an extra £300m plus, and it's a figure that's sure to grow year on year.

In addition of course PCT start up costs were obviously astronomical and included the acquisition of new, and often, palatial premises to house the many new Trust HQs.

In Leeds for example, the North West Leeds PCT has recently acquired the delightful North West House, a four-

storey monolith in Art Deco style. The building currently houses some 250 administrative staff as well as the management of the trust. Lease and service costs are in the region of £250,000 per annum.

The figures would give cause for concern in normal circumstances but are intensified by the knowledge that it is now apparently the intention to knock down all these fledgling organisations in favour of amalgamated 'super PCTs'.

For example, six PCTs in Northumberland and Co Durham are earmarked to be amalgamated into one. Similarly in Leeds, Manchester and, most controversially, Oxfordshire. Here, an Action Committee recently lobbied the House of Commons Health Select Committee when the Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority suddenly announced that they intended to seek bidders from the private sector to manage the amalgamated five Oxfordshire PCTs.

The apparent timetable of events was that advertisements would be placed in the EU Journal in November and the successful bidder would take over in April 2006. The rationale behind this bizarre behaviour was that the 'super PCT' would be 'a very large organisation needing unusual management expertise'. In fact, it will be the size of the former Oxfordshire Health Authority and in any event, the debate about size is somewhat negated by the persisting rumours that Oxfordshire is to be a pilot for other, smaller PCTs.

The Oxfordshire Action Group are justifiably indignant at the prospect of a, possibly foreign, for profit organisation, creaming off 10% of the £575m Oxfordshire Health budget.

Of course, salt will no doubt be added to the wound in Oxford and across the country by the sure and certain knowledge that the present highly paid elite, will be centrally involved in the re-organisations where it can be safely predicted that there will be the introduction of an even higher paid elite of completely unnecessary, new management.

For those forced to 'get on their bikes' and find a proper job there will, of course, be the solace of knowing that in just a few short years of hard labour at the NHS 'coalface' they will have accrued a considerable sum towards their enforced early retirement.

Of course if it suited the Government then Patricia Hewitt could start demanding some answers as to why taxpayers have been paying out massively increased sums of money to under-achieving senior managers.

But that would be to miss the point, where clearly, under-achieving PCTs and Strategic Health Authorities will go a long way towards justifying the head-long rush towards health privatisation.

Mark Metcalf  
Red Star Research

### Quiz answers

1. Edinburgh – all related to members of the Scottish Parliament. Labour First Minister Henry MacLeish had to resign over his constituency office expenses. His successor Jack McConnell survived questions about his family holidays at media mogul Kirsty Wark's villa; and Tory David McLetchie had to answer for overclaiming his taxi fares.
2. Greenwich Mean Time, or London Time, was adopted throughout the country.
3. Diana Spencer
4. Homer Simpson. Doh!

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# REVIEW

## Robert Allen and Tom Jennings look into the Hollywood adaptation of anarchism's most famous graphic novel

It's no wonder that Alan Moore is not amused with the Wachowski brothers' adaptation of his graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, which pitches anarchism against fascism. "It's rubbish," he said of the screenplay and declared that he had no wish to see the finished film. "There wasn't a mention of anarchy as far as I could see."

His specific reasons, however, have more to do with the art of comic making than the art of film making, with the mainstream comic book industry, with Hollywood, with the politics of anarchism and fascism, and much less to do with the story, the plot and the central characters. As far as Moore is concerned, "there are things that are possible in comics that would not be possible anywhere else", while film and television, he said, "have a lot to answer for".

The film version of *V for Vendetta* has generated strong opinions, not least in the USA where it has been called "a vile, pro-terrorist piece of neo-Marxist, left-wing propaganda". Back in Britain, the discussion is about freedom and fascism, with one viewer worried that it is "fetishising fascism rather than espousing freedom". The BBC's Jonathan Ross, an Alan Moore fan, called it "a woeful, depressing failure". But he has been one of the few voices to actually discuss the merits of the film itself, whether it is worth watching, if it is entertaining. The issue it seems are about the politics of the film and the story behind it.

Jeff Sawtell remarked in the *Morning Star* that "Moore has since distanced himself from the Wachowski brothers' production, possibly because his modest anti-fascist fable has been turned into a soulless blockbuster".

In Moore's words, Andy and Larry Wachowski have recast the story as American neo-conservatism versus American liberalism. "Basically," he said, "it's the work of two thwarted and impotent liberals who want to say how annoyed they are with their President, but want to do so in a safe way – by setting it in a fantasy Great Britain."

Sawtell explains that the "the difficulty with *Vendetta* is its simplistic politics, the idea that an idea can be injected into the populace by one loner – the people arising all prepared to take

on the uniform of their self-styled saviour". Here he is missing the point of both Moore's original series and the Wachowski brothers' cinematic adaptation.

*V* is neither romantic hero nor mad villain. According to Moore he is "an allegorical force, an idea given human form". Moore has also dismissed the image of Guy Fawkes and his mad gunpowder plot against parliament in *V*. "I was just using Guy Fawkes as a symbol," Moore told Heidi MacDonald, "without really any references to the historical Guy Fawkes. It was the bonfire night Guy Fawkes I was referencing."

In Moore's mind, *V* is not a freedom fighter and he is not a brave vigilante. The image and actions of the superhero as vigilante, fighting against the villain as madman, is a theme central to comics, specifically those originating in the USA. In *Watchmen*, his eponymous graphic novel of the mid-1980s, Moore made himself into a hero, in the US of all places, with a story that set out, in graphic detail, to ridicule vigilante superheroes.

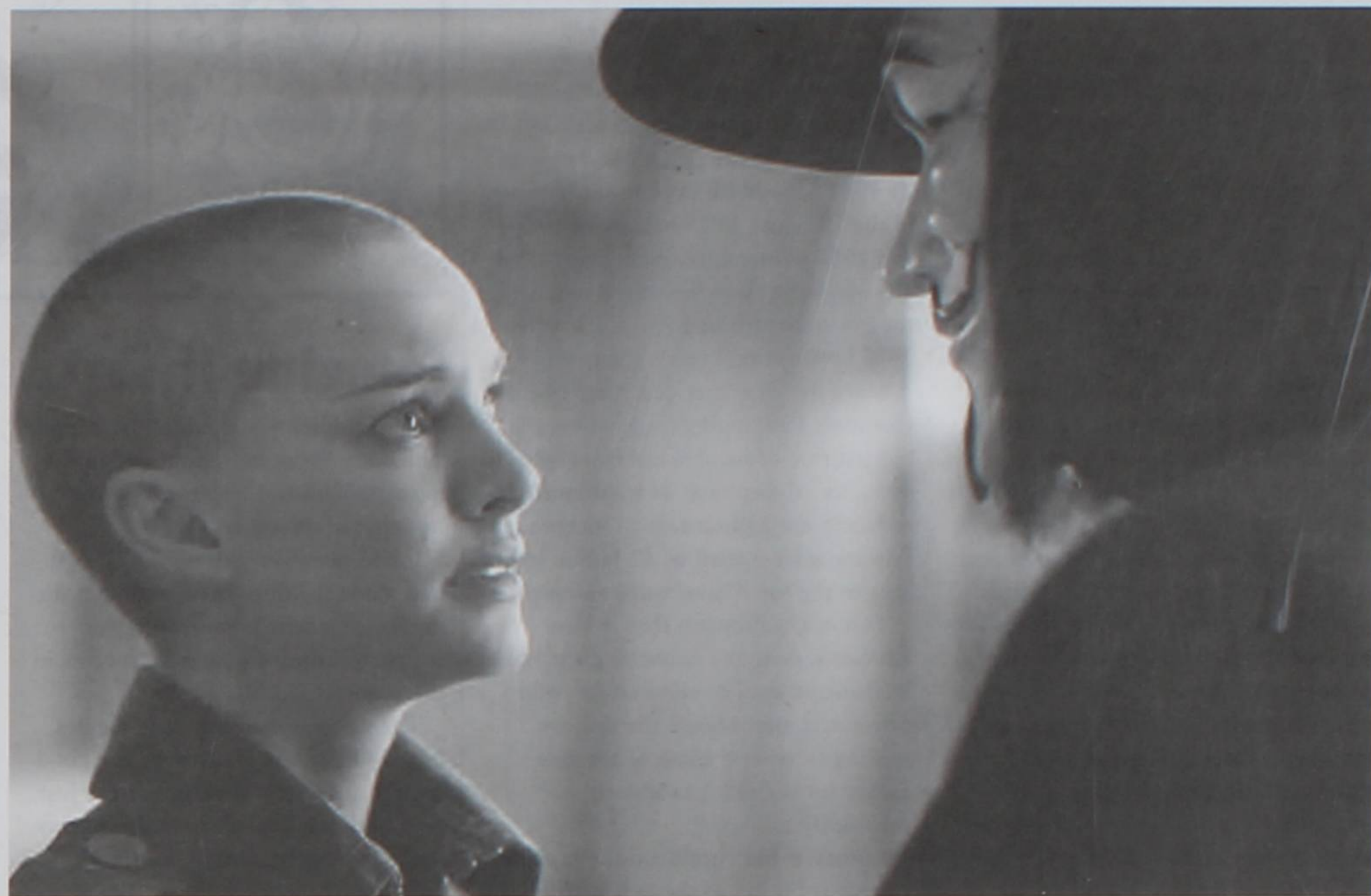
Moore's 2000AD series, *The Ballad of Halo Jones*, did much more for his image as a class-struggle anarchist than *V for Vendetta* or *Watchmen*. Halo Jones doesn't beat any ideological drums nor make any grandiose philosophical statements. Her story, told from a future perspective, is laced with irony, the kind that most anarchists would understand.

There is no irony in the Wachowskis' *V for Vendetta*, just violence. And, despite what those on both the Left and the Right are saying, there is no message either. The film has nothing to do with anarchist theory or practice or with any other ideology.

"People should not be afraid of their governments, governments should be afraid of their people," *V* proclaims in the film. There is no irony in these words. What they carry is a dramatic threat of violence, which was never Moore's intention.

"Anarchy wears two faces, both creator and destroyer," *V* announces in the novel. "Thus destroyers topple empires, make a canvas of clean rubble where creators then can build a better world."

"Let us raise a toast to all our bombers, all our bastards, most



Natalie Portman and Hugo Weaving in *V for Vendetta*

unlovely and most unforgivable.

"Let's drink their health.

"Then meet them no more."

Moore intended *V for Vendetta* to carry a moral message to the reader, from a clear anarchist perspective. The Wachowski brothers have dispensed with that message.

One critic said the film is "a Cracker Jack box restatement of Negri and Hardt's notion of democracy for all". That might be reading too much politics into a film that is now fuelling a debate that has nothing to do with anarchism, or even with injustice. Natalie Portman, who plays the character Evey in the film, said at the London premiere. "I have a sense of injustice, but I don't think I could ever be violent."

That's the real irony of this film. The Wachowskis' female lead appears to understand the story of *V for Vendetta* better than they do.

Or maybe not. Maybe this is the film they always wanted to make, and for all the reasons that *V*'s author claims.

Robert Allen

McDonald's interview with Alan Moore and other information on both the author and the film is at <http://www.comicon.com/thebeat>

This hopelessly incoherent mish-mash of random elements from comic book superhero back catalogues – combined with various soundbites from and random references to recent and contemporary political fiction and real-world circumstances – is stitched together with the most superficial philosophical musings about freedom and justice. Writers Larry and Andy Wachowski were also responsible for the trivial pursuits of *The Matrix*, with similarly absurd pretensions of reflecting on media-saturated culture, but at least faithfully following its computer-game logic. Whereas in *V for Vendetta* the narrative demands of blockbuster oversimplification are met by making complete nonsense of history. So freedom fighter Guy Fawkes rounds off his four centuries-old project in blowing up the Old Bailey and Houses of Parliament (now redundant symbols in a near-future police state) and assassinating a sample of political figureheads and functionaries – justified with a jumble of pompous platitudes wrenched from literary sources and thrown together to resemble sophistication.

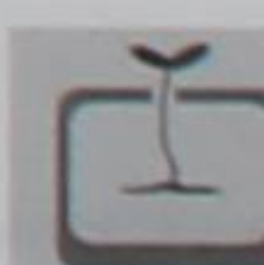
### 'V' signs and simulations

On one level an enjoyably daft and meaningless cartoon mess, the film nevertheless purports to smuggle salient social questions – of violence, terrorism, and the passivity of populations cowering in complicity with fascism – into the consciousnesses of millions of multiplex punters. And that doesn't happen every day, even if these filmmakers lost the plot in mistaking an avalanche of disconnected details for complexity. Such hysterical postmodern pastiche can be a strength, if the ensuing indecisive open-endedness prompts exploratory interpretation among viewers. Unfortunately *Vendetta*'s recuperation of its chaotic impulses reproduces, rather than subverts, the authoritarian strategies supposedly subject to critique. A graphic novel's fractured format forces readers to

elaborate its story in a manner film rarely matches (an honourable exception being Robert Rodriguez's uncanny translation of Frank Miller's noir nightmare, *Sin City*). Here, the seamless cinematic flow merely encourages submission to lazy, careless, dishonest (dis)simulation in celebrating the superiority of cynical quietism.

Most disgracefully, the glossy fantasy aesthetic obliterates material and economic degradation or struggle, leaving for motivation only a tawdry bourgeois Oedipal Stockholm Syndrome between aristocratic (anti)hero and nubile middle class disciple. Although an amusingly gratuitous insult to Leninist vanguard vanity, this corresponds to the depressing representation of a passive (and strangely lilywhite) multitude of couch potatoes confronting the military in the finale. With no grievances beyond dissatisfaction with spin, the zombies march in uniform desire for better media and ringside seats at the spectacle. Given the volume of explosives trundling towards Whitehall along the disused underground, all that awaits them is ecstatic annihilation along with most of central London. Any remaining quibbles about the nobility of revolutionary idealism are therefore ultimately superfluous in *V for Vendetta*'s utter contempt for its audience. After all, the mischievous potential of trash lies in travestying it not reinforcing – the delusions of grandeur of power.

Tom Jennings



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84b Whitechapel High Street

[www.hacklab.org.uk](http://www.hacklab.org.uk)

## A Sideways Look

I don't visit him that often, but I quite like my dentist. He doesn't do work that isn't needed, is friendly and talks to me about what I do need done, and what choices I have. I used to get this on the NHS, but not any more. Those of you who don't use a dentist will probably be unaware of how few NHS dentists there are. In the area I live there are only three who will accept new NHS patients.

My dentist had applied, under the government's new contract for dentists, to do NHS work for children, maternity and benefit cases. He got the children's contract, but not the others. This is particularly bad for anyone on maternity on his books, as it means they are stuffed for getting an NHS dentist as no other local dentist is likely to take them on just for the maternity period.

The government had revised the old dentistry contract, which emphasised the amount of treatment done, or 'items of service', often at the expense of quality, sadly something I've had to reflect on with my current dentist rather a lot. Both the British Dental Association (BDA) and the Audit Commission, who reported on the old contract, agreed that they had to get off this 'treadmill'.

However, New Labour are obsessed by targets and have introduced loads into the new dental contract. Instead of items of service, dentists will meet 'units of dental activity'. Obviously there's a world of difference, it's just that the dentists don't see it and are either quitting or signing the new contracts and then registering disputes about the terms and conditions.

The former head of the BDA, Dr John Renshaw, said he would be leaving the NHS after 37 years. He predicted that the waiting list for an NHS dentist in Scarborough, where he practices, will rise from 4,000 to 10,000. A survey by the BDA predicted that NHS cover would fall off dramatically once the contract comes into force and continue to decline. Newly trained dentists are opting immediately to go into private practice because, according to the BDA, they see no future in the NHS.

And of course, this is what the government forget. They are happy enough attacking workers, but dentists are usually self-employed and have a lot more control over their work than employees do. The BDA chair, Susie Sanderson, says that from their research, dentists want off the treadmill, and generally don't earn more in private practice as opposed to the NHS, so this move is being driven by job satisfaction rather than money.

Labour politicians say that the reforms will mean more people will get to see dentists on the NHS. Dentists say otherwise. Admittedly I'd be more tempted to believe almost any profession above politicians, but personal experience does tend to reinforce it in

this case. Ultimately, as a group dentists can look after themselves. It's those of us with toothache who need to worry.

Svartfrosk

## Blast from the Past

Taken from Freedom 8th April 2000, entitled Battling for Britain? on Labour's March 2000 budget.

The economic policies conducted by Western European governments in all their guises over the last twenty years have all been based around the abandonment of the post-war Keynesian settlement with organised labour – a settlement capital had decided it could no longer afford.

De-industrialisation was combined with changed in taxation to transfer wealth back to the rich from the poor. By 1991 52% of the tax cuts implemented in the UK since 1979 have gone to the top 10% of income earners. Measured after housing costs the, the incomes of the poorest tenth in 1991-1992 were 17% lower in real terms than in 1979.

Margaret Thatcher described Nigel Lawson's 1988 budget, which cut the highest rate of income tax from 60% to 40%, as "the epitaph of socialism". In reducing the highest rate of income tax, Lawson gave a total of £2 billion in tax cuts to the top 5% of wage earners.

You might presume that if New Labour was in any way committed to its declared goal of eliminating child poverty, it might begin the task by seeking to reverse some of the give-aways for the rich introduced previously.

Instead it has continued the process of redistribution to the rich with, in this budget, a cut in basic rate income tax (a move which always benefits most those who are taxed the most) and a further reduction in corporation tax, such that businesses will now pay just 10% on the first £10,000 of profits.

Corporation tax in 1979 stood at 52%. It now stands at 30%, "the lowest rate in the history of British corporation tax, the lowest rate of any major country in Europe, and the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere, including Japan and the United States" as Gordon Brown observed.

## The quiz

1. Where were the 'Officegate', 'Villagate' and 'Taxigate' scandals?
2. What was imposed by the Great Western Railway company in 1840 and implemented nationally in 1880?
3. Who was the first English woman to marry a king or direct heir to the throne of England since the 17th century?
4. Who became a union rep because it would give him the chance to make lifelong links with organised crime?

Answers on page 6



## Imagine if...

Anita Roddick just couldn't be happier. The Body Shop, her grand design for a more, ethical and liberal corporate future, had all grown up.

It had been years of hard slog that had made the difference, and kept the natural cosmetic manufacturer on course to become a massive success in the business world.

There were of course little niggles, but she had been assured by her good friends at L'Oreal that these were just part of doing business, and in no way made her experiment in corporate idealism a failure.

They'd be outsourcing jobs for years to cut costs. They had tried strikebreaking at their Soapworks plant in 2005. They'd had to, how else could they keep costs low enough to compete with the high street stores?

Then they had started manufacturing for the 'dodgy' L'Oreal with its 'harmful chemicals' and 'environmental destruction'. How else were they expected to keep expanding?

And now, in the Body Shop's crowning glory, the whole business was now 'inside' the corporate system, bought and owned by L'Oreal, sealing its future.

How else was their dream of an ethical company producing goods people could trust expected to survive long term? She'd mentioned that it was "The best 30th birthday present that The Body Shop could have received." She herself had taken a cool £130m from the deal. Just recompense, she thought, for a lifetime of devotion to fluffy liberalism.

Note from the author: The moral of this tale? Corporations make money by exploiting people. They don't do ethical, folks.

## Listings

8th April No Borders demonstration at Harmondsworth Detention Centre from 11am to 2pm, for transport details email noborderslondon@riseup.net or phone 07986 075829

8th April Demo outside Styal Prison in Cheshire, from 1.30 to 4.30pm, to show opposition to plans to expand the prison and to call for its closure, for more info and directions of how to get there, see alternatives2prison.uk.com

12th April Radical History Network meeting with talk by David King on the history and relevance of opposing ID cards – those opposing the ID computers, cards and systems, e.g. in the Haringey Against ID campaign, are planning mass resistance. The meeting will be held at the Wood Green Labour Club, Stuart Crescent, London N22, at 8pm

24th to 30th April Real nappy week with various events throughout London, for details see wen.org.uk/rnw or write to Women's Environmental Network, PO Box 30626, London E1 1TZ, or call 020 7481 9004

28th April 25th Anniversary Party of the 1 in 12 club with DJs, cocktails, snacks and maybe even a raffle, from 9pm at 21-23 Albion Street, Bradford

29th April Manchester Anarchist Bookfair at The Basement, 24 Lever Street, from 12 noon until 5pm, for more details see manchester@bookfair.org.uk

29th April Pre-Mayday event with the Industrial Workers of the World at The Square Occupied Social Centre, 21 Russell Square, London WC1, from 4pm onwards, see iwww.org or iwww.org.uk for details

30th April Mayday Cabaret for International Workers' Day, upstairs at the Adelphi, Preston, from 7.30pm, for info contact prestonfs@solfed.org.uk or call 07707256682

1st May Kent Anarchist Group meeting in Canterbury to bring together anarchists

in Kent to discuss forming an anarchist group in the county, venue and time to be confirmed, for more info contact swaleagainstar@aol.com

4th May AGM of leading war profiteer BAe Systems, and Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) have plans, for more info ring 020 7281 0297 or see www.caat.org.uk

6th May March and rally against live animal exports, meet 11am at Dover's seafront near the shelter on the approach road to the Eastern Docks, for info see viva.org.uk or call 0117 944 1000

20th May 'Bush in Wonderland' at the American Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London, a tea party with live music and street performers to highlight the Bush administration losing touch with reality, for details see campaigncc.org

20th May Global boycott of Procter & Gamble, see uncaged.co.uk/pg

29th May Kingston Green Fair with stalls of environmental interest, music, workshops, dance, etc., at Canbury Gardens, Lower Ham Road, Kingston, Surrey

1st to 4th June Earthwise Festival in Dorset, see earthwise-uk.com or email info@subgiant.co.uk

3rd June Strawberry Fair in Cambridge, see strawberry-fair.org.uk

3rd June Climate Conference in central London, see campaigncc.org for more

4th June Camden Green Fair, Regents Park, London, 12 noon to 7pm

10th June The Art Not Oil 2006 exhibition opens in London, see artnotoil.org.uk, londonrisingtide.org.uk or email london@risingtide.org.uk

15th to 29th July Earth Activist Training in Gloucestershire, for details email eat2006@riseup.net (closing date for applications is 31st May)

26th August to 4th September Camp for Climate Action in north of England, see www.climatecamp.org.uk

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