

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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NHS TRUSTS 'DRAINED' BY PFI

In the wake of a renewed drive to expand Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) across the public sector, it has been revealed that earlier projects have been draining cash at the expense of Trust-owned properties.

PFI allows companies to take out private loans to build major projects such as new hospitals, which are then underwritten and repaid by state funds over long periods of time.

A senior hospital official has found that the continued repayments and support for the PFI-built Calderdale Royal Hospital in West Yorkshire have been draining money from Huddersfield Royal Infirmary as the Trust attempts to pay its lease on the building.

In a 99-page report, Director of Estates Stephen Bannister admitted that the Trust's attempts to keep up with payments were at the expense of its own holdings.

Critics from the Save Our NHS campaign have pointed to the admission as another example of PFI companies borrowing at commercial rates, taking a profit, and passing a vastly inflated cost on to the public over an extended timeframe.

The cash crisis at Huddersfield, which is suffering from West Yorkshire's £2.6m overspend for the year, has led to dangerous situations as repairs are not completed.

The report for example highlights serious risks of a potential loss of power to 'multiple locations' due to the vulnera-

bility of the mains switchgear to flooding.

Meanwhile the Norfolk and Norwich hospital scheme, the original flagship of the PFI initiative and cited personally by Tony Blair as an example of the scheme's potential, has been found to have been massively exploited by major companies.

The Norfolk and Norwich, which has been attacked by senior staff, patients and health groups for its poor quality, has had vast sums of money ripped out of it by the companies involved.

John Laing, Innisfree, 3i, Barclays Infrastructure and Serco, who were awarded the PFI contract to build and manage the Norfolk and Norwich in 1998, refinanced the entire operation just five years later.

The companies took out a £106m loan based on the equity in the hospital, in order to pay back profits to their shareholders more quickly. The high risk venture, which was entirely legal, saw the group's return on investment rise from 19% to 60% while the NHS took the added burden of longer and tougher liabilities in exchange for a slice of the increased profits held against their debts.

The Trust is now contracted until 2037. In order to close the deal, it would have to find £257m extra to buy its way out – unlikely as it is currently having difficulty meeting its commitments and is shedding 450 jobs to plug a £15m funding gap.

Chief executive of the PFI organiser



The day the protest died: Brian Haw is now subject to a legal block on his demonstration at Parliament Square against the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, after 50 police, with 24 more on standby in case the lone pacifist got ugly, took down his display of banners on 23rd May. Brian, who has now been protesting for five years straight at the site, is limited to a 3m space around himself at any one time, severely limiting the number of supporters and banners he can bring out. A legal challenge is being prepared.

Partnerships UK, James Stewart, said at the sixth annual Public Private Finance Congress: "At the time it was a market

opener ... and an 18-year debt was all we could get." Since then, however, the UK has developed an "extremely efficient

capital market", he added. Today debt is on offer for up to 30 years.

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PENSIONS NOT FOR POOR

The pensions white paper has been brought out to wide acclaim from employers and unions despite plans to raise the retirement age, linked to a refusal to make any allowances for the lower life expectancy of the poor. Changes to the pension system revolve around two themes: the widening of coverage for women and those who have traditionally not saved towards pensions, and tightening pensions as a predicted explosion in claimants happens over the next ten years. The paper, 'Security in retirement: towards a new pensions system' (dwp.gov.uk), has been lauded because it restores the link between earnings and state pensions, leading to a higher payout on the pensions system.

The introduction of a second National Savings scheme, adding compulsory payments for employers and automatic enrolment for individuals has also been greeted with enthusiasm by the major unions. But the age at which the state pensions are paid out will rise to 68, leaving many on lower incomes – those most likely to need them – unlikely to live long enough to reach pensionable age. In some areas not even the current age of 60 is reached, as in places like the Calder estate in Glasgow.

In the white paper, the government has pointedly said it will not guarantee any changes will be made for vulnerable people, saying it would take a wait and see approach. It said: "We think this is an issue that must be considered nearer the relevant time in the light of the available evidence about inequalities in life expectancy."

Substantial funding has been given to the Financial Assistance Scheme, a government bail-out fund for workers who have lost their pensions when their company goes bust. Some £1.9bn has been put

into the scheme, making a total of £2.3bn in the pot. The measure comes alongside a raft of increases to the potential payouts for affected workers, allowing those near retirement 80% of their promised money, but nothing for those with 15 years or more still to work. Groups already on the scheme have said they will continue to fight. Cardiff steelworkers, who lost their pensions when company ASW went under, believe that everyone, not just the older membership, should receive their full entitlement.

The T&G, Amicus and Unison have all given the white paper their support, saying the inclusion of women in the pensions scheme over the next few years and the restoration of the link between earnings and pensions represent a major victory. However, the GMB have broken with this consensus, suggesting that the useful reforms are happening too slowly (women won't be protected until 2010 for example) and issues such as an allowance of pensions opt outs, and the age of 68 retirement, need to be addressed.

GITMO REVOLTS

Prisoners at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, fought guards in a short-lived prison revolt on 18th May. Eleven detainees hatched a plot to lure their captors into their cell before attacking them with improvised weapons.

The attack happened in the 'medium-security' Camp Four, where the supposedly most compliant inmates, who are slated for eventual release, are held.

The mutiny started with one prisoner pretending to commit suicide by hanging himself, and when soldiers rushed in to stop him they found his cellmates had slicked the floor with urine, faeces and soap, and they were then attacked with improvised weapons manufactured from bits of the cell – light fixtures, pieces of metal and fan blades.

Around a hundred guards responded to the distress call, with many piling into the cell, injuring six of the detainees. The rebels were subsequently moved to a higher security section.

In a separate incident on the same day,

two inmates attempted suicide using hoarded medicines. The suicidal prisoners were held in another wing reserved for suspected Taliban or al-Qa'ida and are now unconscious but stable in the camp medical unit.

Guantanamo Bay holds 460 inmates and has now been open for more than four years despite widespread international condemnation. There have now been 39 suicide attempts, including one co-ordinated effort involving 23 inmates in 2003.

A hunger strike that began last August with 131 detainees is ongoing, but now with only a few people involved. Other protests have involved throwing excrement and urine at camp guards, as well as rattling cages and banging cell doors.

A UN Panel report released the same day called on the United States to close the detention facility. The UN Committee Against Torture said the American government "should cease to detain any person at Guantanamo Bay and close the detention facility."

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Home and away

Cuts = profits

Cable & Wireless has triggered a row with the Communication Workers Union (CWU) by unveiling a £220m bonus scheme for senior managers just weeks after announcing 3,000 job losses.

The bonus scheme (rightly condemned as "outrageous" by the CWU) comes just before the company is expected to announce full-year profits of about £220m, a drop of £148m down from last year. The plan is to see the two divisional bosses have their salaries raised to £600,000 and give them the chance to earn £22m each if certain targets are reached at the company. Meanwhile the groups managing director is to receive a similar amount and an additional 1m shares (with no performance criteria).

Meanwhile, workers received an email earlier this year warning them of job losses and telling them they all needed to work harder. In other words, work harder or be fired. As such, it is hardly surprising that the company thought it could follow up the job losses with huge new pay packages for directors.

Shell given hell

Shell UK has held its annual AGM, with the main meeting in The Hague and a video feed to the Novotel Hotel in Hammersmith, London. There were some interventions from members of 'fenceline' communities (those living next to highly polluting and dangerous refineries and other facilities in countries like the US, South Africa and Nigeria), who attacked Shell's 'good neighbour' policy.

Doug Norland from Pacific Environment, systematically trashed Shell's activities in Sakhalin island, where it is building probably the world's largest piece of oil and gas infrastructure.

Later on, Malcolm Brinded from Shell said that the reason Shell has not yet phased out the abhorrent practice of gas flaring in the Niger Delta was because the Nigerian government hadn't provided the funding – and this from the company, which made £1.5m per hour in the first quarter of 2006.

Cash in hand

The Royal Bank of Scotland is trying to buy its way out of obligations to the company pension fund by offering cash to new workers barred as it closes its scheme. The bank plans to close its final salary scheme to new entrants in October. New workers will be offered an option to invest in defined contribution or money purchase schemes, which have been criticised by unions and pensions groups for offering only a fraction of the payout of final salary pensions, or simply receive a 15% salary rise in exchange.

The company is currently £1.9bn in deficit to the fund, compared to an annual profit of £8bn due to be taken this year from operations.

Bristol Indymedia threatened

Following exposés on the Bristol Indymedia site of a far right party, N9S, which allegedly led to the closure of the group's website, Kevin Quinn, N9S's leader, spent 15th May trying to find members of Bristol Indymedia to "...thank the people from Indymedia for closing my website down ... I will most definitely be coming again."

Indymedia said: "Given the nature of Quinn's 'politics' this 'visit' appears to be a thinly veiled attempt to intimidate a news site that carried stories he did not like. Bristol Indymedia will not stop providing space for people in the South West to have their say."

Around the world

AUSTRALIA: Under the guise of protecting Australians against the threat of terrorism, the Howard-led government has expanded the sedition laws to cover not just people urging the use of violence to overthrow the government, interfere with an election or urge violence that threatens the peace, good order and good government of the Commonwealth, but also people who advocate the use of force. This catch-all phrase includes people who advocate civil disobedience, peaceful mass action, demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, occupations, economic boycotts and other extra parliamentary activity to influence the political process.

The main purpose of the legislation is to restrict political activity in the community, to the act of casting a ballot every three years to give a political representative a signed blank cheque to pass whatever legislation they like over the next three years.

The problem of political expression and association is particularly pressing in Australia because Australians enjoy few, if any, protections to freely express their opinions under the Australian Constitution.

IRAQ: It is hard to comprehend how the US state could do worse than an evil and incompetent dictator like Saddam, but it seems intent on so doing. Today, in 'liberated' Iraq, a total of four million Iraqis were in dire need of humanitarian aid including food. This is roughly 15% of the population, up from 11% in a 2003 report. Almost one child in every ten aged between six months and 5 years old, suffered acute



malnourishment. A spokesman for UNICEF's Iraq Support Centre reported that the number of acutely malnourished children has more than doubled, to 9% in 2005 from 4% in 2002, the last year of Saddam's rule.

PALESTINE: The remnants of Palestinian civil society, brutalised by the occupation and ongoing encirclement by the apartheid wall (pictured above), is now reeling under the shock of the sudden removal of all US and EU aid. Their crime? To have voted in free and fair elections for a movement, Hamas, which Bush and Blair argue is 'terrorist'.

Bank transfers to the Palestinian Authority (PA) have been blocked by the US. Slowly but surely the PA is being starved of the funds needed to maintain basic services and infrastructure. The civil workforce have not been paid for two months and hospitals are desperately short of vital medicines. Jack Straw argued that aid to the PA had to be cut because Hamas refuses to recognise Israel or renounce the right to resist the occupation. Yet the UK is an enthusiastic backer of the Israel whose new Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, has said "I believe with all my

heart in the people of Israel's eternal historic right to the entire land of Israel." – meaning a racially-exclusive state from the Mediterranean to the Jordan.

from Schnevs

POLAND: Maciej D, one of the people listed on the Blood and Honour website (which antifascists had briefly managed to shut down but which came back up), is an anti-fascist who had his address disclosed and had been beaten in front of his house, is recovering from a near-fatal stabbing outside his home.

He was extremely lucky to survive as he was first gassed by nazis and then stabbed near his heart. The stab wound pierced his lungs but not his heart and he had to undergo operation but is apparently in stable condition.

Some local anarchists went to the hospital to visit Maciej. Very luckily, although he is weak and the 30cm knife left a 7cm hole in his lung, it looks as if he will recover and he was even able to talk to people.

Now the biggest problem seems to be capitalism. Maciej, who did not work legally and pay social insurance, is being told that he isn't insured and is facing a huge hospital bill. What's worse, they seem to want to kick him out of the hospital before he's healed.

Fascists on the Blood and Honour website, which the authorities pretend they are unable to block, are celebrating having 'got one', which apparently even made journalists so sick that they were talking about it on television with obvious disgust.

For more info or to offer support, contact southlondonsf@riseup.net

USA: While growth and profits are on the rise, things are not so good for workers in Bush's America. Since the last recession ended in November 2001 real earnings for workers (i.e. pay adjusted for inflation) have actually fallen slightly, as pay increases have lagged behind inflation. That the growth gleefully reported in the media has not 'trickled down' to ordinary



people should hardly surprise, given that this has been the fate of US workers since the 1970s. What is surprising is that they put up with it.

UKRAINE: More than 2,000 Ukrainian coalminers went to Kiev on 23rd May to take part in protests against price and tariff hikes on goods and services.

Lugansk coalminers were among the first to go to Kiev. Coalminers from this eastern-most Ukrainian region will support the general demands, while workers are simultaneously looking for major improvements to the mining sector itself.

They complain of a lack of state support and the non-repayment of wage arrears. At present the wage arrears at Lugansk mines has already exceeded 12.3 million hryvnas (about \$5.4m), with recent debts contributing just over half of this sum.

Along with the wage arrears, problems have emerged across the industry, with power stations refusing to buy coal, and the government failing to assign funds specified in the budget.

The mines did not receive 280 million hryvnas last year and already 203 million hryvnas this year for the technical upgrading and the construction of new mines has added to that total.



Prison news

Screws charged with manslaughter

Four prison guards have been charged in connection with the death of a man at Rye Hill prison. Michael Bailey, 23, was found dead in his cell at the prison in March 2005. Three of the screws have been charged with manslaughter by gross negligence, while a fourth has been charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Justice is something we will be surprised to see.

Jailed for refusing to testify

American activist, Jeff Hogg, has been jailed for refusing to testify before a Grand Jury which is investigating a series of direct actions which occurred in Oregon between the mid-1990s and 2001. Under the Grand Jury rules Jeff can be held for up to 18 months or until the Grand Jury ceases its investigations, whichever is sooner.

- Send letters of support to: Jeffrey Hogg #1065518, Lane County Jail, 101 W 5th Ave, Eugene, OR 97401, USA.
- For more on Jeff and the Grand Jury see <http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2006/05/339630.shtml>

Prison van turned away in protest at HMP Styal

Since the death of her daughter Sarah in prison custody in 2003, Pauline Campbell has campaigned tirelessly to highlight the treatment of women prisoners. In the course of protests outside various women's prisons, she has been arrested on numerous occasions for trying to prevent vans carrying women prisoners from entering.

Using the same tactic outside Styal prison in May – where 42 year old mother of two Valerie Hayes died on 10th May 2006 – Pauline and fellow

protestors succeeded for the first time in preventing a prison van from entering.

Pauline is determined to carry on the protests, recently telling supporters, "Never underestimate the power of a grieving mother whose only child has died at the hands of the State."

US activist imprisoned for exposing animal cruelty

An American activist who took a video camera into battery chicken farm in order to expose the cruel conditions there has been jailed for criminal trespass. Adam Durand received a six month sentence, which supporters described as 'outrageous and highly political'.

• Send letters of support to Adam Durand, Wayne County Jail, 7368 Route 31, Lyons, NY 14489, USA.

- For more information on the case see www.wegmanscruelty.com

Green Scare benefit in Leeds

On Saturday 10th June there will be a benefit in Leeds in support of American eco-activists imprisoned following a wave of repression which is being referred to as the 'Green Scare'. The benefit is one of a range of activities being organised following a call from imprisoned US activist Jeff 'Free' Luers. The Leeds event will comprise a 'solidarity banquet', the screening of a film about Jeff Luers, and a gig featuring three bands as well as DJs. The venue is The Common Place on Wharfe Street near the market, with dinner at 7pm, and the bands due to start at 9pm. Look out for other events taking place elsewhere on the same day.

compiled by Mark Barnsley

News

A CWUel twist of fate

A strike has been threatened against the Royal Mail, but the union isn't yet trusted to win, finds Rob Ray

Amid huge support for the principle of a nationalised Royal Mail, and anger over a new imposed pay settlement far short of expectations, activists are finding it difficult to convince workers that it is worth striking for either.

A decision to unilaterally enforce a rejected pay decision on workers at Royal Mail has led to a ballot for strike action by the CWU, but preparations for the burgeoning dispute will now take up to a month to come into effect, with the union hoping that the company will negotiate a slightly better deal instead.

Stewards, who have for years been battling to convince members the CWU won't simply capitulate in the face of attacks from Royal Mail, are finding that despite agreement with the union, there is also a lack of belief that anything can be done about it.

One activist from the Anglian postal branch of the union said: "The reaction ranges from apathy to anger, more part-timers are accepting of the pay award though many are angry at it being imposed. Such an action as imposing pay without negotiation is an outright attack on the union and we won't take it lying down."

But following years of cutbacks to the workforce, morale across the company is extremely low, he added: "Many are sick of what's going on and just want to take the money and run. On a positive note we (recently) had a member come into our branch office wanting to become a rep in an office we presently have no-one in. It seems Leighton is doing a great job in recruiting for us."

Earlier this month, in what was seen as a hostile move by Royal Mail Chairman Alan Leighton, a 2.9% pay offer that had already been rejected by the CWU was unilaterally imposed across the company.

The CWU responded by calling a ballot on strike action. The union said in a statement: "The pay negotiations are part of wider issues facing the future of Royal Mail and its workforce. Details of a recent efficiency saving deal are being withheld by the company, making the negotiations more difficult. The wording of any agreement will also need to address the future of the business and future pay structures in an increasingly competitive market."

The imposition was followed by a strong showing for the union when it balloted its members ahead of the CWU conference last month finding that 98.5% of members responding to a ballot backed a union plan to retain nationalisation and fight against Leighton's proposals to 'privatise by the back door'.

Ninety thousand people, representing just under half of the total Royal Mail workforce, actively responded in favour of the CWU's 'Shaping the future' plan, giving it one of the strongest mandates of recent times to campaign on a range of issues, including pay, pensions, and privatisation, according to the union.

An early victory has been claimed on the second issue, after the government agreed a package late last month to put £1.7bn into a package to wipe out a large proportion of Royal Mail's £5.5bn deficit.

While the deal, which Leighton



claimed would eventually pay back one pound in five to the government, has been attacked by the far right

press as a case of government bailouts for the public sector, supporters have pointed out that the government took

out far more during an earlier 15-year 'pensions holiday' and profit-taking exercise.

Toxteth no better 25 years on

A report by a regional newspaper into the Toxteth area of Liverpool, 25 years on from a popular uprising in the area that shook the city, has found that promises to invest heavily from the government of the time have been repeatedly broken by successive governments.

The *Liverpool Echo*, which investigated official records at both local and national level to obtain an overall view of how the socially deprived area has fared, said: "Toxteth is still being crushed under the weight of socio-economic inequality. When it comes to unemployment, deprivation, health and education the area is always towards the bottom of the pile."

"And, perhaps most importantly, those who live in Toxteth feel left behind and are still waiting for promises made a quarter of a century ago to be fulfilled."

A litany of statistics showing high unemployment, poor living standards and low life expectancies have shown that over the last two and a half decades,

little has been done to remedy the area's problems.

The report found, among other things:

- Standard mortality rates far above the city average, and at 2.5 times the national average;
- Unemployment of 20.4% in the Granby area, and only 25% of residents in Princes Park area in full time employment;
- 72% of local children grow up with benefits as their main source of income;
- 51% of the workforce has no qualifications.

Toxteth, which has a huge number of houses lying empty as the area, has spiralled into greater poverty and is currently part of a major scheme to knock down much of the old housing and replace it with a new estate, under a plan linked to the national 'Decent Homes Standard', which has begun to displace some of the poorest communities in the country to make room for new build housing.

According to Cllr Warren Bradley, leader of Liverpool City Council: "The

architecture, cultural mix of people and its close proximity to the city centre make the Granby area one of the most attractive and up and coming parts of Liverpool and the high level of investment in the area reflects this."

Although the area itself remains one of the poorest in Liverpool, its positioning is highly desirable, and a major project, the 'Granby Toxteth regeneration framework' is currently in development.

It seems to have backing from the main Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the area, who have repeatedly refused requests by local people to buy empty properties on their books.

One local chartered surveyor, submitting information to the then-housing body the Office of the deputy Prime Minister two years ago, cited extensive evidence that there was a high demand for the existing housing, which is being artificially being depressed by the actions of local RSLs, thus giving a justification for the regeneration scheme.

Uni pay deal blocked

At the time of writing, the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (Ucea) has shocked lecturers' unions by failing to make a revised offer after two days of intensive talks.

Huge pressure has been put on lecturers' unions, who have been fighting to claim an increase in wages which had been promised as part of a funding increase over a year ago.

Ucea said a deal was 'within reach', but lecturers have criticised the umbrella group's actions, arguing an improved offer could have been made and further delays would only hurt students.

The Natfhe and the AUT unions have been refusing to mark students' work until their pay demands are met. The AUT is also refusing to set exams. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, for the most recent year there are figures for, at least 160,000 people working in the higher education sector could see their lives for the next few decades affected by the dispute.

It is also thought that around 300,000 students are affected, who

could experience a delayed graduation if Ucea continues to refuse to pay what was promised.

The Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the lecturers' union Natfhe have been involved in the dispute since November, after Ucea tore up a promise made in April 2005 that lecturers would see a third of a promised £5bn increase in funding for the university system.

Reflecting this promise, made by then-higher education minister Alan Johnson, the unions have asked for a 23% pay increase over three years but Ucea has offered just 12.6% over the same period.

Four other unions involved in higher education – Unison, Amicus, the GMB and the TGWU, have not taken industrial action, but are considering whether to ballot their members.

Scottish higher education union the EIS meanwhile, who had been in the process of consulting their membership, called off any industrial action after talks restarted.

News

New Government, Maximum Force

New Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is promising a clean sweep in Iraq, reports Jack Ray

After more than five months of negotiations, Deputy Leader of the Islamic Dawa Party Nouri al-Maliki was named as the new Iraqi Prime Minister on 20th May, immediately promising to end the insurgency with "maximum force against terrorism." Recently the Iraqi security services have been condemned for the widespread employment of death-squads, targeted assassinations and torture, with a thousand bodies a month now appearing regularly at Baghdad morgue.

On the Saturday that al-Maliki's appointment was approved by parliament, 56 people were reported killed, followed by 50 the following day. In the last two full months 2,449 (after the suicide bombs at the Samarra mosque on 22nd February) death certificates were registered at Baghdad morgue for people killed, excluding those bodies that could not be identified. Around 85,000 refugees have also been displaced in the eruption of sectarian violence.

Al-Maliki has also pledged to end the violence currently being perpetrated by pro-government militia such as the Badr Brigade (linked to the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), as well as targeted killing by security forces and their auxiliaries, saying "militias, death squads, terrorism, killings and assassinations are not normal and we should put an end to the militias." He has also been outspoken about the need for a withdrawal timetable for Coalition forces, surprising Tony Blair at a press conference by announcing that British troops would leave two provinces

within a month, and that all forces would be out of the country within 18 months.

But it is the so-called 'El Salvador option', paramilitary violence by pseudo-official militia and other auxiliaries, which is now the cutting edge of violence against nationalist guerrillas and other obstacles to the coalition project in Iraq. Groups linked to the governing parties are also being used to enforce religious law, prosecute inter-communal grievances and also as part of the widespread corruption and patronage network that now mark governance in Iraq. Al-Maliki's capacity and determination to deal with the problem are highly questionable, given his stated preference for ending the insurgency by overwhelming force. Bayan Jabr, the Interior Minister and ex-Badr Brigade Commander, instigator (along with CIA advisors) of the brutal practices and human rights violations of that Ministry (which currently holds 5,047 prisoners, despite lacking the authority to detain suspects for more than very short periods), has merely been moved sideways to Finance.

The appointment of the Prime Minister has been treated as a victory for US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilad, who was apparently instrumental in forcing rejection of the pro-Iranian Ibrahim Jaafari. However, despite American objections, hardline Islamists have been awarded key roles in Education and Culture. The apportioning of cabinet posts has resulted in 24 MPs withdrawing from government coalitions, and reduced the



Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari (left) congratulates his successor, Nouri al-Maliki on 21st May 2006. Nouri al-Maliki has vowed to bring stability to the nation racked with terrorism and sectarian attacks.

Prime Minister's supporters to just 115 of the parliament's 275 members. Many parties, ensconced in the green zone are now said to regard government positions as key sites of patronage and a way onto the corruption gravy train. Sunni religious politicians expressed problems with the new government,

"we have reservations about the laws related to fighting terror, which do not distinguish between the Resistance, which plays a heroic role for the sake of liberating Iraq, and acts of violence that all reject." He added, "It was obligatory to specify the techniques to be used to dissolve the militias altogether,

and to transform them into state institutions and to keep them from infiltrating the security apparatuses."

On the ground, guerrilla warfare continues across the country, with the fighting in Ramadi now described by US forces as a "full blown kinetic fight on a daily basis".

Afghan refugee siege

A group of 41 Afghan refugees occupied St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, to protest the deportation of asylum seekers back to their war-torn country. The 33 adults in the party then started a hunger strike and refusal of water, continuing to occupy the cathedral for a further seven days before being evicted by the Garda on 20th May.

The adults and eight minors took over the Anglican Cathedral after the Sunday service on 14th May, releasing a statement outlining their reasons: "... the Refugee applications commissioner hasn't given full attention [to] and unlawfully refused most of our asylum applications in Ireland. We had a disciplined demonstration against the decisions in Dublin ... but unfortunately we haven't had a positive response from Justice Office or Court. We left Afghanistan to survive and have our rights protected.

"We have been in Ireland for years

and most of us have been suffering from mental and physical problems ... we want an answer from the Irish Government. Is it life in Ireland or death?

"We couldn't bear this anymore so finally we are here in this Holy Church and have a hunger strike for our future whether that is death or freedom of life."

The action of the hunger strikers made headline news, with much of the right-wing press producing lurid headlines with spurious accusations aimed at the Afghans (including the accusation that they were in touch with the Taliban). Irish Home Secretary Justice Minister Michael McDowell refused to bargain with the men, and subsequently police made plans to remove them. In the seven days that the 41 refugees occupied the church, small solidarity demonstrations and vigils were organised by anti-racist groups, including Residents Against Racism. Both protesters and hunger strikers

were subjected to racist abuse from small numbers of counter-demonstrators, some of whom are alleged to have been linked to far-right groups in Ireland and the UK.

The Garda moved in at 9.30pm on day seven of the occupation. The minors, who had been taken into state care, were first removed in an ambulance, and the adults, who had threatened to self-harm if removed by force, eventually left the building after several hours negotiation. Earlier in the day, 250 demonstrators had held a vigil, chanting 'let them stay!' and 30-40 counter-demonstrators had also gathered.

The hunger strikers appeared in Court at Kilmainham on 25th May and were remanded on bail until June.



Bangladesh uprising

Tens of thousands of Textile workers in Bangladesh were involved in massive clashes with police during a strike and riot starting on 20th May in protest at pay and conditions in the country's major export sector. Two workers were killed and two hundred injured in the clashes, while over a hundred factories were burned or sabotaged. When workers eventually returned to work on the 24th, around \$77m damage had been caused.

Textiles are Bangladesh's main export sector, employing 1.2 million people (40% of the country's industrial workers) in 4,000 factories and accounting for 75% of its exports. Workers on average make as little as \$22 a month, with one case reported in which people were working 12-hour, 7-day weeks, for just \$6 a month. Unpaid overtime is common, and real wages in the sector are declining as living costs rise.

The wildcat strike spread spontaneously from a single disputed dismissal at one

factory, but things became more heated as demonstrating workers were attacked on Monday by security forces. Across industrial areas, workers came out in thousands to support the protests, issuing demands for holidays and back-pay. On May 23rd 50,000 protesters in Ashulia were dispersed with tear gas after they began burning garment factories. In Dhaka, workers burned cars and buses, before blockading roads and bringing city traffic to a halt. The previous day a massive crowd of 100,000 at Dhaka's Export Processing Zone had been attacked by police with one man killed.

Workers demands are for a rise (from 11 to 16 cents per garment), one day off a week, regular payment and an overtime rise. Business leaders and politicians dismissed the riots as being a conspiracy by the Indian government to wreck the industry - though they were forced to negotiate with trade unions and forced to form a pay commission to regulate pay in the industry.

Feature

Every little hurts

Richard Griffin explores the power of the supermarkets and finds a rapacious monster at our doors

Sittingbourne in Kent is not famous for much. It does though claim to have the longest High Street in Britain. If you had walked along it forty years ago you would have passed four fishmongers, seven butchers (including a specialist pork one), no less than nine greengrocers, four bakers and not a single supermarket (the first one arrived in the mid 1970s). Shops sold local produce including fish landed the same day – a short train journey away in Whitstable – and fruit and vegetables from the surrounding countryside.

Today there is just one butcher and fishmonger left, a single greengrocer and a lone baker. There are, though, three supermarkets in the town and even more a quick car drive away. One in ten car journeys made in Britain are now to a supermarket. While these supermarkets are full of out of season fruit and vegetables intensively grown abroad and flown thousands of miles, you will struggle to find locally grown produce. Green beans from Kenya in December, yes, cherries and apples from Kent orchards in the autumn, forget it.

Karl Marx got a lot of his economic predictions wrong. In one respect he was spot on, though. Capitalism, he predicted, would reproduce itself by growing bigger. Capitalist companies if left alone would become monopolies allowing them to maximise their profits and increase their power to exploit.

This trend can be seen clearly in Britain's retail sector. Four supermarkets – Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda and Morrison/Safeway's – control between them 80% of a market worth £125 billion a year. Tesco's alone account for 30% of the market. In 2001 its share was 15%. Last month the store announced record profits of £2.2 billion. An incredible 26 million square feet of England's soil is now covered by a Tesco store, a figure set to rise by a further two million.

Commenting on Tesco's profits

Friends of the Earth supermarkets campaigner Sandra Bell said: "Tesco's booming profits come at a cost with consumers, farmers and our environment paying the price. It is time to put the breaks on the Tesco juggernaut. The Government and competition authorities must recognise the value of small shops to local communities and create an environment that allows retail choice to flourish."

So serious is the situation that the Office of Fair Trading at the start of May announced that they were going to refer the sector to the Competition Commission. Campaigners against supermarkets have though asked why the big four, and particularly Tesco, have already been allowed to grow to the point that £8 out of every £10 spent on groceries is in a supermarket.

Tesco's power means that it is able to pay suppliers less than prevailing market prices. The UK pressure group Farm estimates that a quarter of Britain's farms will close or merge with a loss of 50,000 jobs due to unfair competition. It is the same with small retailers.

Since the 1940s around 100,000 small shops have closed, according to Felicity Lawrence in her book *Not on the Label*. Fifteen years ago there were 47,000 independent grocery retailers. Now there are just 28,000 and the number is dropping. Tescopoly, an alliance that includes Friends of the Earth and the GMB trade union, report that "in the five years to 2002, 50 specialised stores like butchers, bakers, fishmongers and newsagents closed every week. In May 2005 the IGD, in its authoritative Convenience Retailing Report revealed the loss of 2,157 unaffiliated independent convenience retailers, compared to only 1,079 the year before."

As with all capitalist companies, profits come at a price to workers. Tesco's make around £800,000 profit a week from selling bananas. The pressure group Banana Link report



widespread trade union repression and many workers failing to receive a living wage on plantations in Costa Rica that supply the supermarket. Action Aid and Oxfam have both exposed the appalling working conditions of thousands of women workers in South Africa who grow fruit and vegetables that end up on Tesco's shelves.

In Canterbury, down the road from Sittingbourne, there is an independent butcher who puts 'Air Miles' on the produce he sells. Most are in single figures. His lamb isn't flown from New Zealand but comes from a farm seven miles away. The environmental impact of the meat he sales is minimal. Tescopoly estimates that it would take more than 60 corner shops and greengrocers to match the carbon dioxide emissions from one average sized superstore. Each year 15 million plastic bags given away by supermarkets end up in landfill sites.

At the heart of anarchism is an absolute and unbending opposition to the concentration of power. Anarchism seeks to liberate social relations from the state and from capitalism. Through films such as *Supersize Me* and best selling books like *Fast Food Nation* and *Not On The Label*, the issues associated with the production and consumption of food are becoming better known.

While supermarkets give the illusion of choice and convenience, these 'Temples of Consumption' (to borrow George Ritzers' phrase) are in fact sources of exploitation and alienation. When I buy bread from my local bakers not only am I getting a loaf that tastes

of something, because it isn't pumped full of air and water, it is also made locally. I also know the people in the shop. We chat. If I am late they will put my loaf to one side for me. Shopping there is a pleasant and human experience. That isn't how I feel when I go to Sainsbury's. Humanity is bled out of supermarket shopping.

By the way, I am lucky that I have a local baker to shop in. While there are 38,000 craft bakers in France there are just 2,800 in Britain. Of course I pay more for my loaf (£1.20). It is true that many working class people cannot afford the prices that independent retailers are forced to charge regardless of the quality. There is a reason why so many families surviving on limited incomes shop in supermarkets. Food politics cannot be seen in isolation from the wider struggle against capitalism and class exploitation.

There is the beginnings of the backlash against the big four supermarkets. From Workington in Cumbria to Wadebridge in Cornwall, people are protesting against supermarkets and the impact they have on local communities. These bottom-up campaigns are good news.

Forty years ago Sittingbourne High Street, like so many, was vibrant. Local people could buy local products and had a variety of shops to choose from. Now like so many places it is in danger of becoming a Clone Town – devoid of character with the same few shops you can find anywhere. The rise of the supermarket has a large part to play in this story. It is not too late to stem the tide but time is running out.

Groceries – a free market?

The Office of Fair Trading has referred the issue of groceries and the major supermarkets to the Competition Commission.

In its report it lists several areas the commission needs to look at: Buying power for the supermarkets has increased to the point where their buying and selling practices 'could distort competition' (e.g. bulk buying can be done so cheaply that any competitors cannot compete even selling at cost, and on single items supermarkets can afford to run at a loss indefinitely until their competitor goes out of business).

Supermarkets are now such huge landowners that new entrants to the grocery market can often be put off simply by the lack of available ground on which to open.

Even on ground which has been bought and then resold by supermarkets, restrictive covenants have in some cases been placed which prohibits competitors from opening.

The planning regime militates against new entrants (though this has been known at times to act as a barrier to supermarket expansion as well) The OFT may make a market investigation reference to the CC where it has reasonable grounds for suspecting that any feature, or combination of features, of a market in the United Kingdom for goods or services prevents, restricts or distorts competition.



Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 67 Number 11

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's time for our periodic round-up of what jobs we need people for. Top of the list at the moment is people to do a regular day shift in the shop, and help out with the mailout. We currently have a couple of volunteers who are helping out with it, but need more to avoid getting into a situation where we are letting them do it all the time. We are in need of people to market the paper.

We also need journalists, with a particular emphasis on areas like ID cards and high-tech surveillance of the public, and issues such as PFI, intellectual property, housing, etc. And we need editors, particularly London-based but not necessarily, to commission articles and if possible, sub them down as well. So er... a staff, basically.

• A small apology should go in at this point. It was said in Angel Alley that the 'Crossrail hole' – a tunnel due to run through densely packed working class areas with a high risk of subsidence and other damage as a line from the city to Canary Wharf is built for the capital's business leaders – had been beaten. This is not entirely true. The Brick Lane area is and remains under threat from the Crossrail plans as it is the only area to continue being a target for tunnel alignments and a ventilation and intervention shaft.

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 17th June 2006 and the last day to get copy to us (see contact details above) will be Thursday 8th June.

A question of priorities...

When Janet Jackson had her wardrobe 'malfunction' at the Super Bowl a few years back, the Bush Junta went straight into action and changed the law in 40 days. The 20th of May saw five miners killed in a Kentucky mine explosion. This is over four months since the Sago mine tragedy killed 12 and a miner safety bill co-sponsored by Democrat George Miller is still languishing in Congress. According to Miller, "Congress hasn't done a damn thing about securing a safer workplace for these miners and for these families."

Miller notes that the Kentucky mine was non-unionised, arguing that "in non-union mines there's a great deal of intimidation that goes on against the workers, because the mine owners do not want to shut down the mines, they do not want to reduce their output. If you suggest that something is as dangerous to do that, you may lose your job, and it's a real problem."

Nice to know that the Republicans, like the bosses, get their priorities right.

Iain Mackay

Media junkies

On many political campaigns, you may encounter the problem of the political 'media-junkie', who is obsessed with getting his/her name in the bourgeois press. To this end, these people will attempt to restrain, even undermine campaigns.

They will try to steer campaigns away from anything feasibly illegal (and the true nature of the laws make that pretty much all encompassing), they will try to moderate matters, they will try to make things less controversial, more media friendly.

And all this isn't in the name of revolution of course, the vast majority of the public use the daily papers for little more than the TV times and sports stats, throwing it away afterwards.

So what makes the media-junkies tick? They fit into the tradition of the careerist Left: many would-be politicians, Labourites/Trade Unionists know that falling on the wrong side of the bourgeois press can be disastrous, eg. they may not be able to sue for libel, and it could lead to their deselection.

They suck up the press so as to cut it out and use it for their CVs: typical careerism. They just try and use the struggles of ordinary people to their personal advantage: this is why they're also control freaks, too. Hype is all-important.

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

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But there is a way of cold-turkeying those twats. You can pretty much see what they don't like: bad relations with the media. Well, what you do is deliberately ruin their media relations. It'll embarrass the sychophants and it will be a pleasure to watch 'em squirm. No doubt they'll try and have a witch hunt to see who did that and they will attempt to smear people.

Jayne
 Manchester

John Kenneth Galbraith, RIP

The 29th April saw the death of economist John Kenneth Galbraith at the grand old age of 97. While his books were popular in the 1950s and 1960s, his influence and ideas grew out of fashion in the 1980s with the rise of neo-liberalism. This is understandable, as his analysis was far too realistic to be useable by the ruling elite to justify their power, profits or policies.

Galbraith firmly saw the role that economics played in justifying capitalism and elite rule. In Galbraith's vision, economic power was a fact which could not and should not be ignored and any form of economics which did was just apologetics for injustice and inequality. As he put it, "the most damaging feature" of mainstream economics "is the arrangement by which power ... is removed from the subject." He noted that



while it may hard to ignore such an obvious fact, economists do manage it.

His analysis of the economy was based on the obvious fact of corporate power. One section of the economy reflected, to a degree, the vision of many competing firms but the other, dominant, section did not. Here was corporate power, with substantial economic and political power and economics, consequently, had to analyse it in a different way. Sadly, most economists did not follow his lead.

In response to rising economic power, Galbraith pointed to the development of what he termed 'countervailing power'. For example, the rise of corporate power saw the rise of union power to protect their workers.

While anarchists may suggest getting rid of economic power to start with, Galbraith's starting point was correct – an awareness of reality and the current structure of the economy. Such a perspective goes not make you popular in elite circles, unlike those economists who justified the weakening or elimination of such countervailing institutions as trade unions in terms of an economic model which ignored capitalist power.

Nor were his ideas were popular with

mainstream economists firmly wedded to the mathematical illusions of neo-classical economics. This did not surprise Galbraith, for as he put it economics is dominated by a perspective in which "it is a far, far better thing to have a firm anchor in nonsense than to put out on the troubled sea of thought."

He rightly recognised mainstream economics for the nonsense it is, arguing that its vision of society "is not real". Rather than analyse reality, economics evaded it and asserted that the economy worked "as if" it matched the unreal assumptions of neoclassical economics. No other science would take such an approach seriously. In biology, for example, the notion that the world can be analysed "as if" God created it is called Creationism and rightly dismissed. In economics, such people are generally awarded professorships.

While anarchists may reject his reformist strategy and statist perspective, his critique of capitalism and economics is thought provoking, realistic and witty. Little wonder he never got the so-called Nobel prize in economics (that it was awarded to that charlatan Milton Friedman says it all). If economics ever does become a science, Galbraith will be fondly remembered as one of its key trail-blazers. For anyone interested in his ideas, I would recommend *The Essential Galbraith* (Mariner Books, ISBN 0618119639) as an excellent starting point.

His most famous quote is, I think, his concise summing up of supply-side economics (or neo-liberalism as it is called today), namely "that the rich were not working because they had too little money, the poor because they had much." Ironically enough, a few weeks after his death corporate capitalism proved his words are still as applicable today as telecommunications corporation Cable and Wireless unveiled a major bonus for senior managers just weeks after announcing job cuts (see page 2).

Job losses are a great way to increase profits by making the remaining staff work harder for longer. There is nothing like fear to keep wages down and profits up.

Of course, it may be considered strange that such high amounts are required to get the executives to do what, surely, must be considered part of their normal job but Galbraith would not be surprised. That is why he is still worth reading today, in spite of his flaws.

PFI in the NHS

page 1

The head of the Treasury's private finance unit has said a vast number of deals across the sector, affecting not just hospitals but schools, housing projects and even fire stations, will continue to be signed.

Speaking at the Public Private Finance Congress, Richard Abadie predicted about forty deals a year, with a capital value of £4bn.

On 18th May, for example, despite a 500-strong petition from tenants and residents, the total opposition of the Little London Tenants and Residents Association (LLTRA) Committee and Save Little London Campaign, and huge support from neighbouring communities, the Council Executive in Leeds took the decision to go ahead with its PFI regeneration scheme in Little London.

Lower City

page 7

from the diversely intransigent pressures of legal dictate, economic survival, biological reality and social complexity. Her immediate impulse is to flee 'up north' to the Amazon – a mythical land of riches ('gold nuggets for blowjobs') free from official rule and the law of the father – with colleagues providing solidarity (e.g. abortifacient pills) and companionship, leaving behind men's fatal inability to relinquish childish self-absorption.

Ultimately, though, this wish-fulfilment dissolves, along with her hard-nosed facade of self-sufficiency, into uncontrollable tears as she tends the wounds from Deco and Naldinho's mutual battering – they too being unwilling to surrender intimate caring to perpetual paranoia and predation in the war of all against all. By extension, the film also highlights what political philosophy has long ignored or downplayed – the critical role of women in social and cultural (as well as sexual and economic) reproduction – and hence in the prospects for political advance at all levels.

The exchanges of sidelong glances in Lower City's final extreme close-ups then imply a dawning shared understanding that the trio can only move forward together. But rather than the destructively vicious circles of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, or the comfortably pretentious superficiality of *Jules et Jim*, the social engagement of suffering bodies, minds, hearts and souls might yet generate the synergy necessary for a better life to be wrought from the hard labour of love.



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Quiz answers

1. Bart de Ligt, who died in 1938, who drew from Gandhi and anarcho-syndicalism in this work.
2. The Builders Laborers Federation of New South Wales, Australia. Successfully organised on the job, they reached out to other issues that they felt fitted in with the working class's broader interests, such as lack of affordable housing and roads being routed through working class areas, starting in 1971 until the union was smashed by an alliance of Maoists and construction bosses.
3. New Zealand. Both are Green Party, Meteria Turei was an anarcho-feminist and Nandor Tanzcos was a Rasta anarchist. He's now the world's first Rastafarian MP. Hmmm.
4. *How Shall We Bring about the Revolution* by Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget. It was written in 1909, which might explain why the authors were not as alert to the horrors of war as they would have a mere five years later.

REVIEW

Tom Jennings glimpses seeds of hope in *Lower City's* vividly lurid portrayal of the seamier side of lowlife

An impressive first feature by director Sérgio Machado, *Lower City* strives to express the predicament of the modern Brazilian underclass adrift without social, family or government support, but somehow mustering the motivation to persevere.

With its love triangle inspired by Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*, the film's naturalism (spoiled by hamfisted subtitling) avoids 'state of the nation' polemics, explicit political commentary and objectifying social realism, with a superb fusion of form and content benefiting from half a century of independent filmmaking alternatives to Hollywood spectacle.

Its very rare achievement is to effectively condense the desperation of entire strata into three marginal lives without pathologising, psychologising, moralising, sentimentalising or heroising. Instead, in crystallising self-destructive inadequacy, the energy generated from the collision of passionate affinities is presented as a precious source of shared courage and potential.

The restless, claustrophobic, handheld camerawork, intense colours and low lighting are characteristic of the ghettocentric Latin American new wave (*Amores Perros*, *City of God*, etc). The raw immediacy and urgency of lived experience is conveyed by staying close to the actors' physicality: telephoto lens narrowing perspective; soundtrack accommodating audible breathing; patterns of camera movement matching emotional states; editing synchronised with heartbeats to suit prevailing moods.

Very short scenes express realms of subjective meaning: fast and furiously emphasising the pressure of necessity; rarer slow episodes and fleeting static long shots hinting at space for reflection spoiled by the brooding aftermath of biographies full of hassle.

The growth of love then symbolises something powerful to hold onto amidst unpredictable flux.

Fiercely loyal childhood friends Deco (Lázaro Ramos) and Naldinho (Wagner Moura) ply a cargo trade along the northeastern coast. Karina (Alice Braga) hitches a lift to Salvador, the provincial capital, paying by having sex with them both. When Naldinho is stabbed protecting Deco from racist attack, her altruism and care adds mutual loving recognition to ecstatic release.

The negotiation of this shift means re-evaluating priorities and perspectives on life, and they orient differently to the shared dynamic of yearning. Naldinho is impulsive and reckless, with love representing self-control to be achieved by proxy in looking after Karina. Deco is less patriarchal, seeking reciprocal caring and containment. Karina, meanwhile, insists on autonomy – demanding friendship, sexual satisfaction and sufficient security to relinquish control. Openly acknowledging for the men their and her vulnerability, her refusal to abandon either of them holds the story together while seemingly preventing resolution.

The dilemma is accentuated by untenable economics, which Deco and Naldinho displace onto their relationship with Karina. They consider selling their boat, which like their 'brotherhood' no longer sustains them outside of lucrative illegalities. Deco boxes for a local agent, but has to throw prize bouts against lesser talents with better social contacts.

Naldinho embarks on small-scale hold-ups, but the risks far outweigh paltry rewards, especially when ripped off by the local godfather. Karina works as a stripper and prostitute, with the most developed sense of community shown among her co-workers in the nightclub. Then, when she becomes pregnant, both men flatter themselves as individual 'saviours'. Violence ensues



as neither can modulate their envious 'marriage' fantasies.

Deco's fighting career is an expedient outlet for his frustration at the elusiveness of equilibrium, allowing him to offer Karina tenderness without strings: a heartfelt offer of shared childrearing; the sexual gift of cunnilingus; and consistent concern for her welfare as much as his. Naldinho's paternalistic bravura, however, crumbles into infantile rage with the collapse of his delusions of criminal grandeur.

The hard labour of love

The wider social structures enclosing the trio are efficiently sketched in their illicit drudges earning a crust. Karina's situation is most complex, and the tricky intersection of erotic display,

prostitution and sexual romance is cleverly handled without moral judgement. The advising Bahia Association of Sex Workers surely helped sidestep stereotypes of exploitation and abuse, with the prostitutes forging some agency in their work and in the ways it overflows into personal life.

As practical economics, any personal degradation is contextualised by the available options – familiar to women everywhere whose only remaining resources reside in their sexualised bodies. Conversely, the clients are pathetically at the mercy of lust covered up, for example, with macho bluff and bluster.

Explicitly marked as defensive reactions to vulnerability and neediness, this is alternately tolerated, impatiently

dismissed, or reversed in manipulative hustling (most enjoyably in the simulated drug overdose scam). Better-off customers are inadequate to be pandered to, with the hypocrisy of bourgeois mores typified in one client's impotence and suicide after showing Karina family snapshots.

This episode exemplifies institutional complicity with sexual commerce when the nightclub madam bails Karina out after the local police threaten her with trial for drugs offences. She realises that she is caught in a trap arising from servicing the needs of others.

Her ambivalent desires to do this while being looked after as well as valued romantically and sexually – which all seemed conceivable with Deco and Naldinho – are under attack

➔ page 6, column 5

MAGAZINES

Two new issues of well-established British anarchist titles have emerged of late.

Organise!

Organise! number 66 is an attractive A4 publication from the Anarchist Federation, with an interesting selection of articles.

Two of the main features focus on environmental issues and anarchist responses to them, one in Ireland around a proposed gas refinery and pipeline, the other on action against strip mining in Appalachia.

Also there's an article on opposition to the government's ID card scheme, an historical piece on the Spanish Civil War and on contemporary anarchist activity in Venezuela.

There's also a discussion on what stance anarchists should take towards

the media and academic researchers. The culture section has a piece on the Spanish artist Ramon Acin Aquilue, short reviews of four

Kate Sharpley Library pamphlets and an appreciation of Paul Avrich.

The issue is rounded off with a couple of short historical biographical pieces, and the usual contacts, publications and a full page aims and principles.

Direct Action

Direct Action number 36 is another A4 publication, this is from the Solidarity Federation, with a similar mix of features, reviews and historical pieces as *Organise!*

The main features in this issue are a piece on TV and policing, education, the state and working class education, the Spanish civil war (well it is the 70th

anniversary), anarchism in Southern Africa, radical history in South London (and a review of some of related pamphlets), an analysis of New Labour and capitalism and a couple of other pamphlets and one music CD review. There are also the obligatory contacts and other information.

Both publications have now dropped any attempt at providing 'news' coverage, instead focusing on more analytical and historical material, coupled with interviews and reviews. Sadly neither has a letters page this time, but overall both contain interesting items. That said, I feel that the quality of writing in *Organise!* is of a higher quality than *Direct Action*, but as the latter has just got a new editorial team, let's hope they'll improve with time!

On the other hand, *Direct Action's* use of colour on its cover makes it

more attractive, although one sometimes struggles to see what the images on the front and back covers are supposed to represent or what idea they are trying to get over.

Bread and Roses

A third title, *Bread and Roses*, has also hit the shelves. Their second issue this year, the magazine is the official organ of the IWW. Produced in Brighton, this issue delivers a mix of news regarding the US syndicalist stalwart, which has nearly completed registration in the UK as an officially recognised union.

One article to specifically watch out for is a special feature on the Haymarket Martyrs, which goes into a great deal of depth on the famed Chicago bombings and subsequent trial which we now remember every May day.

Richard Alexander/Rob Ray

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A Sideways Look

As I started to write this piece, with the sound of heavy rain against the window, it could only have been an English drought.

Sutton and East Surrey Water has got a drought order and it emerged that Thames Water were not applying for a drought order, despite pressure from the Environment Agency. It's not hard to gauge why - Thames has the worst leakage records in the country, as well as making enormous profits and paying their Chief Executive £800,000 a year - it's a situation the term 'PR disaster' was coined for. Thames were one of only two companies (the other being United Utilities) not to meet the targets imposed by Ofwat for reducing leakage.

Thames Water complain that their problem is the Victorian pipes in London. They are, apparently, quite old, and in need of some repair. This situation appears to be a bit unforeseen! Clearly, the leaks couldn't all be fixed at once, but one wonders what they've been up to in the last few decades - and what they achieve when they do dig up the roads.

The government has said that the drought is caused by depletion of ground water. This hits certain areas of the south east harder, because the region has historically lower rainfall and fewer reservoirs. Lower than average rainfall over the last two years has meant that the ground water held in aquifers has not replenished.

However, I don't think that's the only reason. There are also issues with what happens to rain when it falls. If it is torrential, a lot will run off straight into rivers and then the sea. This also causes more pollution, as heavy rain washes chemicals and rubbish into the sea. One bonus of the drought has been that beaches in the South East are now much cleaner, because pollution hasn't been washed out to sea.

I also think the pattern of development in the South East, particularly, has probably exacerbated it. Concreting over fields for houses, offices, roads and car parks means the ground cannot absorb rainfall - which in turn maximises the surface runoff. Suburbs have mile after mile of houses with the front garden concreted over to make a drive and save on the time and trouble of a garden. Even where runoff does make it beyond the concrete, its effect is far from benign, as the chemicals and pollution it has absorbed along the way pass into the aquifer. There is the added complication that a lot of channels, both natural and man-made storm drains, cannot cope with large volumes of water travelling at speed, making floods more likely.

Water is set to be one of the key areas of conflict in the coming century - it's already a big issue in Spain where the government plan to divert water from the north of the country to feed the agriculture of Andalusia and Murcia. Battles regularly take place

between the poor and rapacious water multinationals in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The people of Bolivia have successfully fought off multinationals such as Suez and Bewater who raised prices and denied potable water to the poor.

Changes have to be made to the way we, in Britain, use water.

Of course, capitalism can't be blamed for there being less rainfall, that's surely down to climate change. I wonder what's been driving that?

Svartfrosk

Blast from the Past

Taken from Freedom 8th June 1996, entitled Mad Cow Panic

Spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, FSE, Scrapie, CJD, Kudu and other names varying with the species of mammal affected) resisted all attempts to identify the virus which caused it, until the totally unexpected hypothesis was proposed that it is not a virus at all but a mis-shapen protein.

Politicians and officials without scientific training are impressed by Greek. Because scientists can translate disease that makes holes in the brain into spongiform encephalopathy, it is assumed that they know what is going on. Before 1995, scientific advice to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) was "we don't know what causes BSE, but we're looking for a virus". MAFF proceeded on the basis that BSE was caused by a virus, citing 'scientific evidence'. A hand-out of the 1970s reads:

"Food items containing meat or meat products, such as sandwiches, pork pies, pasties and burgers, may carry viruses which, although harmless to humans, can cause serious disease in grass eating animals and pigs. It is illegal to feed such products to livestock."

But the prohibition did not apply to the meat in cattle-cake, because that was heated to destroy viruses and other parasites.

The inclusion of meat in cattle-cake is often misunderstood. Cattle are not 'vegetarian'. They are herbivores which require meat chemicals to be healthy. On grass they obtain all the meat they need by ingesting invertebrates 'by accident', but in artificial feed meat must be included 'on purpose'.

The quiz

1. Which Dutch anarchist has had only one of his major works published in English, *The Conquest of Violence*?
2. Which union initiated 'green bans'?
3. Which country has two sitting MPs who were once anarchists? What party are they in?
4. Which fictionalised account of a successful syndicalist revolution ends with a bizarre sci-fi-style defeat of invading imperialist armies?

Answers on page 6



Imagine if...

Jason Cowley sat eyeing up his latest masterpiece for the New Statesman. His call for the liberals of the country to send in their nominations for the greatest heroes of our time had been a spectacular success.

Thousands of people had written in, nominating for the hall of fame some of the greatest and most heroic people ever to walk the earth. People who had made such a huge contribution to the liberal cause that they deserved inclusion in a list of just 50 out of the planet's entire six billion souls.

Among the two most obvious greats, Aung San Suu Kyi and Nelson Mandela, the liberals had spoken. Bob Geldof was the third most heroic person in the world. Thatcher was fifth. Bill Gates a lowly eighth, and disappointingly, the near-miraculous work by Jamie Oliver in pushing school dinners 'right up the government's agenda' was a mere 17th, slightly above Tony Blair.

He wiped a tear from his eye as he spotted who was at number 31, after Bono, Richard Branson and George Galloway but just about beating the Queen. Brian Haw. What was a guy like that doing there, a guy who, like Bonnie from Big Brother, had seen his most precious possessions taken away and who now had just one placard left, having stood up to the brutality of the British state all by himself and reaped the bitter harvest of their near-fascist repression.

He spotted a report on 'another Columbian trade unionist murdered after standing up to state-sponsored paramilitaries' which had been gathering dust on his desk for months. Carefully, he pushed it to the bottom of his 'doesn't fit into a liberal worldview' pile, and resumed re-reading his article.

See newstatesman.com/200605220016

Listings

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 Blackfriars Hall, St Andrews Plain, Norwich, from 10am to 6pm, see norwichanarchists.org

10th June World Naked Bike Ride, at over 60 worldwide locations, for details see worldnakedbikeride.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

16th to 18th June Projectile, a festival of anarchist film and culture at the Star & Shadow Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne, see projectile.org.uk for details 23 to 26th June Global Animal Rights Gathering organised by Shac (shac.net) For info contact info@ar2006.info or see

ar2006.info

15th to 18th July G8 2006 in St Petersburg, Russia, to find out more check out <http://g8-2006.plentyfact.net> or <http://spb8.hardcore.lt/>

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

21st July International protest camp in Iceland where a series of gigantic dams is already under construction in the eastern highlands and the natural habitat of many rare and endangered plants and animals will be destroyed, see savingiceland.org

26th to 30th July DIY: Against the State, an activist and anarchist convention in Freiburg, Germany, with workshops, bands and more, plus a big Reclaim The Streets party on the Saturday, contact d.i.y.against@gmx.de

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

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