

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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JOB CUTS DEEPEN: 16,000 TO GO?

A massive round of job cuts around the country have been announced in the wake of the decision to close the Peugeot factory at Ryton.

Including Peugeot, up to 16,000 losses in a range of industries have been announced in the last two weeks, largely as part of a major new drive by big businesses to outsource large sections of their workforces.

Some of the larger announcements have included:

- Cable giant NTL have announced the loss of between 5-6,000 places at the companies as part of a major outsourcing initiative agreed with their newly merged partner Telewest. The jobs represent just under a third of the company's total workforce. The company is expected to outsource many call centre positions in a move likely to anger unions about the ease with which big business can abandon British workers in favour of cheaper overseas labour. NTL already has deals with Fujitsu and IBM to deal with customer care through staff in India and South Africa. IBM, for instance, deals with customer service for NTL's broadband offering.
- Orange employees are to be among the hardest hit in the country with 2,000 jobs slated for redundancy following a merger between the mobile phone giant and online service provider Wanadoo. Darlington, Bristol, North Tyneside and Peterlee are most vulnerable.

ICI have begun a new round of redundancies as part of an effort to be 'best in class'. The chemical group announced a £340m plan to axe 2,300 people, amounting to eight per cent of the total workforce over the next three years. Estimated savings will be £140m per annum by 2011. It is hoped the impact will be reduced on the UK as the company has already taken all but 4,000 of its staff out of the country.

The two most noticeable cuts however have been in motor industry plants. Cuts at the Peugeot Ryton plant in Coventry directly affect 2,700 people, with a large number of subsidiary jobs potentially also going if the plant shuts its doors as planned.

Since the cuts were first announced late last month, workers at the factory have begun to try and fight the proposed cuts, mounting demonstrations outside car show rooms to put pressure on the French manufacturer not to close production next year.

A short wildcat strike was brought out at Vauxhall's Ellesmere plant on Merseyside after an announcement by the chief of General Motors in Europe, Carl Peter-Foster, boasted that the UK had the easiest labour laws around, and that this was a major reason for a likely 1,000 job cuts at the factory.

GM have subsequently said in a statement that Foster's remark "was to show the robustness of the labour market overall in the UK, and its ability to



Peugeot workers from the Ryton plant along with militants from West Midlands Anarchists and Solidarity Federation staged a demonstration in Digbeth to protest against the planned closure of the plant

absorb jobs, should the decision ultimately be made to reduce employment at the facility in Ellesmere Port."

The company said it had not made any firm decisions, but reiterated the

view that job cuts in the UK would be more desirable than elsewhere in Europe where legislation is not so 'robust'.

Jobs are also going – each in the hundreds – at the HP Foods factory in

Birmingham, the Communsis printing plant in Altrincham, CE Marshall in Willenhall and Saint-Gobain Pipelines in Staveley.

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ASYLUM DESPAIR

Following alleged attacks on prisoners at a major detention centre for asylum seekers in London, four people have tried to kill themselves within a 12-hour period, and others are no longer leaving their rooms, according to sources inside the facility.

A minor riot broke out at Colnbrook detention centre after officers beat one man for asking for more food at lunchtime, and broke the arm of another who shouted for them to stop, according to detainees.

Four days later on 11th May, two people tried to kill themselves following a failed attempt by inmate Tariq Rashid to cut his own throat. A small number of people also continue to hunger strike.

One inmate contacted by Freedom said: "On Sunday there was a big fight, this morning I didn't even go out from my room. There are people who have been here for two years, and they aren't happy. There are seven people in my wing still on hunger strike, I don't know about the other wings they don't let us speak to each other."

On 7th May, an Algerian inmate got into an argument with the manager on duty, over the amount of food he was entitled to for lunch. When the manager resorted to some physical contact to make his point, the prisoner refused to speak further on the subject and would not leave the counter until he had the food.

Having collected his lunch and brought it to his room, he was taken outside and beaten by officers, making fellow inmates so angry in their cells that supporting officers were called, according to the Detainee Support Network.

Six descended on a single Algerian, banging on his door, and broke his arm, say the group: "The injustice of six men beating, choking, one man and an

additional five DCOs, fighting the remaining two Algerians, was too much. Trays, plates of food, the tray rack and cutlery was used on the officers, and the whole wing was sealed off."

The following Tuesday, an inmate reported three suicide attempts at Colnbrook. The first attempt was by Tariq Rashid, who has been detained for over a year and a half. Tariq is so desperate to get out that he volunteered to go back to Iraq ten times – a measure refused by the Home Office.

After reading a monthly report which told him his stay would be extended again, Tariq sank into depression and that evening broke a shaving razor and tried to slit his throat open.

By the morning two more men had made attempts. One, an unnamed Jamaican, tried to jump from a second floor window, but was restrained by other inmates. Another man from Iran was found by his room mate hanging from the door handle, by his own bedsheet.

for more info see noborders.org.uk

FREEPORT DUMP

Documents leaked to an environmental group from Freeport McMoran, owners of the giant Freeport mine in West Papua, have seemingly confirmed local accusations that the company is knowingly polluting the country's rivers with heavy metals such as copper and arsenic.

Indonesian environmental group Wahli have found that mine bosses have put up to a billion tonnes of mine waste through the world heritage Lorentz National Park, with potentially devastating consequences for local people and wildlife. The damning report comes from Freeport's own experts, and found that 'tailings' from the company are reaching the coastal part of the island, with copper contamination being found in aquatic animals. Animals tested upstream were clear of contamination.

The methods used to dump the waste, putting it through the local river system, are illegal but the environmental group say the Indonesian government are reluctant to challenge the power of the mining concern in the area. Any challenge

would be complicated by the government's own long-term policy of hiring out their local armed forces to the company to protect against insurgencies in the area.

The government receives around £20m a year from the practice, and Indonesian troops have in the past killed dissenters campaigning on environmental grounds. West Papuan independence campaigners have claimed for over a decade that the company is polluting the water.

The Indonesian government however denied the claims, saying their own scrutiny team found no evidence that any law was being breached, and admitting only that there was 'minor' pollution.

The Wahli group have called on the government to suspend mining operations until the company cleans its act up.

West Papuan groups have launched several protests against the mining recently, accusing it of environmental and human rights abuses. Four security force officers and one civilian were killed during a anti-Freeport protest in the West Papuan capital of Jayapura recently.

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Home and away

Asbestos payouts reduced

A ruling from the House of Lords on 3rd May has drastically reduced payouts for deaths related to asbestos to the families of those killed. The ruling overturned an earlier hearing in which the court of appeal accepted that each employer in cases involving asbestos should be held liable for the whole amount. Because the disease attached to asbestos inhalation, mesothelioma, can take 40 years to develop, many of the companies involved are no longer operating and cannot be tracked down.

About 1,900 people die in the UK each year from mesothelioma, and the total is predicted to reach 160,000.

The Wal-Mart 'family'

Ballots for strike action at supermarket chain Asda have begun after the company finally refused to back down and live up to its promises over improvements to employee conditions. The retailer, a subsidiary of Wal-Mart, had said at a House of Commons meeting in April that it would deliver a raft of improvements, but GMB union negotiators found after an investigation of the contents of the truce that there would be no change.

A unanimous vote by shop stewards at 20 affected UK distribution centres brought the move to strike back on the agenda. Members have attacked 'unhealthy work rates', demanded the reinstatement of a bonus dropped in 2005, and the right to collective bargaining.

The company was fined £850,000 in February for offering a 10% rise in wages to any worker prepared to give up their collective bargaining rights at their County Durham depot.

Brian loses case

Brian Haw, who has camped outside Parliament for nearly five years as a reminder of their genocidal war-mongering, has been told he will have to seek police permission to hold any further demonstration, and that they are likely to impose conditions.

The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act came into force on the 1st August last year, section 132 of which requires any person intending to hold a demonstration near parliament to seek authorisation from the police and to adhere to any conditions that the police may apply.

Permission to appeal to the House of Lords is refused, and Brian is banned from Parliament Square until any future judgement, though he is allowed to independently petition the law lords.

EDO lose out

Arms giant EDO MBM have lost after final attempts to support an injunction against protesters failed, and could now be now liable for tens of thousands in damages, while having racked up over £1m in costs.

Andrew Beckett, press spokesman for SMASH EDO said, "We were accused of harassment by EDO, and Sussex Police, who secured an interim injunction on trumped-up evidence, but it must be clear to the world after the collapse of the injunction and the dropping of so many criminal cases that we are ones who have been harassed, and it is they in who have been harassing us."

EDO brought an injunction claim against 14 protesters and two protest groups in April 2005, and by bringing spurious evidence into the case were able to get an interim injunction against all protesters (i.e. any member of the public campaigning outside the factory, regardless of their conduct).

Around the world

BOLIVIA: A series of major public revolts over gas supplies has borne fruit as the major industries begin to be brought under public ownership. Under Decree 28701, royalties paid to the Bolivian government by energy companies will increase from half to 82%. Companies will be obliged to sell 51% of their holdings to the Bolivian government and have six months to renegotiate contracts or leave. The law fulfils an election promise by left wing president, Evo Morales, to bring natural resources back under public control after two former presidents were ousted for failing to reform the sector.

Although the move was greeted by celebrations in the capital, La Paz, international investors are less excited. Amongst them is the government of Brazil, run by former Trade Union activist and now market friendly Lula Ignacio da Silva. The Brazilian state owned energy company, Petrobras, which has £1bn invested in Bolivia's gas fields, has called the move 'unfriendly' and was, perhaps, a little surprised given that the government admitted that the military seizure of its facilities in Santa Cruz, had caught Brazilian ministers 'with their pants down'.

Bolivia is currently following Venezuela's decision to form an assembly to draw up a more radical, indigenous-friendly constitution and may be joined by Peru following Humala's talk of rewriting their constitution in order to "stop the process of neo-colonialism in Peru."

BRAZIL: Labour unions have said that they expect more than 5,700 jobs to go from a major Vauxhall plant there, but the German car manufacturer denied such a figure.

However, Volkswagen's Brazil unit have admitted it may have to lay off workers, citing a strong local currency as a cause of slow exports.

Thousands of job cuts and production slashes are 'inevitable', Volkswagen said in a statement on Wednesday. Brazil chief Hans-Christian Maernar said production costs need to fall by 25%. The 5,700 jobs would represent over a quarter of the company's total workforce in the country.

Maernar said the car manufacturer may forgo exporting 100,000 cars a year through 2008 as the real BRBY is at a five-year high against the dollar.

CHECHNYA: International access to the village of Russian-backed Chechen warlord Ramzan Kadyrov has been denied to human rights groups after they attempted to gain access to the alleged torture site.

Officials of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) were turned away from Tsentoroi, located 55 km south-east of the regional capital Grozny.

Kadyrov, who effectively took control of the country after his father was assassinated two years ago this month, is thought to have set up secret jails across the region to clamp down on dissenters.

Although President Alu Alkhanov is nominally President, Kadyrov, who hold the title of Prime Minister, also runs his father's old 1,500-strong security force, a group thought to have abducted and murdered hundreds of civilians.

In December 2004, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded him the country's highest award, the Hero of Russia medal, in a Kremlin endorsement of his authority.

INDIA: A ship carrying over 900 tonnes of asbestos is to be broken up on the Indian coast for scrap, leading to fears over health dangers to the workforce and damage to the surrounding

environment. The SS Fance, owned by Regent Shipping in India, has been decommissioned, with the scrap steel destined for the Indian markets. The craft is however contaminated with toxic materials including globally banned polychlorinated biphenyl and heavy metals. Up to 10,000 workers could be put at risk if the ship is broken up, according to environmental groups.

The news follows the recent recalling of French aircraft carrier Clemenceau, which had also been bound for Alang with a massive cargo of asbestos in its hull, after protests from Indian trade unions and environmental groups.

The ship is to be taken to the Alang shipyard in Gujarat state for dismantling later this month. Ship breaking is considered to be one of the most pollutant industries in the world.

PHILIPPINES: A deputation from the International Labour Solidarity Mission (ILSM) have found an 'alarming' rise in the number of cases of human rights violations in the country, with the Arroyo administration implicated in a large number of abductions and murders of unionists, labour organisers, activists and supporters.

ILSM have reported that all the victims they had investigated had been respected members of their communities, and in many cases had devoted their lives to the defence of the rights of sugar workers.

The group found that the killing they investigated had been well-planned and pre-meditated. A common pattern emerged that individuals were first watched, then threatened and finally killed in isolated locations to avoid witnesses.

The group condemned the police force, and the government's Commission on Human Rights for not bothering, in some cases, to even talk to family

members of the victims or visit the site of the murder.

Evidence points to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for all the killings, harassments and abductions, and other human rights violations against cause-oriented organisers and their supporters nationwide, said Paul Quintos, executive director of the Ecumenical Institute for Labour Education and Research (EILER) and designated spokesperson of the mission.

He added that the atrocities have been occurring alongside the Arroyo government's vilification campaign and constant branding of these organisations as 'enemies of the state'.

RUSSIA: Authorities have been condemned as new figures have revealed the country saw at least the equivalent of one assault a day and two murders a month by racist groups. The real figure is thought to be far higher however due to fear and a lack of comprehensive records. Many of those attacked believe the police to be unconcerned or even pro the abuse.

Official reports estimates that more than 5,000 people in Russia belong to extremist racist groups, while NGOs estimate it could be as high as 50,000. The groups are well-organised and linked in many cases to fascist ideologies.

Anti-racists have also been targeted by the groups, with even people showing a liking for rap or reggae music being attacked.

Most recently, severe oppression of Chechens in the Federation has begun to break out, following a spate of high-profile bombings and hijackings by nationalist groups from the region.

• In none of the above cases have the UK or US governments condemned or intervened. Occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq and sanctions against Cuba and Iran are however ongoing.

Prison news

Barcelona repression continues

The repression against squatters and Anarchists in Barcelona continues. On 9th May four more young people were arrested and are currently being held on terrorism charges. While Ignasi, arrested on 24th February, has now been released on bail, his co-accused, Ruben, remains in prison.

On the day of Ruben's bail hearing, the Judge sitting on the case received a letter-bomb and, because of this, is demanding that Ruben, who appears to have the best possible alibi for the untimely attack, should receive a prison sentence of 100 years.

On 1st May there was a march to Barcelona's Quatre Camins prison in support of Ruben and the other anarchist prisoners. The 'Barcelona Six', some of whom have been in custody for nearly three years now, have also recently been sentenced, but since the sentences have yet to be ratified details are not being released. Spain has no legal aid system, so people in Barcelona are desperately in need of funds to help defend those arrested and imprisoned. All other

forms of solidarity with the prisoners is also encouraged. For more information on the repression against anarchists in Barcelona at www.presosalacalle.tk

New animal rights prisoners

In a widely publicised case, four British animal rights activists have received sentences of up to 12 years for their part in the campaign against a farm which bred guinea pigs for use in experiments. The four are:

- Josephine Mayo (new prisoner), HMP Peterborough, Saville Road, Westfield, Peterborough, PE3 7PD.
- John Smith (TB4887), HMP Nottingham, Perry Road, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AG.
- Jon Ablewhite (TB4885), HMP Nottingham, Perry Road, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AG.
- Kerry Whitburn (TB4886), HMP Nottingham, Perry Road, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AG.

Anarchists arrested in Italy

On the 4th May ten anarchists from the environmental activist group Il Silvestre

were arrested during raids in Pisa, Italy. They are accused of using explosives to damage an electricity pylon in the mountains near Pisa, which the police say was a protest against nuclear power. Five of those arrested have been placed under strict house arrest, while the others have been remanded in custody. The details of the prisoners are:

- Costantino Ragusa, Piazza Filangeri 2, 20123 Milano, Italy.
- Silvia Guerini, Via Don Bosco 43, 56100 Pisa, Italy.
- Federico Bonamici, Via Don Bosco 43, 56100 Pisa, Italy.
- Giuseppe Bonamici, Via Don Bosco 43, 56100 Pisa, Italy.
- Benedetta Galante, Via San Giorgio 110, 55100 Lucca, Italy.

On the same day as the raids in Pisa, three anarchists were also arrested in Rome for allegedly stealing a car. Those arrested include former animal rights prisoner Sergio Maria Stefani, who has been remanded in custody along with one of the others arrested. The third person has been placed under house arrest. Details of the two prisoners are:

- Sergio Maria Stefani, Via della Lungara 29, 00185 Roma, Italy.
- Gabriele Onofri, Via della Lungara, 29, 00185 Roma, Italy.

American antifascist prisoner

An American woman, Lasandra Burwell, has been sentenced to five years imprisonment for throwing bricks at the cops during the anti-fascist riot in Toledo, Ohio last October. She would welcome books and letters of support.

- Lasandra Burwell W063658, Ohio Reformatory for Women, 1479 Collins Ave. Marysville, OH 43040, USA.

Dutch activist arrested in Switzerland

A Dutch activist, Sven Erik van Hasselt, has been remanded in custody in Switzerland for allegedly spray-painting the side of a pharmaceutical building.

- Sven Erik van Hasselt, Untersuchungsgefängnis Basel-Stadt, Innere Margarethenstr. 18, CH-4051 Basel, Switzerland.

News

Live longer, for less

Developments in the public and private pensions sectors have added yet more problems for future retirees, reports Rob Ray

A final agreement has been reached by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown over the likely path of the major pensions reforms to be brought through over the next few years, following the earlier recommendations of the Turner report.

Meanwhile, in the private sector, rail union the RMT have agreed to ballot for industrial action over threats to their own pension system, and general union Amicus claim to have found abuse of the 'pensions ringfencing' system first exploited by Marconi last year.

Blair and Brown have laid out a plan which would see the full state pension retiring age rise to 65 by the year 2024, going up to 68 by 2050, while relinking the pension payout itself to average earnings, rather than the slower-rising goods prices.

The government is likely to begin putting larger state increases on the table in 2012, along with a boost for women working as carers, who will receive a full pension after 30 years' work.

Legislation on a bill implementing the policies, but not the link to earnings, will be introduced in November, and includes a caveat that if the 'fiscal position' changes, Gordon Brown will be able to rethink the plan.

However the move, which closely matches the original recommendations of the Turner report, has come under sustained fire over its massive inequalities. Critics have pointed out a large part of the poorer sections of society will effectively be unable to claim their pensions at all, as tough living and working conditions mean that less well off sectors will not actually live long enough to claim the state pension.

Workers will also, it seems likely, be placed into a 'soft compulsion' second pension scheme, the National Pensions Saving Scheme, which will be automatic unless workers deliberately opt out.

In the private sector, the RMT rail union have begun to ballot for industrial action over planned reductions to their pension schemes.

The ballot could see unionists out in June against employer attempts to close pension schemes to new staff, increase employee contributions and cut final payouts.

Higher employee contributions are set to be introduced from July, which unions have said works as a deadline for a deal to be agreed. The vote will include train drivers, engineers, office staff and signallers.

Following the move to unilaterally increase workers' pension contributions and close existing schemes, Network Rail has condemned the response and said unions were using rail passengers and employees as pawns in the campaign.

Following privatisation, the Railway Pension Scheme was fragmented into a hundred different sections. There are significant deficits in many sections partly through poor financial returns but mainly as a result of the actuary changing mortality assumptions on the basis that pensioners are living longer. Another significant cause of the deficits, however, is due to the structure and exploitation of the Railway Pensions Scheme.

Professor Jean Shaoul of Manchester University has calculated that since privatisation around £800m a year has been taken out of the industry as



returns to private lenders and investors.

Amicus have also started to raise questions over a private pension scheme, this time in industrial shipping, oil and engineering company Kvaerner.

The company has been absolved of all responsibility after following telecoms-

giant Marconi's lead in effectively buying itself out of the company pension scheme.

The move, which was approved by the government's Pensions Regulator, saw Kvaerner pay £101 million into the scheme, which currently serves 31,000

employees and has a basic float of £1.1bn.

Amicus has raised concerns with the regulator that Kvaerner's deal breaches legislation laid down in 2003 that says solvent companies offloading their pensions obligations should leave the funds adequately provided for.

NHS Cuts top 11,000

A joint survey carried out by the Royal College of Midwives and the TUC-affiliated Chartered Society of Physiotherapy at the start of May has found that their near 100,000 members were concerned about shrinking maternity budgets, recruitment freezes and staff cuts, plus increased waiting times for physiotherapy treatment. The unions pointed out that staff "morale is low and this cannot be good for patient care."

Job cuts across the NHS have now topped 11,000 according to NHS Watch (nhswatch.info/jobbedlosses.html#totals). The group has also identified over 1,000 beds that have been lost.

The Royal College of Nursing predicts that the final figure will exceed 13,000. Latest trusts to announce job losses according to the BBC include Pennine Acute Trust, which runs four Greater Manchester hospitals, which says it might axe up to 800 posts as it struggles to cope with a deficit of £21m. Kennet and North Wiltshire

Primary Care Trust and the West Wiltshire Trust have announced a plan which could see the loss of more than 80 management and administration posts. Managers at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital warn up to 450 jobs could be scrapped as part of plans to reduce a £14.8m budget deficit.

At the heart of the current NHS crisis is the government's determination to introduce market style reforms into the health care. These will see large acute hospitals competing against each other for patients. The more patients a hospital treats the more money it will receive. Given that the amount of money they receive is centrally fixed the cheaper they can treat people the more profit they will be able to make. This may have implications for national pay contracts. In the community NHS providers will have to compete with private sector health care organisations to provide services. The current job losses could just be the tip of the iceberg as the government's reforms

really kick in this year. An independent health think tank, Reform, has predicted that 100,000 jobs might ultimately be at risk.

Freedom has already reported that mental health trusts have fared particularly badly in the current environment. Nearly a fifth are making expenditure reductions amounting to £16.5m. Children's services are another area that has been badly hit, leading to the resignation of a health minister in protest.

Resistance to the cuts is growing. Some 5,000 workers and residents marched through Stoke-on-Trent on Mayday weekend to protest at the proposed 1,000 job losses at North Staffs hospital. Unison and the RCN lobbied Parliament on 11th May. Local campaigns are springing up across the country. There is though no single concerted campaign nationally against the cuts. The numerous NHS trade unions and patient groups have not united.

Richard Griffin

Nuclear waste leak

Nuclear waste site Sellafield is in trouble for the second time in less than a month after the Health and Safety Executive announced it is bringing a prosecution in connection with a major leak.

An investigation into the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (Thorp) indicated that there had been a leak of radioactive 'liquor' inside a shielded facility last year which had gone unnoticed for some time.

Under the Nuclear Installations Act, managers at the plant are alleged to have failed to ensure safety systems are in good working order, and that leaks are detected and reported.

The news follows an incident on 20th April, where a nuclear flask fell off a containment wagon at the site.

Although no radioactive substances were said to have been leaked, transports were diverted away from the main gates, and an emergency response unit was set up.

The waste had been transported to the site by rail, and was being lifted

over to a truck to move to its final destination when it slipped and fell. The container did not seem to have broken.

The incident itself came only three weeks after the derailment of another train, this time unloaded, which happened during a test shunting operation for nuclear waste to be put back to sea and returned to international customers.

The facility is currently going through a bidding process as part of the BNFL group to be moved into the private sector. Freedom, in an investigation last year, analysed the front runners for the huge contract, and found that all five had either recently been prosecuted for breaches of safety at other plants around the world, or had never worked in nuclear power before.

Fears have been raised that placing nuclear contracts into the hands of US-based companies which have already shown a tendency to cut corners could be a recipe for disaster.

News

Outrage as Atenco is sacked

Ellen Kemp reports on the massive police assault on a Mexican town which fought back against their brutality

A political crisis is engulfing Mexico after a police attack on the people of Atenco and Texcoco, two towns that lie 20 miles to the east of Mexico City. On 3rd May flower sellers in Texcoco were attacked by the police as they attempted to set up their stalls in the local market. They then sought solidarity from the people of the town and also from the Frente de Los Pueblos en Defensa de La Tierra (People's Front in defence of the Land - FPDT) that is based in the nearby town of Atenco.

People from Atenco blocked the local highway and the police responded by drafting in a further 600 to lift the blockade. In the ensuing battles hundreds were injured, a 14-year-old boy was shot dead by the police, 100 arrested and 11 police officers were taken hostage. The officers were later handed over to the Red Cross.

In reprisal 3,000 paramilitary police organised an early morning attack against the community of Atenco. The town was surrounded at 6.30 am and then the police launched their rampage, homes were ransacked, many more arrested, some women were raped in police vans and many people were given severe beatings.

Others suffered severe injuries from the firing of metal tear gas pellets fired at point blank range. Alexis Benhumea, a student, suffered a double fracture to his skull as a result. For 12 hours the police siege stopped his family being able to get him urgent medical treatment. He is now in a coma and his life hangs in the balance. In order to silence news of the brutality, journalists, camera crews

and photographers were singled out for beatings and arrests. Foreign journalists have been illegally (i.e. without a court order) deported. The leadership of the FPDT was arrested. In all, over 230 were arrested and 18 people are still unaccounted for.

Support for the people of Atenco erupted across most of Mexico, with protests in Chiapas, Mexico City, and Guadajara. These protests have continued throughout the week following the attack, with students in Mexico city blocking the main Mexico-Guernavaca highway. Protests also took place in cities in the US. The Zapatistas immediately gave their support to Atenco. A Red Alert was issued announcing the cessation of all activities of the Zapatistas and the 'Other Campaign' (see Freedom, 14th January 2006) and urging all support to be given to Atenco. On 7th May the Zapatistas marched in solidarity to Atenco, by the time they arrived the march had grown from 2,000 to over 10,000 people.

The attack on the community of Atenco has wider implications than merely the police seeking revenge for its initial defeat. The farmers of Atenco defeated the combined forces of the state and its compliant media when in 2002 they halted proposals for the compulsory confiscation of their land and the building of an airport. This defeat had been a major embarrassment for the President Fox's government.

The FPDT are also part of the Other Campaign and its members have provided security for the leadership of the Zapatistas. The media's lies about



EVICTED IN SOUTH KOREA: A massive eviction involving 16,000 police, army personnel and plainclothes ex-military strike breakers have violently attacked and destroyed the Daechuri primary school which had become the headquarters of a farmers' group resisting the enforced militarisation of the area. The army surrounded the occupied area with around 25km of barbed wire fencing, having arrested 400 people and severely injured over 200 in fighting at the school. There have been major demonstrations in the capital in protest at the attacks, which aim to placate the 2,328 acre area in preparation for the building of a new US military base.

the events at Atenco sought to discredit both of these organisations, for example it was reported that the death of the 14-year-old was caused by a firecracker thrown by rioters. President Fox is also

trying to constantly discredit the left candidate who is currently leading the polls for July's presidential election. For the Other Campaign these events will not be forgotten as Subcomandante

Marcos declared "Close the highways, close the streets, fly, paint, whatever occurs to you, in a civil and peaceful manner. Atenco cannot be left all to itself."

Can you hear the people sing?

An investigative journalist has attacked revelations over internal call monitoring in the US as being just the tip of the iceberg. Greg Palast, who has just completed a major investigation into the issue, has found evidence that a major data-mining company has been cross-checking information on billions of files regarding the daily actions - and political preferences - of the entire country, and selling them to the FBI to cross-check with their own records. The revelation goes far beyond a disclosure on 11th May that the Bush administration had been secretly collecting the phone records of millions of people by obtaining records from telecommunications giants AT&T, Verizon and BellSouth.

Palast, who has dubbed the process the 'privatisation of the FBI', and an investigative team, alleges that since 1997 Choicepoint have made billions of dollars from national security contracts, doing work which, while legal in the private sector, would be against US law

if done by a governmental group.

Information gathered includes medical details, personal shopping preferences, voting details and associations, which are supposedly protected individual information under the constitution (unless you are suspected of committing a crime).

Writing for online newsgroup Buzzflash, Greg said: "ChoicePoint's board has more Republicans than a Palm Beach country club. It was funded, and its board stocked, by such Republican sugar daddies as billionaires Bernie Marcus and Ken Langone - even after Langone was charged by the Securities Exchange Commission with abuse of inside information."

Following on from the collection of personal data, investigators have found that the next step is DNA sampling, linked in to all other records and then sold to the FBI, according to Palast.

Choicepoint, who have recently been given the largest fine in Federal Trade Commission history for letting identity

thieves purchase 145,000 credit card records, made \$270m in the first quarter of 2006. Last month the company won a contract to integrate all of the FBI's own data mining tools using their software.

The news that phone call data is being given away could have significant consequences for the telecommunications companies in America. Currently, the government is safe from prosecution as it's not illegal for the government to buy information on its citizens, only for companies to sell it. Companies that violate the law are subject to being sued and potentially paying damages of at least \$1,000 per violation per customer.

A 1979 high court ruling found that the public could not expect their phone records to be held in private, a measure which allowed the government to obtain records without a warrant. The ruling was followed by the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, which makes it illegal for companies to divulge personal information including phone records.

ESF in Athens

Around 80,000 people marched through the centre of Athens to celebrate the end of this year's European Social Forum. The event, which has been marked in recent years by a return to the debates of the nineteenth century over 'horizontal' and 'vertical' organisation (anarchist and centralised organising), again saw a major contingent of libertarians split off from the main body.

Themes arising at the ESF this year tended to focus around the possibility of war with Iran, the continuing rebellions against neo-liberalism in Bolivia, and the victory in France against the CPE first employment contract earlier this year.

But complaints from the anarchist attendees abounded about the dominance of the socialist groups over the event.

At major events such as the anti war meetings, socialist groups dominated the stage, and calls were made for the ESF - known as a forum rather than a platform - to 'officially' condemn the

neoliberal 'Washington model' being imposed in Europe. Calls were also made to unconditionally support the uprisings in Afghanistan and Iraq, with little acknowledgement made that they might be reactionary in character themselves.

A third major theme was of immigrant rights, which has hit the UK headlines recently after a major hunger strike at Colnbrook detention centre (see page 1).

Clashes broke out around the fringes of the final march in Athens. A few hours before the ESF march took place, anarchists from the libertarian-anarchists forum made a separate march.

They broke up into smaller groups of 400-500 people and even before the ESF march had started they started targeting police headquarters and several banks. As they moved on they attacked the US embassy, the Hilton hotel, the Italian embassy, riot police guarding the house of parliament, McDonalds restaurant and several department stores.

Feature

Liars and magicians

James Horrox analyses the raft of recent legislative reforms which are giving the government ever more powers to silence dissent

While we in Britain continue to marvel at the increasingly transparent and unashamed manner in which the US government goes about insulting the intelligence of its citizens, here in the United Kingdom our own leaders have been achieving much the same results without having to resort to the kind of overt, flag-waving nationalism whipped up in the wake of 9/11. By means of the subtle, and increasingly not-so-subtle exploitation of our vulnerable 'constitution', the British government has left its citizens at the mercy of, to quote one prominent British journalist, "a host of laws whose ostensible purpose is the reverse of their actual effect".

The latest in a long line of such controversial and back-handed legislation is The Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill (LRRB), which has already managed to pass its second parliamentary reading. Dubbed 'the dictatorship Bill', this is perhaps the most chilling piece of legislation to have been drawn up by New Labour to date being as it is, in the words of John Pilger, is "utterly totalitarian in scope".

Before taking the Act itself at face-value I think it is important to recap briefly on some of the events that have taken place in this country over the last five years. Why? Because, strip away the spin and the double-think inherent in New Labour's *modus operandi*, and fundamentally what we have seen since 2001 smacks unmistakably of tyranny.

The death of free speech in the United Kingdom: the story so far...

It is perhaps the case of veteran peace-activist Walter Wolfgang that provided the most shocking and certainly most public display to date of the government's fear of free speech, giving the nation a valuable insight into exactly how dissenters will be dealt with under the New Labour regime. During a speech by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw at the party conference in the Autumn of 2005, the 82-year-old party member was violently ejected from the conference hall by two of the conference's 'security guards'. His crime? Shouting "nonsense" during Straw's tired soliloquising about bringing democracy to Iraq.

It is the Terrorism Act (2001), Section 44 in particular, that has been at the forefront of the controversy following Mr Wolfgang's experience, and in a documentary the octogenarian activist drew attention to some of the many highly-publicised cases to date of this piece of legislation being abused to further The Party's own ends. One protester in Brighton for example, 80-year old John Catt, who served in the RAF during World War Two found himself at the mercy of the Sussex Police

for wearing a T-shirt bearing the words 'Bush Blair Sharon to be tried for war crimes torture human rights abuse' and, 'the leaders of rogue states'. The stop-and-search form filled out by the police officer stated, under grounds for intervention, "carrying placard [sic] and T-shirt with anti-Blair info". The purpose of the stop and search was recorded as 'terrorism'.

The inescapable logic of this leaves us with the sinister conclusion that 'anti-Blair info' = 'terrorism'.

David Blunkett, the Home Secretary responsible for instigating this legislation, repeatedly defended the Terrorism Act, assuring the nation that "powers under this legislation are applied solely for the prevention and investigation of acts of terrorism." As demonstrated by the many instances which have found their way into the mainstream media, this has turned out to be manifestly not the case.

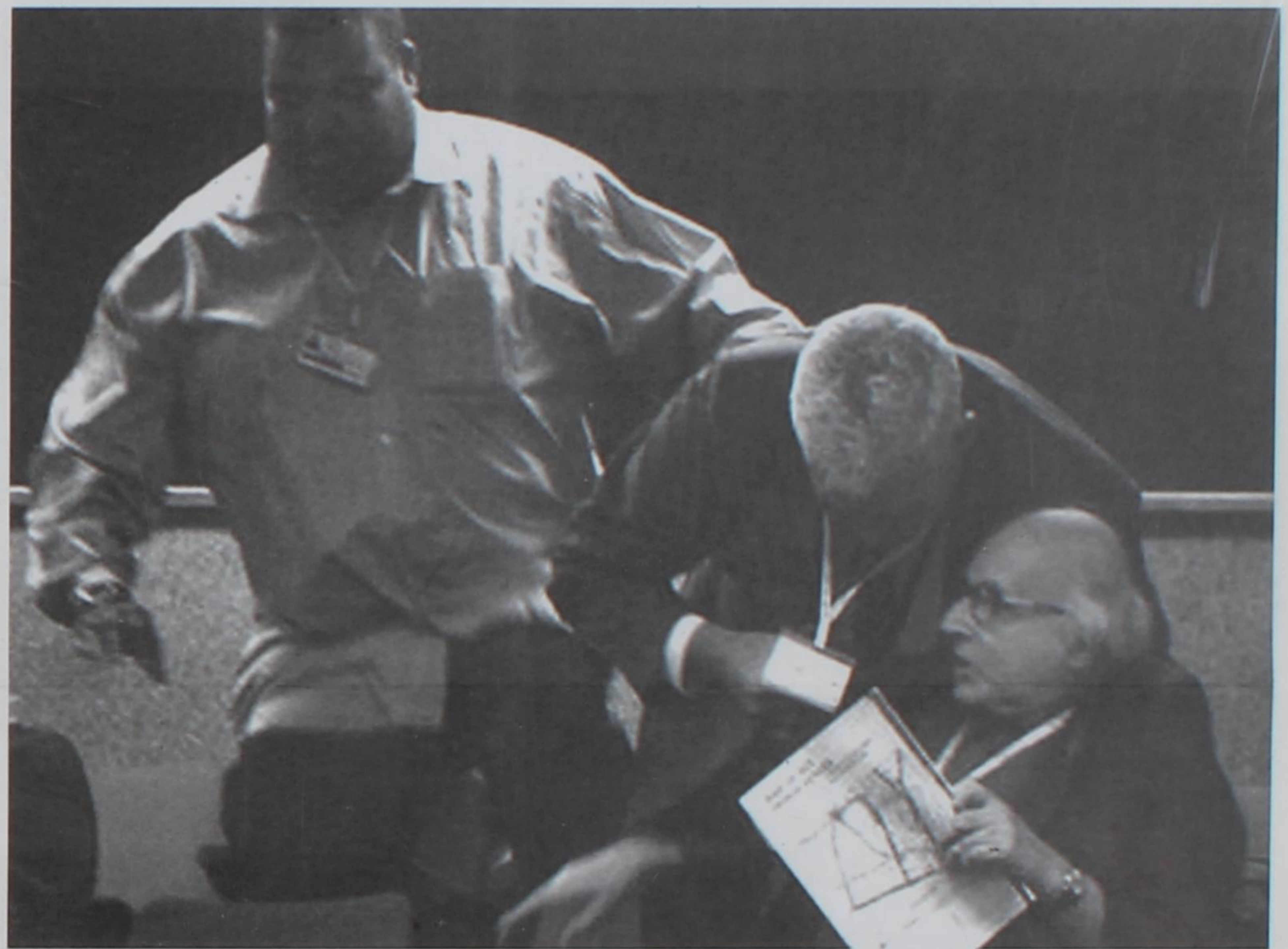
But the implications of New Labour's anti-terrorism legislation run deeper than the annihilation of free speech. The Terrorism Act (2000), Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act (2001), Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000), the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2005) and a host of other comparable legislation have removed many of our most basic civil liberties, leaving UK citizens vulnerable to arbitrary arrest, imprisonment without charge or trial and denying them access to legal representation.

Time after time, the government has attempted to justify such extreme legislation as this with the argument that extraordinary situations call for extraordinary measures. In 1943 however, during some of the most difficult times this country has ever faced, Winston Churchill was adamant in his assertion that "the power of the executive to cast a man in prison without formulating any charge known to the law and particularly to deny him the judgement of his peers is in the highest degree odious and is the foundation of all totalitarian government, whether Nazi or Communist."

Churchill's observation came at a time when Britain was facing the very real threat of invasion from the most vicious war-machines the world has ever seen.

But free speech itself has been in jeopardy in this country for many years and there already exists a massive stockpile of legislation for the government to draw on in its mission to quash dissent, much of it originally passed by means of similar manipulation of a so-called 'state of emergency'.

Indeed it is often forgotten that much of Blair's legislation has its foundations in the twenty years of Tory rule inherited by Labour in 1997. In many ways the governments of Thatcher and Major set the wheels in motion, enacting vast



Walter Wolfgang, aged 82, being violently ejected from the Labour Party conference in 2005

swathes of legislation, the notorious Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (1989), and Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) being just two of the more controversial examples.

Legislation of 1988 and 1989 in particular exemplify laws introduced because of a so-called 'emergency' similar to the context of recent terrorism legislation, a perceived threat to national security which subsequently never disappears leaving the legislation still in force. The Thatcher government was responsible for enacting numerous such measures restricting freedom of speech, movement and association on the basis of the IRA threat.

In enacting such laws the Thatcher government set a precedent on which her successor John Major, and ultimately the New Labour machine have since been able to build.

John Major's legislation, specifically the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994), was similarly controversial in its own right at the time, but has over recent years become symptomatic of a wider issue. The Criminal Justice Act is one among many other laws amended by the New Labour government for use for purposes other than those for which they were designed – namely, to silence dissenting voices.

For example, a group of students from Lancaster University were recently detained by police while handing out leaflets during a conference of executives from BAe Systems, DuPont,

GlaxoSmithKline and Shell. The students aimed simply to highlight what they believed to be inappropriate relationships between academic research and business; they didn't intimidate anyone or try to disrupt the conference, but irrespective of the peaceful nature of their protest they were convicted of aggravated trespass under the 1994 Criminal Justice Act which Labour amended in 2003.

Already it seems we have ample evidence of legislation being created, or existing legislation being amended, for use as a weapon against the people of the United Kingdom. So where is all this leading?

Blair's Enabling Act

This is the question which the people of Britain should be paying some serious attention as we lumber towards complete governmental control, particularly as the next chapter in this twisted saga has the clear potential to be a pivotal moment in the history of this country.

The Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill (LRRB) has recently been brought before the House of Commons to replace the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 (RRA), and has caused no small amount of contention among those who are even aware of its existence. Presented to Parliament this Spring as a means of repealing red tape and thus restricting the reach of the state, if passed, the Bill would in reality grant any minister of the Crown the power to

"make provision amending, repealing or replacing any legislation", meaning "any public general Act", or indeed "any rule of law".

To anyone with any knowledge of twentieth century European history, it should be strikingly obvious that this Bill is of serious cause for concern, perhaps more so than any other legislation passed by New Labour to date, being as it is almost identical in its objective to the Enabling Act passed by Adolf Hitler on 23rd March 1933.

The Enabling Act was the second major step (after the Reichstag Fire Decree) by which the Nazis were able to obtain complete dictatorial powers using legal means, with the result that Hitler and his cabinet had a free reign to enact laws without the participation of the Reichstag. Similarly the LRRB of 2006 exploits the United Kingdom's flimsy constitution enabling the government to attain what effectively amounts to absolute power through means which are, due to the nature of our political system, technically legal.

At this juncture in the history of the United Kingdom I don't think it is being sensationalist to suggest that unless the people of this country begin to take serious measures to stem this ever rising tide of authoritarian behaviour by their government, the prophetic words of George Orwell look increasingly likely to become a living reality: "If you want a vision of the future," wrote Orwell, "imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever."

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 67 Number 10

Anarchism

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

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

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

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

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

Angel Alley

The last edition of this paper has been pretty late, and this one may also be, and sadly, it's down to a whole new set of problems.

Although the editorial team is now running like a well-oiled machine (well, when I say oiled, sandpapered perhaps), but the person who has been helping us with the mailout, with a great deal of patience, recently has finally decided he has had enough.

This has left us with a bit of a problem. We have had various people come forward and help, who haven't returned (though it is admittedly not the most exciting job in the world, as various former and current editors can attest to), or haven't been followed up. On those grounds, if we haven't spoken to you recently, apologies – we are all horrendously busy and things get put by the wayside.

If you are interested in helping with the mailout for the paper, we desperately need you, so please do get in touch using the contact details below, or pass by the bookshop and leave us a note of your details.

There is always something to do and, particularly if you can put some regular time in, we are looking for someone to take on the difficult task of organising the distribution of the paper, chasing up helpers for the mailout process, etc.

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 3rd June 2006 and the last day to get copy to us (see contact details above) will be Thursday 25th May.

French lessons for neo-liberal America

One of the standard defences of capitalism is the argument that, in the long term, we are all better off in the long run if we let the market do its magic. In practice, of course, this means letting the bosses do what they want and so workers are encouraged not to fight, not to join unions and generally be 'flexible' (i.e. do what they are told).

When young workers in France took to the streets protesting against a new (neo-liberal) employment laws, there was much shaking of heads. Did they not know that the market order cannot be changed? Did they not realise that neo-liberalism was the future? Did they not recognise their own self-interest? Did they not know that unemployment male unemployment for young people in France was a massive 20.8% compared to 11.8% in America?

Unluckily for the so-called experts, the French youth know their interests far better than those who pontificated about them. Yes, in 2004, the unemployment rate was 20.8% for young males in France. However, this value is so high because so many are in education (only 32.8% of 15-24 year old French males are employed, compared to 61.9% in America). Once you compare like to like, there is no real difference between France and neo-liberal America. The ratio of unemployed to population is 8.6% (France) to 8.3% (USA). The reason for apparently high youth unemployment is due to more French youth in education (only 41.4% of young males are working in France compared to 70.2% in America). Once that is taken into account, French youth unemployment becomes a case of market ideology ignoring the evidence to further its supporters agendas.

The French were right to reject neo-liberalism. Before being forced into an embarrassing U-turn by mass direct action, the French Prime Minister stated that "urgent" action was needed to "bring the French labour market into the modern era". That would be the modern era of McJobs, casualisation, soaring inequality, autocratic management, job insecurity and decades of stagnating wages workers in neo-liberal America face? Little wonder French workers were unhappy. They, rightly, saw the new labour contract as a step along that road and the destruction of the loss of workers' rights which they have fought long and hard to secure. More importantly, they took action to stop this latest neo-liberal assault – and won! They show what is possible when

direct action and solidarity are your weapons.

And what of neo-liberalist ideology? Is America, that paradigm of neo-liberalism, worth following? According to opinion polls, most Americans are unhappy with how the economy is going. One of the reasons is that median incomes have been flat or declining while, over the same period, average incomes have grown (as has productivity growth). For example, since 1998, the US economy has expanded by more than a quarter. However, the median wage has fell by 3.8 per cent. Indeed, this wage stagnation goes back to 1973 (the only exception were a few years in the late 1990s). Given that the median wage represents the income of the middle fifth of Americans, this is obviously important.

The explanation is obvious: soaring inequality. This explains why you can have stagnating wages and rising the average income. It is a classic example of how to lie with statistics. This is particularly the case with averages. For example, if you put Bill Gates in a room with nine homeless guys the average income is \$6 billion each (hell, put Gates in a room with tens of thousands and the average would still be in the millions!). On average, America is wealthier but this wealth is concentrating in fewer and fewer hands. The medium family is not seeing anything trickle down, as promised – rather they have been increasingly exploited.

Not only this, but this growing inequality is also marked by falling class mobility – the bottom 90% of the population have a decreasing chance of moving upwards. In fact, the chance of Americans remaining in the same income bracket as their parents is higher than in every other developed country (barring the UK, of course). This is unsurprising as climbing a hill is far easier than climbing a mountain.

Sadly, the facts of rising inequality and falling social mobility have not seeped into the popular consciousness yet. This is due, undoubtedly, to the role of right-wing propaganda and think-tanks. While fewer than 1% (i.e. the mega-rich) are likely ever to pay it, a sizable proportion of Americans support the abolition of the estate tax on inheritances. In other words, they support a policy which will consolidate inequality and reduce social mobility for future generations!

And in spite of falling social mobility over the last 30 years, most Americans have faith in the American dream. According to New York Times polls, 80% agree with the proposition that "if you are poor and work hard you have a chance of becoming rich." This is up from 60 per cent in 1980.

Faith is the right word. The elite must be laughing their heads off.

Correction

In the Mayday edition of the paper, we ran an article on the 1926 general strike which named Asquith as the Prime Minister at the time. This was a vicious calumny on the reputation of an entirely different Prime Minister who doubtless would have behaved like a saint if put in the same position, and it was in fact Stanley Baldwin who was the villain of the piece.

Our apologies to anyone who was deeply insulted by the intimation that a man instrumental in trying to crush the

suffragettes movement, who started a naval arms race with Germany and then wantonly allowed 500,000 people to be sacrificed by aristocratic morons in World War Two in a strategically ridiculous push on the Somme (never mind the rest of the war 'effort'), could possibly have the nerve to act in such a way.

By the way, no we didn't get any complaints, but a reminder of what that idiot was all about never hurts.

The values presidency?

Much was made by the media of Bush's inauguration speech after he stole the election for the second time. The journalists took his words about ending tyranny across the globe seriously rather than simply laughing. No one who knew anything about US imperialism or the Bush Junta would take his comments remotely seriously. Unsurprisingly, we were proven right when the White House quietly admitted that there would be no change in policy a few days later.

To gain an insight into the gulf between rhetoric and reality, we need only quote Bush describing Azerbaijan at the start of May. According to the White House website, Bush thinks that Azerbaijan is a "modern Muslim country that is able to provide for its citizens, that understands that democracy is the wave of the future." If he bothered to ask, say Amnesty or Human Rights Watch, he would know that the regime engages in the imprisonment and torture of opponents and is riddled with corruption.

No honest person would call this regime a 'democracy' or even tending towards it, particularly if they have read Bush's own State Department's most recent report on the country. This listed numerous violations of human rights including such democratic principles as a restricted right of citizens to peacefully change their government, the torture and beating of persons in custody, arbitrary arrest and detention (particularly of political opponents), excessive use of force to disperse demonstrations, limited workers' rights, police impunity, periodic interference with media freedom as well as violence and sexual discrimination against women.

Somewhat ironically, Bush said of Aliyev (Azerbaijan's ruler) that "We share the same values." Aliyev's government circumvents international law, manipulates elections, reduces media freedom and only came to power in an election marked by so many irregularities than even Bush's own State Department considered it rigged. Just like Bush's America! Perhaps this is what he means when he talks about Azerbaijan becoming "a modern, secular, democratic country"?

So why is Bush saying such nice things about the regime? Simply because Azerbaijan has oil, lots of it.

In addition, it has a large pipeline, a US-backed pipeline which realises several crucial goals for the White House (such as reducing dependence on the Middle East supplies and Russian pipelines). As usual, the US is cuddling to a dictator in order to secure its imperial aims. Equally unsurprisingly, Azerbaijan's ruler is simply the latest in a long line of dictator's Bush has welcomed with open arms.

Job losses

➔ page 1

Meanwhile a major public enquiry into the construction of the Olympic village in London opened with the point that the government-led project would total a loss of 3,000 jobs for the area if the government's own regeneration figures are to be believed.

Michael Finlay pointed out that the government said 14,000 jobs would go from the compulsory purchase and bulldozing of a large swathe of Stratford, but the Olympics would generate only 11,000.



Book reviews

➔ page 7

movement was at the time. Tresca was hated by the anti-organisationalist anarchists who followed Luigi Gaellani and they stopped at nothing to smear him (much to the joy of the Fascists in the 1920s and '30s). Letters from Malatesta, Goldman nor Berkman could not stop the personal attacks. It seems strange to see how, today, a similar process is at work with anti-organisationalist anarchists (such as primitivists) indulging in similar attacks. It would be nice to think we could learn some lessons of the past!

In summary, this is a very interesting book and well recommended. Tresca's memory should be honoured by all fighters for freedom today and Pernicone has done both Tresca and our movement a great service in writing this biography of an undeservingly forgotten champion of freedom. May it inspire many more!

Iain Mackay

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Quiz answers

1. The microscopic lifeforms which float in the air, carried by the wind. It consists of microbes, seeds, pollen and small spiders and insects.
2. 'The Red Flag' was written by Jim Connell on a train between London Bridge and New Cross Gate.
3. The Haymarket Martyrs. Connell told Tom Mann that he was "inspired by the Paris Commune, the heroism of the Russian nihilists, the firmness of the Irish Land-Leaguers and the devotion unto death of the Chicago anarchists."
4. Greenland, which joined as part of Denmark, but left after a referendum in 1985.

REVIEW

AK's new release of American anarchist newspaper 'The Blast' is a work worth dipping into, finds Richard Alexander

I have a golden rule that I normally keep to when reviewing books, and that is I never write the review until I have read the whole book. However, in this case, I'm going to have to break my own rule as this book isn't really something you can 'read' in the same way as a narrative text. And that's because it's a reprint of every issue of the anarchist newspaper *The Blast* published first in San Francisco and later in New York between January 1916 and June 1917. All 29 of them.

Unlike its contemporary, *Mother Earth*, this was an attempt at a street-level weapon for the working class in the class war. It was written by people who were directly involved in (or knew those who were) many of the most important episodes in this period, when the American people were being steered towards involvement in the mass slaughter that was happening in Europe and where any differences in interest between capital and labour was not only bad for business, it was totally unpatriotic.

Not a time when it was easy being a revolutionary – but a time when the anti-state / anti-capital / anti-war message couldn't have been more necessary.

Hence the paper covered at some length such events as the trials of radicals and labour activists such as Warren Billings and Tom Mooney, showing outrage but little surprise at the way the cases against the men were presented and the men convicted with little evidence against them.

The paper covered stories highlighting labour struggles including the IWW at Everett, Washington and more mundane labour disputes throughout the USA. The paper was also internationalist in its coverage with constant reflections on what was happening in France, and the inevitable fate of many of those who

would be conscripted and forced to fight should the USA get drawn into the war.

The paper also had coverage of events in Mexico and of the Magon brothers.* Another issue that concerned the paper was birth control and reports were made of Margaret Sanger's court cases and Sanger herself was given space in the paper. There's also a piece from the Indian National Party on 'The Growth of Revolution in India' and in the last few issues reports and comments on the initial revolution in Russia.

Alongside these reports there were more general pieces, with, amongst others, Alexander Berkman discussing 'Anarchism and Violence', a reprint of Nietzsche on 'Science: God's mortal terror' (Nietzsche was evidently a favourite of both Berkman and Emma Goldman – and as a fund-raising offer readers were offered a 20 volume set of Nietzsche's works as the prize in a raffle), Josiah Warren on 'The Crimes of Government' and Edward Carpenter on 'The Cry of the Nations' to pick a fairly random sample.

The paper also carried the staples of any newspaper – there's small ads for businesses, a regular letters column, appeals for funds, lists of donations, some fairly dire poetry, a column for the young folk, public meetings and lectures, books and pamphlets available from the bookshop (many will be familiar to anyone who has visited Freedom Bookshop in the past 40 years I suspect!) and an assortment of news items and quotes.

Throughout its existence the paper had problems with the US mail service, apparently this state monopoly objected to having to deliver anti-state propaganda and the forces of law and order made regular visits to the offices in their campaign of harassment against it, taking subscription's lists and correspondence (so unlike modern times!)



The Blast, which had strong internationalist sympathies, followed the exploits of the iconic Mexican revolutionaries the Magon brothers

The paper was finally closed down in June 1917 when Berkman was arrested (with Emma Goldman) on charges of inducing people to refuse to register for the draft for the war, which the USA had finally joined in April 1917.

So there you have a glimpse into what the book contains. There is, unsurprisingly, no index, which is a shame but understandable – (there's a project for someone with time and inclination!) The reproduction is very clear and Barry Pateman's introduction does a good job of situating the paper

in both Berkman's own life and within the wider political, social and economic context. As I mentioned this isn't something you'll want to sit down and read right through, rather you can dip into it and then if a particular story grabs you, you can follow that through the issues, seeing how it developed. Overall a fine reproduction of the complete run of the paper, something you'll otherwise never have been able to read unless you had access to wherever the original versions of the copies of the paper were located (surely some sort of acknowledgment

would have been in order?)

Anyway, job well done by AK Press, well worth getting if you're interested in this period of anarchist history.

*The Magon brothers were famed revolutionaries and anarchists of the time, and helped organise (and publicise) major rebellions against the corrupt and greedy government.

The Blast, edited by Alexander Berkman with an introduction by Barry Pateman, AK Press, £15.

BOOKS

Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel

by Nunzio Pernicone
Palgrave Macmillan, £16.99

Carlo Tresca is one of those rebel workers whose memory deserves to be honoured and Pernicone's excellent biography does just that. Pernicone's has previously produced an excellent history of the Italian anarchist movement (*Italian Anarchism: 1864-1892*, Princeton University Press, 1993) and this work is of equal quality and of interest to anarchists. He obviously understands anarchism and writes with sympathy and knowledge about it. Such historians are rare.

Tresca was born to a middle-class family in Italy in the 1879. He soon became a socialist and became active in the Italian Railroad Workers' Federation before emigrating to America at the age of 25. Once there he was elected secretary of the Italian Socialist Federation of North America and he took a full part in the class struggle. He switched political

sympathies from social democracy to syndicalism as he realised the inherent reformism of the former and the importance of the direct action of the latter.

He became associated with the IWW, taking part in strikes of Pennsylvania coal miners before becoming involved in many important (even legendary) industrial disputes. Over time his syndicalism turned into anarcho-syndicalism and he became one of the leading anarchists in America, particularly in the Italian-American community.

Pernicone paints a picture of a deeply colourful and charismatic figure who played a key role in numerous fights for workers' rights. He was a newspaper editor – editing *Il Martello* (The Hammer) for over 20 years – a passionate and powerful writer, an agitator as well as an organiser. He was happiest in the struggle, taking up any call for his help in encouraging Italian workers to strike and fight. His agitation was legendary, including the victorious strike in Lawrence (1912), the Little Falls, New

York textile workers' strike (1912), the New York City hotel workers' strike (1913), the Paterson, New Jersey silk workers' strike (1913), and the Mesabi Range, Minnesota, miners' strike (1916). He also played an important role in the unsuccessful attempt to save Sacco and Vanzetti.

After the First World War, Tresca turned his fire against both fascism and Leninist/Stalinist tyranny. He was an early and passionate opponent of fascism, quickly becoming the leading anti-fascist in America. His activities earned the hatred of Mussolini and his regime as he played a key role (both politically and physically) in stopping the spread of fascism in Italian-American communities (they tried to blow him up in 1926).

Pernicone recounts in much detail how willing the 'democratic' American state was to help Fascist Italy by trying to expel Tresca. He also recounts how Tresca used to send Mussolini a telegram on the latter's birthday. Before emigrating to America, the youthful

Tresca had met with Mussolini (then a left-socialist leader) only to be informed that being in America would turn Tresca into a real revolutionary. Tresca's telegram simply reminded Mussolini that he had been right!

Unlike many during that period, Tresca had no illusions in the Soviet Union. He saw how Lenin's regime had crushed the real revolution in Russia and opposed the new 'socialist' regime as vigorously as he did fascism. During the 1920s, however, Tresca did try to work with all opponents of fascism, even the communists (Tresca did not doubt the bravery of the rank and file and recognised their willingness to fight fascism). His attempts to build anti-fascist united fronts are recounted in some detail by Pernicone, as is Stalinist attempts to control such bodies. This, along with the Stalinist counter-revolutionary role in the Spanish Revolution, caused Tresca's anti-Leninism to grow during the 1930s until such time as he opposed any form of co-operation with the Stalinists. This

earned him their hatred.

Tresca's fight for freedom, equality and solidarity continued right to his assassination at the age of 63. While no one was ever prosecuted for the murder, Pernicone does a good job in evaluating the evidence and conflicting theories (suspects include the Stalinists, the Fascists and the Mafia) before pointing the finger at Mafioso Carmine Galante. Suffice to say, the title of a previous biography of Tresca definitely summed up his life: 'All the right enemies!'

This biography is the product of over thirty years work and the author clearly admires Tresca. However, this is no whitewash and the book shows the flaws as well as strengths of this untiring and fearless champion of liberty and justice. This is a riveting book and not only brings to life Tresca's only amazing story but brings to life the world of radical politics of the time.

One thing which does strike the reader is how sectarian the anarchist

A Sideways Look

One of the many ideas pushed by New Labour that hasn't taken off is the idea of directly elected mayors. A look at one London borough that's just had its elections tells us why that is something to be thankful for.

Firstly, as a resident of said borough, I had the dubious pleasure of being canvassed. By more than one party. It took me by surprise as no one's ever bothered before in all the time I've lived here. But then Labour didn't look like they might lose before - there's nothing like being taken for granted. What Labour didn't have was the numbers to campaign fully. I spoke to local Labour Party members who were still going to vote Labour, but wouldn't put out leaflets or bang on doors. It's at times like these that the party's hierarchy might consider just what motivates the people who do work for them voluntarily, but then the idea of giving up time and money for a cause you believe in isn't fashionable in such circles.

Labour have put out the story that they were affected by national issues - Charles Clarke being incompetent (with a subtext of not being enough of a racist for the Daily Mail), Prescott having an affair, that sort of thing. Apologies to the spin doctors but Labour sort of lost round here because of local factors. I've written about some of them here before.

I say 'sort of lost' because although they lost control of the council, Lewisham benefits from having a directly elected executive Mayor. He gets paid £71,000 a year for making bad decisions. Why can't they just pay management consultants for crap decisions, like every other council does? And while Labour took a hammering in terms of the number of councillors, a 66% majority is required to stop any of the Mayor's daft decisions. A quick survey of the votes showed that he was elected with under 40% of the votes cast. Take into account the turnout, and it falls to one in eight of eligible voters.

The big local issues were Lewisham's poor recycling record, its lack of school places and the council's war on swimming. The latter two are connected, as the council knocked down a school in the north of the borough, then realised it was very short of school places. It failed to find a suitable site where it was needed so opted to demolish the recently refurbished swimming pool in Ladywell and build a school there, though campaigners insist the site is too small. The Mayor promised to open a new, smaller pool elsewhere in Lewisham in 2010, so swimmers would only have to go without a local pool for three years. However, one of the other nearby pools is currently closed for emergency repairs after being run down by the council to make it easier to close, and a new one scheduled for the south of the borough is running years late. Not to

mention it is being built by the same firm who buggered up the Clissold Leisure Centre in Hackney.

The closure of the pool is not a foregone conclusion, some direct action might get the council to think again. Naturally, it's something that should have been tried at the start, rather than imagining that you can achieve anything by electoralism. But at least the Mayor can't claim that he has a mandate to demolish the pool. Every other mayoral candidate didn't want it demolished until an alternative had been built. In fact virtually the only difference in manifestos was that - everyone said remarkably similar things about recycling and the need for a new school - and even Labour were committed to building a new pool. They just didn't want the expense of running the existing one while they did deals with the property developers.

Svartfrosk

Blast from the Past

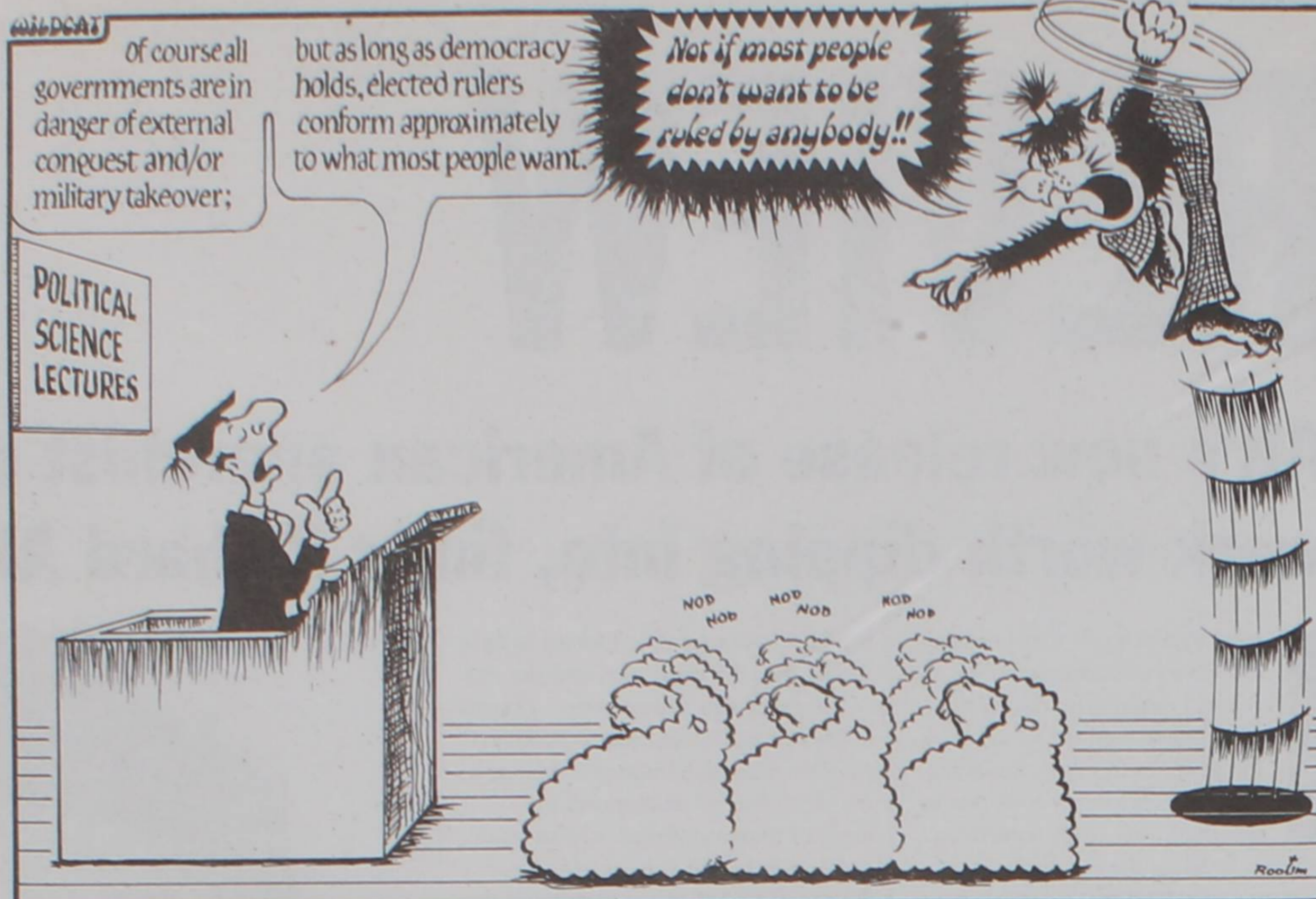
Taken from Freedom 11th May 1963, entitled Take Over the Railways!
The Labour Party leaders are understandably worried lest the proposed strike called by the National Union of Railwaymen for next week damages the Party's chances of winning the next general elections. In a desperate bid to recoup its (electoral) popularity the Government is seeking any kind of excuse to confuse the issues, and above all to create a quite false image of the Labour Party as the mouthpiece of extremists in the Unions ... Undoubtedly the Tory election managers will welcome the NUR strike next week, and will seek to use the inconvenience to which the travelling public has been subjected, for electoral ends ...

On the other hand Mr George Brown's appeal to the railwaymen to call off the strike and allow the Beeching plan to be thrashed out politically ... was hardly less ham-handed. It is true that the future pattern of public transport is a question of direct interest to each one of us. But it is equally a fact that the railway workers are primarily interested in their future livelihoods ... and this is purely an economic issue. As anarchists we consider the political and economic as indivisible, and because we do, we are opposed to capitalist, and all authoritarian, systems.

The quiz

1. What is aeroplankton?
2. Which socialist anthem was written on a train journey from London Bridge?
3. Who inspired the line "it shrouded off our martyred dead" in 'The Red Flag'?
4. Which is the only country to have left the European Union?

Answers on page 6



Imagine if...

Tony Blair bounded into Gordon's office, and shook his hair out, covering the chancellor in mud and water. As the august Scotsman spluttered, Tony leaped excitedly into his lap and started licking his face.

"Off Tony, off! Bad Tony!" Gordon pushed the PM down and gave him a look as he reached for a handy tissue. Tony whimpered a little, then forgot the slight and ran in circles trying to catch the brief he held in his hand.

Gordon sighed and sternly pointed to another chair. "Tony, sit!"

Tony, remembering where he was supposed to be, sat down and began wagging his brief enthusiastically.

"What is Tony?" Tony continued wagging and wuffed a bit.

"What's that you've got there? The report on the London Tube Bombings?" Tony yelped excitedly and yanked on the report as Gordon tried to take it off him. "Give, Tony, Give."

Tony let go and finally got himself together enough to speak. "It's gone our way Gordon, the brief I mean, it completely exonerates the security services and says we should have given them all that money and power earlier and it might have saved everyone!"

Gordon shook his head in exasperation. "Tony, of course it did. It's a public report. I don't even remember the last time one of those went against us."

Tony scratched behind his ear and looked a little downcast. "Oh yeah." But he brightened up immediately, as Tony tends to. "Good though isn't it?"

Gordon patted him on the head. "Yes Tony, very good."

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Listings

22nd May Defend Council Housing: National Conference, discussing resistance to council house sell-offs, privatisation and more, from 11am to 4.30pm at TUC, Congress House, 23-27 Great Russell Street, London, WC1, to register call 020 7987 9989, see www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

26th May Demo against BP's Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, 5pm at the BP Building, St James Square, London SW1, for info call 07766175641, email bakuceyhan@googlemail.com or visit www.baku.org.uk

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

31st May 'A New World in our Hearts', the London Anarchist Federation are holding a public meeting with video showing on the Spanish revolution of 1936, with talk and discussion at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 at 7.30pm (disabled access)

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 details

3rd June The Incredible Veggie Roadshow, with stalls, vegan fashion and footwear, beauty products, books and so much more, from 10.30am to 4.30pm at The Guildhall, St Helen's Square, York, for more info see viva.org.uk/roadshows06/

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

10th June DIY Punk Record Fair at The Square, 22 Russell Square, London WC1 from 2pm to 6pm, free, bring your collections to trade, sell or swap, vegan food, and bands later on. For a stall

email marta@activedistribution.org
10th June Road Block national conference for anti-roads campaigners, in central Birmingham, for more info and to download booking forms see roadblock.org.uk

10th June Anarchist Bookfair at Blackfriar's Hall, St Andrews Plain, Norwich, from 10am to 6pm, see norwichanarchists.org

11th June to 1st July Art Not Oil, various venues, for info email info@artnotoil.org.uk or call 07708 794665 or visit artnotoil.org.uk nationalpetroleumgallery.org.uk or londonrisingtide.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

30th September Tenth European Hazards Conference in Jurmula, Latvia, over this weekend, for details see hazardscampaign.org.uk/docs/riga.htm

Norwich's Anarchist Bookfair
10th June 2006 10am - 6pm
Blackfriar's Hall, Norwich
Stalls, Music, Meetings, Food, Bar, Plus Much More
Free Entry - Beards Optional

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