

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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WHERE THE BENEFIT LIES

The government has this month introduced its controversial Welfare Reform Bill, aiming to take one million people off incapacity benefits.

Incapacity Benefits themselves are to go, replaced by a new Employment and Support Allowance which for most people on them today may reduce the longer people stay off work.

The system is part of a three-pronged attack on the long-term unemployed, and is part of a drive to get 80% of people in work. In conjunction with the raising of working age for the elderly, and plans to get lone parents out of the home, the government are hoping in total to put 2.3 million people to work in order to increase the size of the workforce and help pay for the so-called 'pensions timebomb' when the baby-boomer generation retires.

The system seems to operate in a similar way to Job Seekers' Allowance, with the disabled asked to undertake a series of tasks 'in exchange' for payments.

One explanatory document notes: "To most people it will be paid in return for undertaking work related interviews, agreeing an action plan and, as resources allow, participating in some form of work-related activity. If benefit recipients do not fulfil these agreed responsibilities, the new benefit will be reduced in a series of slices, ultimately to the equivalent level of basic Jobseeker's Allowance though they will remain on ESA."

However disability rights organisations have hit out against the idea, pointing to circumstances where those on incapacity may not be able to understand what they are being asked for or could be unable to interact sufficiently with officers from the Department of Work and Pensions to complete their tasks.

Officers from the National Autistic Society have expressed concerns that people with autism might be penalised, as would people with learning disabilities, and potentially those with emotional and psychiatric problems..

Gordon Lishman, Director General of Age Concern, said: "This is a deeply flawed package. It will do nothing for millions of people already out of work and risks doing little for the hundreds of thousands who will apply for the new benefit after their 50th birthday.

"We agree with supporting people to get back to work, but the evidence shows that existing pilots are not working for people over 50. Unless the support on offer actually works, it is wrong to require people to participate or to pay them lower benefits in the expectation they will find jobs."

Most of the work in moving people from benefits into the workplace, it has emerged, will be made the responsibility of private agencies, with 60% of ESA support work allocated to the commercial sector. Much of the rest of the ESA scheme will also be contracted out, this time to NGOs or voluntary groups.



COOLING OFF: Demonstrators take a break as thousands of students march through Frankfurt in Germany. Events turned ugly shortly after this picture was taken, with riot police clubbing and spraying demonstrators, and 230 people were arrested, but later released without charge. The heavy-handed police approach was unexpected, as a 'hands-off' approach is more normal for student demonstrations. The march was held in protest at the city's introduction of tuition fees, following the success last year of conservative parliamentarians in overturning a legal ban on individual states introducing them. Frankfurt University now charges 15,000euros, not including living accommodation.

Margaret Hodge, the minister for work, said that the plans did not amount to a privatisation of Jobcentre

Plus as the state would continue to oversee employment services. But she said that voluntary groups in

particular were more effective in reaching out to marginalised groups

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WIN AT SECRET TRIBUNAL

A confidential sum has been awarded to Michael Anderson, an electrician thought to have been one of over 1,000 people blacklisted by three major contractors.

The case is linked to ongoing allegations by industry whistleblower Alan Wainwright, who himself is undergoing a major tribunal case regarding his sacking from a senior position at Hayden Young.

Wainwright said in his blog on the subject: "Michael was one of the electricians on the Drake and Scull, Jubilee Line Extension Project list.

"I had received a witness order to give evidence at the tribunal [M. Anderson v Emcor Rail and

Engineering] on 21st June 2006, but both parties agreed a confidential settlement the day before."

Anderson, a JIB graded approved electrician, said before the trial that he had spent 16 months out of work, despite sending out over 250 applications over the period.

The news came ahead of a meeting in London of rank and file building workers on 11th July to discuss the situation, and amid several branch meetings across the sector.

Construction workers have been battling for years to expose blacklisting in the industry against organisers in disputes. As early as July 2004, a group of Manchester Electricians scored a major victory when a tribunal ruled they had been unfairly sacked due to the union activities aided and abetted by an Amicus officer - known as the DAF tribunal.

Since Wainwright's tribunal case began in March, along with three lists published at his blog on blacklistedelectricians.blogspot.com, the

campaign has gathered pace.

Apart from Michael Anderson, two other people have come forward and are willing to be published.

Steve Johnson, an electrical engineer for subcontractor Logic on the Manchester Royal Infirmary building project, has said that he was pressured to fire worker Steve Acheson on the orders of the main contractor - a charge not denied by Rob Macintyre, who had done the pressuring.

The Royal Infirmary project has gained some notoriety over the last year, as it is also the site at which three workers picketed last month following their dismissal - allegedly over their participation in the DAF tribunal.

The other figure, Steve Keevil, claims he has been unable to find work with another Joint Industry Board company since his involvement in the Jubilee Line Extension project, on which the largest blacklist is allegedly based.

Having contacted *Freedom* and anarchist magazine *Northern Voices*,

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SIEGE AT PIETER

An unconfirmed report on Russia Indymedia has alleged that a factory occupation in the city has been attacked by what appear to be bailiffs and city officials.

The OZ mpbo plant was occupied after managers at the facility built up a debt to workers of 49m roubles (just under £1m) over the course of four months, with wages left unpaid throughout that time.

At the turn of the month, courts bound over the company to pay back wages, but this was quickly followed by a team of officials and ten bailiffs who attempted to evict the occupying workforce. A reporter from the scene said: "If not for the interference of the police, then blood could have been spilled in Zavodchan. There would have been a lot.

"To put it is simply and bluntly - they tried to thrash and to fling out the plant protection and its workers and put a guard in their place. This would have occurred, if not for the protest of the people and law."

Workers have called for a criminal prosecution against Yunis Lukmanov, chairman of the housing committee of the city, and that he be immediately removed from his post.

The workforce have declared the attempted eviction, ordered by Lukmanov, to be illegal as law courts have ruled the workforce should be paid and the action is being perceived as an attempt to wrest back control of the situation from the workforce so wages can continue to be withheld.

The workforce have also raised questions over the move as part of a wider policy in St Petersburg of political provocation of the local workforce, and mention was even made of the move as a means of tearing support away from the G8 demonstrations due this month.



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Home and away

Liverpool fire fight

Merseyside firefighters could be forced into strike action to save four fire engines for the region. FBU leaders have met the fire authority to discuss the cutbacks, which include 120 job losses and plans to reduce nightly cover in Liverpool city centre to just one engine.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is angry over the recommendations of 'time and motion consultants' who had previously been brought into the Hertfordshire brigade, where a strike resulted. The Union has commissioned accountants to find the £3m worth of savings the fire service insists it must make, without putting the public at increased risk.

TDS worker wildcat

Production at Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port factory was stopped on Monday after staff walked out at neighboring TDS Automotive Logistics.

The mini strike took place without a vote amongst the company's workers, who supply parts to Vauxhall. The workers are angry at plans to cut 240 jobs at TDS, and bravely took matters into their own hands. Their union – the Trade and General Workers Union – said they did not support the walkout, and claimed that their main priority was getting staff back to work.

On Monday, a statement from TDS said the company was discussing cutting the jobs in order to move from three to two shifts. The Transport and General Workers' Union and Amicus rejected proposals for redundancy terms on Friday, but on Monday the workers walked out without consulting their leaders.

Production of the Vauxhall Astra stopped at about 7.30am on Monday. Vauxhall said this was due to a lack of a number of parts being supplied by the company.

Rolling stock watched

The Department for Transport has begun a market investigation into rail rolling stock companies (Roscos).

In welcoming the referral to the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), transport union boss Gerry Doherty from Tssa said: "The ORR investigated the rolling stock market once before in 1998.

Between then and the 'Future of Rail' White Paper, published by the government in July 2004 the Roscos continued reporting operating profits averaging over 47% of their revenue each year."

The Tssa transport union said: "If the government is serious about delivering value for public money then they will have no qualms about returning the Roscos to public ownership at a discounted price."

Barclays frank

Banking giant Barclays has decided to cut hundreds of finance jobs on top of 1,200 losses from its banking division.

Barclay's, the third largest bank in Britain, is cutting 350 more jobs from sites in Birmingham and East Sussex as part of a continued restructuring, as it also closes its Woolwich operations.

Stephen Price, managing director of Barclays asset and sales finance, said the bank had to move with the market to ensure future success. "Our customers have told us what they want – a more slick and streamlined process."

Keith Brookes, of the union Amicus, which represents bank workers, said it was endeavouring to keep compulsory redundancies to an absolute minimum. "We are confident that the vast majority of the job cuts will be dealt with through natural attrition and redeployment."

Around the world

FRANCE: Over the last year, the French Ministry of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy has had to back-pedal on his new deportation plans in the face of a new form of resistance: that of parents and teachers trying to protect children or 'illegal' immigrants called *sans-papiers* (without papers).

In October last year, amidst growing demonstrations and strikes in schools around France, and protests against police arresting children in school, Sarkozy had to send instructions so that pupils and their families could stay until the end of the school term. As this deadline approaches, fear has been mounting among immigrant families, but also popular discontent channelled through a network called RESF or *Reseau Education Sans Frontieres* (Learning Without Borders) that is now active in all regions in France and staging various protests and symbolic actions like 'parrainage republicains' (Republican patronage).

RESF has gained recognition as small victories have accumulated over time, one of the latest being the return of Mariam Sylla and her two children from Mali as Sarkozy was embarking on a controversial tour to Mali and other African countries. A national petition of civil disobedience, claiming "we will not let them take those children, we will protect them, we will hide them from the police" has gathered over 62,000 signatures so far. Nicolas Sarkozy has managed to have his new anti-immigrant law pass with approval of *Assemblée Nationale* (Parliament) and *Sénat*, but has had to issue new instructions, which have been heavily

criticised, allowing some immigrant families to stay.

Sarkozy wanted to raise an electoral debate, courting Petainist France at the expense of immigrants, but this is now becoming a central opinion debate at his expense.

POLAND: Minister of Education, Romek Giertych, has indicated his intention to prosecute anarchists who have been attacking his moves to strengthen the Catholic church and denounce homosexuality in schools.

The details of the action is still unclear, but Romek has filed (yet another) complaint to the prosecutor. This time he is trying to repress the Student's Initiative, which has organised protests against him. It's already headline news that Romek has accused them of publishing information on its website inciting young people to commit crimes.

They may want to repress one or two activists who were in the forefront of the recent protests against the Minister. 'AP' has received interrogating phone calls about his and the student groups relation to the Anarchist Federation. AP admitted that he is a member but denied that the student's group is part of the federation or that all the people who took part in protests or consider themselves part of the group are even anarchists.

There are no legal organisations like Student's Initiative, so there is no organisation to take to court – of course, there are also no leaders, although the media likes to make them. Since the mainstream press have made our friend into one of the leaders, comrades are afraid that Giertych will try to give him

a particularly hard time. The Anarchist Federation has denounced these attempts by Giertych to demonise the students.

RUSSIA: As reported by activists from the Network Against the G8, within the last few weeks St Petersburg's cops visited the homes of ten local anarchists and antifascists (participants of Anti-War Committee, Piter's League of Anarchists, Antifascist Association and other organisations) – those who were briefly detained after a Mayday demonstration.

Activists who were at home during those 'visits' had their fingerprints taken and had to make written statements about their plans for the time of the G8 summit in July. This follows other recent 'visits' by police officers from criminal investigation units and officers of Federal Security Service (FSB) who came to their homes or workplaces threatening activists. If activists could not be found – their relatives and colleagues were harassed.

It's not just the dreadlocked masses who won't be welcome though, as Moscow bureaucrats are still refusing entry to forty foreign non-governmental organisations. According to one pen-pusher, the main reason was "mistakes in connection with the negligent filling in of forms."

TIMOR: Initial checks on children in makeshift camps for displaced persons in Timor-Leste today indicated that 15% need immediate treatment for malnutrition after violence ripped through the small South-East Asian nation, driving more than 155,000 people, 15% of the

total population, from their homes.

As UN envoys continued their efforts to calm tensions and plan for a possible expanded UN police force in the country, the UN Children's Fund launched a campaign to screen all the estimated ten thousand children under the age of 5 living in 66 camps in Dili, the capital.

The Agency examined three hundred children at the Dom Bosco Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, one of the largest, and found 45 malnourished children for medical care, five of whom were sent directly to hospitals, although there is no overall food shortage.

The camp houses 14,000 people who fled their homes in the crisis, which erupted in late April.

The country saw its food aid from the United Nations halved late last month.

USA: Members of the Dehcho First Nations, a native American tribe in Canada, have said they will resist the building of a \$7bn pipeline across the Northwestern Territories using both legislative means and direct action.

An 800-mile-long natural gas pipeline would bisect the tribe's traditional territory and help spawn industrial development in Canada's vast boreal forest, one of the last intact stretches of the Earth's original forest cover.

The companies that want to build the underground pipeline – Imperial Oil, Shell Canada, ConocoPhillips and ExxonMobil Canada – estimate that it would carry 1.2 billion cubic feet of gas per day.

Prison news

Colnbrook fight goes on

According to figures inside the immigration detention facility at Colnbrook, the Home Office is attempting to cover up the hunger strikes previously reported in *Freedom*.

Forty detainees at Colnbrook went on hunger strike again two weeks ago after their previous requests were ignored. Over half are still on hunger strike, some have been punished, moved to the health care in order to separate them from friends or put in isolation.

They are still fighting lengthy, arbitrary detention, sometimes for over a year – one man has been detained for five years! There have been three recent suicide attempts in the centre – one man cut himself badly after being detained for over two years. He had been asking in vain to be sent back to his country.

Over 100 detainees went on hunger strike in Colnbrook on 8th April 2006. The hunger strike started as a spontaneous reaction against the repression there during the 300-strong protest outside demanding the closure of all detention centres. A week later 120 detainees went on hunger strike at Haslar (Hampshire) in solidarity with Colnbrook. A further 120 detainees went on a hunger strike in Campsfield House near Oxford on 14th June.

Many live in fear. Detention makes it

difficult to stay in contact with friends, family and solicitors. Many are unable to find a solicitor before they are arbitrarily deported to the country they have fled from – to face whatever persecution forced them to come here in the first place. Many immigration detainees are survivors of torture and rape, and many had family members killed, sometimes in front of them.

Home Office figures reveal that there are 2,250 men, women and children in detention the UK. Around 25,000 in total were detained last year, and around 15,000 deported. More people were deported in the first quarter 2006 than ever before, despite the fact that asylum applications are decreasing.

The government doesn't monitor what happens to people after deportation. NGOs and human rights activists have reported numerous cases of people imprisoned, tortured and even killed after being deported.

Harmondsworth and Colnbrook are next to each other near Heathrow airport, and have a capacity of 550 and 326 respectively, holding single men. Harmondsworth was set ablaze during a disturbance in 2004 following the suicide of detainee Sergey Baraunick. The centre later re-opened. Tinsley House (135 capacity: men, women and children) is near Gatwick, where they

are planning to build a fourth detention centre. Yarl's Wood near Bedford was built to detain up to 900. Half of this centre burnt down in 2002, endangering the detainees locked inside. The centre re-opened to detain single women, children and families.

In an open letter, inmates said: "Officers have resolved to falsify their reports to cover their own failures in stopping the movement. The officers have resorted to spying on the detainees, and examining the shop records to see if the detainees are buying any edible materials.

"If they see even one sweet or candy they tick on their register that the detainee is now eating. One was seen with a cup of water and the officer proceeded to call him liar for pretending to be on hunger strike, and eating in secret. Civil disobedience at the centre is at an all time high. There are verbal clashes, and exchanges between officers and detainees, almost every hour." Email noborderslondon@riseup.org for more information or you can go to ncadc.org.uk, barbedwirebritain.org.uk, noil.org.uk or apil2.org.uk

Barcelona pair freed on bail

Ruben, arrested on 9th February in Barcelona, was released on 26th June on 6,000 euros bail. His comrade Ignasi was bailed out on 31st March.

However, they're still being charged.

Around 8pm on 9th February, a comrade was arrested on his way home from work. Several masked men belonging to the anti-terrorist police stormed his workplace and forced him into a van. Our comrade was driven home to the Horta neighbourhood and his house searched.

The police took fingerprint samples, and took away computers, hard drives, and paperwork. During the raid another comrade was arrested, but later released without charges the following day. At the same time another comrade's house was raided in the centre of town and he was arrested.

They are being accused of public disorder and several acts of sabotage, including an arson attack to the Sabadell Bank and to the CIRE (Centre de Iniciatives por la Reinsercio), an enterprise which exploits cheap prison labour in Catalunya.

Organise and take action now against Spanish embassies, consulates and companies!

Please send details of any actions taken to coordinadora@riseup.net

If you want to help financially, the bank account is: Banco Oficina D.C. N' mero de cuenta, BBVA 0182-4209-47-0201518073 For more info see <http://karcelona.revolt.org> or write to coordinadora@riseup.net

News

A very English protest

Rob Ray looks into a new plan by the unions involved in the Ryton plant closure to save jobs

Following a failed strike ballot earlier this year to stop Peugeot from outsourcing its manufacture of cars to Eastern Europe, Amicus and the T&G launched two major campaigns to 'save British jobs.'

The first saw Amicus attempt to pressure Vauxhall, who also announced cuts that month, by threatening to switch its £8m vehicle fleet deal to another manufacturer in May. The second came into the effect at the beginning of July, and comprises a £1m outlay – on advertising.

Coming as the World Cup reached its end, the advertising campaign, which was launched after England had been knocked out, has attempted to use nationalism to appeal to car buyers to boycott Peugeot.

Under the banner "You're either Peugeot or England", the two unions have, according to one union insider, been deliberately targeted to use jingoism, particularly in papers such as the *Daily Sport*, as a means to build support for a consumer boycott.

The boycott was launched in April when the announcement was made that the Ryton plant in Coventry, which has the highest productivity in the company making the most successful brand in Peugeot's history, would close midway through 2007 with a loss of 2,300 jobs.

An initial ballot for a strike was narrowly rejected, amid fears that the company would simply use an action as excuse to shut the facility down earlier. Less vocal calls for a factory occupation, to keep equipment on site, were also rejected.

The boycott, which is supported by the Ryton workers, was launched along-

side a 'rescue plan' drawn up by the unions, in an attempt to pressure Peugeot to the negotiating table.

Questions as to the effectiveness of a boycott have surfaced however, with libertarian commentators such as West Midlands Anarchists, who have staged solidarity actions at Ryton, arguing that its impact will be severely limited.

The target for a consumer boycott has also been criticised by industry insiders. Writers for *Which Car?* magazine, which recorded the most positive reaction so far to the concept of a consumer boycott in its poll – 40% of respondents – believe that for most buyers of an expensive new car, ethical factors will be a low priority.

One example given involved a similar campaign launched by shoe manufacturers in Italy on far more evocative grounds, urging consumers to buy shoes from Europe to fight child labour practices elsewhere, which has failed to make an impact. Other high-profile consumer boycotts, on items which make far less impact on personal budgets than car buying, most notably the largest boycott campaign in the world, against Nestlé.

Amicus defended the outlay's potential impact, saying "We believe that the Great British public will want to send a powerful message to Peugeot – that if they want to sell their cars here they have to build them here. They cannot expect to bolster their already vast profits by exploiting cheap labour in Eastern Europe without there being a backlash."

The most major concerns have been raised however from socialist groups of all stripes that following pledges from



both French and Eastern European workers of sympathy strikes if radical action were to be taken, the move undermines international solidarity in favour of crude national cheerleading. Peugeot itself has weighed in with an

attack, asking what mandate the unions have to spend so much of their memberships' money without recourse to a ballot.

• In a bizarre twist, Plans to campaign on the airwaves have been dashed by

a law banning trade unions from mentioning employers or industrial disputes.

Section 15 of the Radio Advertising Standards code limits trade unions to advertising their services to members.

Anger at closures

A source at the Land Registry has hit out at union and government connivance over moves to shut nearly a third of its holdings and displace or sack hundreds of workers across the country.

The source, who wishes to remain anonymous, along with thousands of other staff at the Land Registry found out about a decision by top bosses at the department that the closure of seven out of 24 offices had been taken last month following a public announcement.

But consultation over the process, which would uproot or sack around 25% of the department's 8,500 staff by 2015, has been shown up as a sham after it emerged that union officials for the incumbent PCS agreed to the move in secret, effectively presenting a done deal to the workforce.

The first building to go will be the group's South East office at Harrow, and staff morale reached rock bottom after they found out that they would effectively be acting as sacrificial lambs for upper management.

Freedom's source said: "Our director of Human Resources rather gave the game away when she explained to staff that the Land Registry Head Office hadn't even been bothered to approach the Treasury to find out if they would get the okay for renewing the [Harrow] lease, because they didn't want to draw their attention to all the other Land Registry staff based in the South East.

"So people at Harrow are enjoying the exhilarating sensation of being sacrificed for the greater good of all the people at Head Office and elsewhere who don't fancy having to move.

"Our unions have been pretty useless – apparently in advance of the decision Head Office approached a couple of PCS national officers and asked them if they would be prepared to discuss something confidentially. My response would have been 'No – if it's that important I don't want to keep it secret from my members'. Their's was 'Okay then'.

"There's a high level of unionisation but they never seem able to stop

management from doing exactly what they like. Young people and people with kids will be most affected, the older people will just wait it out or retire and won't be too bothered."

Land Registry's York Office, currently employing 136 staff, will also close by 2015 when the lease expires. In towns where Land Registry has two offices – Birkenhead, Durham, Lytham, Nottingham and Swansea – the offices will be merged and replaced by a single office in the town.

Peter Collis, Chief Land Registrar, said: "We will be sorry to close our office in Harrow which has served us well since 1965. However, we now need to reduce the number of local offices we have to match our lower staff numbers."



Scam at the BBC

An analysis of the BBC's latest finance report has found the company are hiding a huge pension budget surplus to drive through cuts to their employees' scheme.

Entertainment union BECTU has accused the BBC of burying good news about its pension scheme by dropping key data from its Annual Report.

Vital finance figures have been omitted from the report, which was published on 7th July.

Normally BBC reports on each year's pension scheme 'interim valuation' – a snapshot measurement of a pension fund's health in between the three-yearly full valuations required by law.

This year the interim valuation figures have been dropped – a change that the union believes was made to avoid the BBC having to reveal an embarrassingly-large fund surplus as cuts go through to pensions.

Union officials estimate that the BBC has a surplus approaching half a billion pounds, based on the £130 million

surplus figure that was included in the Annual Report in accordance with accounting rule FRS 17.

This measurement, although notoriously volatile, has always shown a lower valuation of the BBC scheme than the statutory calculations carried out each year by pension actuaries. The fact that its FRS 17 figure has gone into the black, after three years of deficit, means that the BBC pension scheme is healthier than almost any other large pension fund in the UK.

In April the BBC announced that its normal retirement age would rise from 60 to 65 in 2016, and from this September new staff joining the Corporation would have access only to a limited-benefit 'career average' pension, rather than the more beneficial final-salary scheme that current staff belong to.

Additionally, staff are being asked to increase their payments into the scheme to 7.5% of salaries in 2007, followed by another possible increase to 9% in 2008.

News

Four months on strike

Over 120 days since CNT workers downed tools against Mercadona, and they're still fighting, reports Rob Ray

As *Freedom* goes to press, strikers at a Spanish centre for supermarket giant Mercadona have entered the fifth month of an open-ended dispute, reiterating that they will not give up despite the odds.

15th July saw a day of solidarity action for the strike, with workers in all sections of the union's international, the IWA, urged to picket Spanish consulates, send letters of protest to Mercadona and raise money.

The Mercadona strike blew up after an ongoing dispute between union organisers at the company's logistics facility near Barcelona resulted in the unfair dismissal of two workers and heavy sanctions against a third.

The company refused to recognise the union when it began organising in the centre, and threw down the gauntlet by sacking leading organisers.

After a ten day strike was ignored, it was declared indefinite.

Part of the CNT anarcho-syndicalist union, the strikers have seen thousands of euros sent in support, including money from affiliated AIT groups and from Britain, since they began the strike on 8th March.

Solidarity seen already has been warmly received. The IWA secretariat in Oslo has authorised three payments so far, the most recent being at the beginning of this month, and other sections have individually sent money, such as the Solidarity Federation.

The IWA Secretariat said: "In strikes there is an urgent need for economic aid.

The Secretariat has sent 2,500 euros two times [5,000 euros] and has decided now to send another 2,500 euros. Additionally we know that Sections have sent and are collecting money."

There are currently only 17 people on strike, along with the three affected organisers, after an initial surge of well over 100 in the workplace, as many supporters caved in to pressure from the supermarket.

However most of the remaining strikers are immigrants from Latin American countries, and in interviews have said that the tough conditions there have given them little fear of the tactics used by Mercadona in Spain.

In an interview with Kaosenlared.net, one striker said: "Since many of us come from Latin America, where we've experienced tough social conflicts – with unions, wars, etc. – the first thing we did when we came to Barcelona is join two widely known business-friendly unions.

"Fortunately, we've been able to maintain a certain level of organisation amongst ourselves, and that's what made it possible to strike against Mercadona – because if it was for the UGT and CCOO, by now we'd all be fired. CCOO only cares about the union elections – and none of us want that."

The company has used tough tactics to try and break the strike, first of all mass-hiring scab labour when it became apparent that a major strike was beginning, and later filing legal injunctions, hiring security around the



building and keeping the scabs on when people went back to work to keep conditions favourable while they wait the strike out.

They have also enlisted the help of the two reformist unions, UGT and CCOO, members of which have declared against the strikers and

testified in favour of sackings.

One striker said: "You have to know that this corporation, Mercadona, is an exploiter. This is the front against capitalism – you must come to the front and support striking workers – you must make their struggle your struggle; their strike your strike."

Messages of solidarity can be sent to the workers through the Local Federation of the CNT-AIT of Barcelona: sov@barcelona.cnt.es If you wish to help financially, the bank details are IBAN (Europe): ES08 2100 (La Caixa)–1183-35-0100505773, or from other parts of the world BIC (Swift): CAIXESBBXXX 2100 (La Caixa)–1183-35-0100505773

Government declared pointless

The movement of the popular assembly in Oaxaca state in Mexico led by the teachers has decided to put aside the state government and use its own power in the service of the people.

The movement came about as a result of a state-wide strike of teachers who managed to develop a popular movement against the corrupt state government of governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (see *Freedom*, 1st July 2006).

At first the popular assembly – known as APPO – called for the disruption of Mexico's presidential elections on 2nd July and also to force Ortiz from power. However, on 30th June the APPO took the decision to allow the elections to take place as this would present an opportunity for state forces to attack the movement.

Interestingly APPO did not call for a vote for the Leftist candidate Lopez Obrador, but called upon the population to vote against the parties of the right the National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The other major decision taken

was to usurp state power on 5th July.

On 5th July the APPO set up its alternative government in the old government colonial palace, which has been turned into a museum. Enrique Rueda Pacheco, leader of the teachers' union, spoke of "recovering the power of the people for the people". The APPO will attempt to revitalise the Oaxaca system of *usos y costumbres* (practices and customs) that are recognised as a form of self-rule in the constitution of the state. It is a method of reaching decisions and of making politics by consensus, and excludes political parties from the process.

For the APPO to succeed it is important that *usos y costumbres* is re-inaugurated in urban areas where political parties and their corrupt bureaucrats have operated for too long. In many smaller communities the *tequio* (voluntary community service) still operates, with participants coming together to repair roads and buildings, harvesting together and sharing expenses for other community affairs such as weddings and funerals. It

is hoped that *usos y costumbres* will end the system of local party bosses (*caciques*) who profited in their tenure at the expense of local people.

As the APPO convenes its alternative government, the presidential elections have turned into a farce. Caldero of the right wing PAN has, according to the electoral regulatory authority (IFE), won the election over the left wing candidate Lopez Obrador by 0.6% of the vote, despite Obrador leading the polls. Obrador is demanding a full recount of the election as votes from working class districts were found in a municipal dump. Other irregularities include missing electoral rolls and the bias clearly shown by the IFE towards the candidacy of Caldero, in particular declaring him the winner before all the rural votes had been counted. There is a widespread fear in the popular movements of Mexico that the return of the right to power will see the increasing use of violence against them, as was seen at Atenco earlier this year (see *Freedom*, 20th May 2006).

Ellen Kemp

Moroccan repression

On 27th June three human rights activists were jailed for between one and three years by a Moroccan colonial court in Sahrawi, Western Sahara.

There is a continual abuse by the Moroccan colonial administration of the rights of the Sahrawi population. Recently in the capital of Smara houses were ransacked and nearly 30 people were arrested, some of whom were tortured. Demonstrations for the independence in June organised by Sahrawi youth were brutally broken up by colonial police.

Sahrawi has been fighting for its independence since Spain, the former colonists, left the territory in 1975. The Kingdom of Morocco seized this opportunity to take over Sahrawi and begin its colonisation. The fight against the Moroccans is led by the Polisario Front, who had previously fought the Spanish. A war of national liberation was fought until 1991 when a cease fire was reached.

Polisario had hoped to win the referendum on independence planned for 1992,

but to date this has not taken place. The Moroccans refused to hold a referendum that they knew they were going to lose. Since that time the colonisation of Sahrawi has continued and now Moroccan colonists outnumber indigenous Sahwaris.

Probably 200,000 Sahwaris have been displaced and live in camps in Algeria and Mauritania. The Moroccans have built a huge wall across the country and they control the area north and west of this wall. The population of this area is 260,000 people alongside an occupying army of 160,000.

Despite the endless repression of Sahwaris in May 2005 there was a major uprising in several cities against Moroccan rule, led by students. Many were arrested, some disappeared and many others were injured and wounded. These events were labelled the 'Independence Intafada'. The struggles continue as Morocco holds out against international pressure to reach an agreement.

Ellen Kemp

Feature

Stopping the BNP

John Shute analyses the new model BNP, and finds the anarchist response wanting

The May local elections delivered up a significant boost for the British National Party, which took 11 seats in East London, and now holds 46 council seats overall. The BNP has a sustained political support of about one in twenty voters. Part of the reason for the BNP's success is their effectiveness as a site for an anti-establishment protest vote, as the working class becomes increasingly disengaged from the political process.

New Labour's resort to racialised politics out of self-interest – engendering an atmosphere of hysteria about asylum seekers, foreign prisoners, etc., so as to then posture as delivering a tough response – has legitimised the racism of the BNP, allowing it to compete with the racism of the main parties rather than be seen as a party outside the establishment consensus.

Equally, though, the standing-down of Anti-Fascist Action as a physical opposition to the BNP has allowed them free access to working class communities where before they were unable to operate at all.

In response to the disbanding of AFA, Antifa UK has emerged as alternative – seeking to mount both physical and ideological opposition to the far-right. If Antifa's effectiveness can best be measured by the extent of the success of the far-right, then the results so far are less than impressive.

The Antifa's website appears to have more in common with a university ragweek magazine than a serious justification of militant resistance to fascism. There is schoolboy humour aplenty, and an obsession with the dregs of the far right – the British Peoples' Party (BPP) in particular – but little serious analysis of the ideology of the far right or any evidence of effective opposition to the BNP.

In fact the obsession with the BPP serves to cover for the lack of solution, not a physical challenge to those setting the agenda – the BPP as a straw man Antifa can kick around in the absence of any capacity to confront the BNP.

This won't do – in its heyday Anti Fascist Action was a real threat to the far right because its challenge was to them where and when it counted, forcing the National Front and BNP to abandon street-based politics in favour of electoralism, particularly once the protection of Combat 18 had been exposed as a layer of flab around an easily-bruised belly.

The formation of the Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) was, in turn, a response to the electoralism of the BNP – a move to a new arena of ideological warfare, the physical battle having reached a temporary lull.

Any critique of the IWCA's subsequent inability to mount an effective political

challenge to the growth of the BNP as a current within the white working class would need to show both a greater willingness to develop an ideological attack on the BNP and an effectiveness in challenging the BNP physically, in view of its working-class constituency. On both counts the Antifa initiative has yet to succeed. Bricking Nick Griffin's car is not effective physical-force anti fascism.

The lack of analysis of the BNP as an ideological phenomenon is cause for concern. As it has grown under the Griffin leadership, so the BNP has become more sophisticated politically. It is also the case that the BNP under Griffin is not the same political entity as under John Tyndall.

Tyndall was an outright authoritarian. It was easy to combat Tyndall's ideas because it was always possible to somewhere find a quote from him where the critique of liberal democracy slipped into a denial of the need for democracy at all. The current BNP aren't so easy to define. Their manifesto commits them to a Citizens Initiative referenda, a Bill of Rights, a non-party political second chamber, a free fully-funded NHS, a fair deal for pensioners, media reform to allow all sections of our society free and unfettered access to the media.

They are committed to progressivism in taxation by income brackets in the form of a consumption tax. They align themselves with the Levellers, Chartists, the early Labour movement as committed to liberty of conscience, speech, action and political association from monarchs, barons and bosses, and from popes, priests and censors.

Much as the association of the BNP with the memory of Chartism is nauseating, it is not any longer the case that a critique of the BNP can begin and end with an argument that they will deny to those they say they stand for the rights they claim now to represent.

In the 1930s R.G. Collingwood's definition of fascism was as capitalist socialism – a system in which the machinery of Socialism has been turned upside down in order to connect it up with a different prime mover, namely the desire of capitalists to remain capitalists would have sufficed as a critique. The current main players in the far right are a little more slippery than that.

With the defeat of organised labour in the 1980s, class has become the great unmentionable in British politics. The rhetoric of classlessness is combined with a demonisation and ridiculing of the working class as chavs, lumpen, white trash, etc.

This represents in part the sneer of the winners at the losers and in part something more sophisticated – selling



the working class a denial of its own subjectivity as a class, to be replaced by a self-image as individual victim. Thus there exists now a political and ideological consensus that if class is no longer a political issue, then those problems which arise from the continued existence of class division-inequality of wealth, access to housing, education, welfare, are really the fault of individual failings.

When the BNP arrive on the doorstep in working class communities they tell the white working class something that has been denied by the Ivory Tower liberals of the political consensus. Things haven't got better for that silent majority of the British people – they've got worse.

What the BNP do though, is to racialise the issue of class, so that the white working class has been done down by the liberal elite in that its interests in terms of housing, jobs, etc., have been sold out to immigrants, asylum seekers – the multicultural experiment.

On one level it's easy enough to prove that in the last three decades the rich have got progressively more rich, and the poor have simply got poorer – with the non-white poor doing worst of all.

But the conspiracy of silence by that same liberal elite about questions of class means that most working class people don't encounter a political alternative to the BNP that agrees that their lot is shite, but frames the solution in terms of class, not race.

The BNP are the only political force which consistently courts white working class communities and refuses to embrace the liberal lie that social conflict has been managed away. The BNP win the argument because the revolutionary alternative is simply never put.

In a sense, the BNP remain the last line of defence for capital. If the lie that social division is a thing of the past can't hold any longer, in the face of working class disaffection, then the next solution is to racialise the issue of class. If the political establishment is so discredited by its own venality that it has no audience within the working class, then someone pissing in the tent from outside is required to do the job. Hence the BNP will attract greater legitimacy from outside its current core constituency, and the quicker the vote for the mainstream parties falls.

At present the task remains to confront the BNP politically and ideologically

within working class communities. Antifa, if it is to be effective, has to look to physically challenge the BNP, rather than dodge the issue of its capacity to do so by knocking around the pond life of the BPP, NF *et al.*

There are major problems to be surmounted in doing so – as regards the way the BNP liaise with the cops, etc. – but it cannot be ducked. Moreover, there has to be an effective ideological critique of the BNP – not just a collection of jokes and sneers.

We need to take seriously the BNP's audience even if we wish to deny legitimacy to the BNP. The central focus of the BNP is race. If we are to confront their ideas we have to do so on that ground. We have to be able to demonstrate the logic of anti-racism in class terms, not simply dodge the issue or hope that if we focus on bread and butter issues then white working class racism can be forgotten. We cannot defeat the BNP without challenging the racism within our own class head-on.

Working class racism is the slave identifying with the master. Breaking its hold is part of not simply breaking the hold of the BNP, but fostering a sense of militant working class independence.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 67 Number 14

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

First of all we should apologise for our headline on the front page of the last issue. At the time of going to press, we thought it was reasonable to assume that the Asda strike would be going ahead. As it is, it seems there has been a partial victory, tempered by the fact GMB's top management have removed wage negotiations yet another level away from the workforce. Still, at least our roundup of Asda's strikebreaking tactics beforehand may have been useful.

Quick ask on jobs, if you are available one day a week, or more, the bookshop people would love to hear from you – just walk in and ask.

On happier matters, congratulations to the author of A Sideways Look (page 8) on a new addition to the family, may they live a long, fruitful and free life in the bosom of a family and community which loves them. If the new arrival turns out as reliable and decent as Svartfrosk, then they'll be a good 'un.

Best wishes also go to the extended family of regular Freedom writer Dave E, who is now a proud grandfather again; a belated good luck to 'Catch', from Libcom; and to certain leading lights of the recently-closed Square social centre (see page 8) as well!

If nothing else, the last year certainly seems to have been fertile on one level at least...

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 29th July 2006 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 20th July (see contact details above).

The land of make believe

For some twenty years any journalist wanting to file exaggerated, lazy or downright slanderous copy has had one staple source for stories – *Class War*. Sometimes the journalist concerned has been given smears to peddle by Special Branch or MI5, sometimes they are able to come up with an inaccurate article all on their own.

From the hundreds that have appeared, *Class War* proudly presents ten of the biggest whoppers from our mouldy mound of press cuttings.

And for any journalists reading, before you write your piece please consider whether you can you match the following all time classics...

10. Swedes 2 Turnips 1!

That *Class War* was behind the rioting in Gothenburg in 2001 at the demonstration against the EU summit (Jason Burke, Kamal Ahmed and Lars Bevanger, *The Observer*, 17th June 2001). Not one member of *Class War*, from either the UK or Europe was there. The price of a pint in Scandinavia puts us off travelling there. Some of us did watch the footage on telly though.

9. Who Do You Think You're Kidding Mr Hitler!

Class War is a fascist organisation (David Rose in the *Guardian*, 30th September 1985) and Union Jack tattooed CW members provoked the 1985 Brixton riots. Handed to the *Guardian* by self-confessed spook Gerry Gable of *Searchlight* magazine, the paper was forced into a sorry retraction shortly afterwards.

8. Yuppiecide?

'Eastenders Stars Targeted by *Class War* Terrorists' (*News of the World* magazine, 5th July 1987). The colour picture of Leslie Grantham in a sniper's target was the only good thing about this piece, which claimed we intended to assassinate certain actors in the top BBC soap for betraying their class.

7. Gruesome Threesome?

That former *Class War* national organiser Tim Scargill was an informer for fascist group Combat 18 (*Searchlight*, April 1993). Gerry Gable again, this time attacking an ex-member of *Class War* alongside Malcolm Astells of Anti-Fascist Action and independent researcher Larry O'Hara.

This nonsense produced a storm of protest and when *Searchlight* published their history of C18 (White Riot by Nick Lowles, Milo 2001). Scargill,

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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56@

Astells and O'Hara did not warrant a single mention between them. All of which begs the question if *Searchlight* were not willing to stand by their story, why did they print it in the first place?

6. Class War Vampires!

Following a ritualistic murder case in Germany, the *Evening Standard* magazine expressed concern that London is a hotbed of vampire activity ('In Search of the Urban Vampire', Nick Compton, 5th April 2002). Compton interviewed the Rt Rev Sean Manchester of Highgate, who styles himself as the UK's leading vampire hunter. Who could doubt his credentials when he states of vampires "A significant number engage in satanic practices and have contact with established diabolists. Many are anarchists and some support *Class War*. A handful are neo-Nazis. Some are both."

Look out for those neo-Nazi anarchist *Class War* vampires the next time you go to Highgate Cemetery!

5. International Conference Shame!

To the *Daily Star* only one thing could be worse than a *Class War* member – *Class War* members who are not even British, meeting – in London! How else to explain the distress the *Star* went through on 12th September 1991 when its editorial thundered "Instead of holding rallies they should be stuffed and exhibited at the Natural History Museum with the dinosaurs they resemble so closely."

4. Marked Men?

From 1999-2000, the *Sunday Times* ran a series of ever more ludicrous articles by lanky streak of piss Mark Macaskill. What set Macaskill apart from his contemporaries was the range of groups he targeted with his pen, and his extremely obvious and failed attempt to infiltrate the *Sunday Times*' tea boy into London *Class War*.

The highlight of his investigation came when he employed a photographer to target Middlesex University academic Jock Young, who Macaskill believed to be the leader of *Class War*. He is not, and indeed has never even been a member or supporter of the group!

After getting several home addresses of alleged anarchists (presumably from the police) Macaskill's eventual expose of *Class War* (*Sunday Times*, 14th May 2000) left everybody who knows us scratching their heads.

Mackaskill seems to have gone a bit quiet of late – could he have followed the route David Shayler took of working for the *Sunday Times* first and then formally joining the security services afterwards?

3. Pinocchio's Nose

'The Riot Puppeteers' screamed the *Daily Mail* of 25th July 1992. It seemed that the riots of the long hot summer of 1992 did not occur because people do not like the police and actually rather enjoying throwing bricks at cops, but because "members of the *Class War* anarchist organisation are orchestrating the unrest in Burnley and Huddersfield, using CB radios and scanners to monitor police communications." Whatever next!

2. Nazis of the Left!

So screamed *Daily Mirror* pen-pusher John Merritt (17th February 1987) Our crime? Booring actor Tom Watt, then better known as Lofty in *Eastenders*, who had opened a yuppie housing development in Hackney. What did he expect – praise?

1. Digging Up Diana!

By a distance, the best ever story about *Class War* was by Tim Lockett in the *Daily Mirror* of 27th August 2000. *Class War* were apparently planning to dig up the body of Princess Diana from her island grave at Althorp, Northamptonshire. Thankfully for the Spencer family we had been thwarted in this dastardly deed by an undercover TV reporter. The worms of Althorp could carry on eating.

Lockett quoted a 'source' close to the investigation. "The anarchists are highly organised. They have been liaising in code via the pages of the *Big Issue* and group members contact each other with pagers."

Needless to say no such plan, or investigative journalist existed, and no TV programme appeared. The 'plot' itself though had already been published, in the form of a novel – *Anarchist* by *Class War* founder Ian Bone, some two years earlier.

There are lots of good critiques available of the media, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media* by Michael Parenti being one classic. That the media exercises power without responsibility, that they are easily co-opted by politicians and other powerful figures and that journalism tends to reflect the middle concerns and interests of middle class journalists is perhaps obvious. The articles above however suggest something more – that many journalists are idle, prejudiced and perhaps most importantly, nowhere near as clever as they actually believe they are.

Class War Federation

Palestine appeal

The Israeli government's assault on the Palestinian people has reached a new and terrifying level. Israel has:

- Imposed a brutal blockade on the Palestinians, resulting in deliberate starvation;
- Destroyed Gaza's water and electricity supplies, creating death and disease;
- Destroyed vital bridges and roads;
- Killed 51 Palestinians including 20 children in June 2006 alone;
- Imprisoned 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners including 100 women and 300 children;
- Arrested half the elected government and a quarter of elected MPs.

The government of Israel must:

- Stop violating international law and UN resolutions;
- End the collective punishment of the Palestinians;
- Stop the shelling and bombing of Gaza;
- End its illegal occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and remove its settlements;
- Respect the right of the Palestinians to a viable independent state;
- Respect the right of return of refugees;
- Dismantle its illegal apartheid wall built on stolen Palestinian land.

PSC urgently need funds to respond appropriately during this current emergency. We want to do media adverts, etc. We urge you to have collections and help the PSC to campaign effectively during such emergencies.

Donations can be made by card, so if you have a collection or would like to make an individual donation please call us now on 020 7700 6192 in order to

make a card payment.

We all need to monitor the media and complain when clear pro-Israeli bias is being used to misrepresent the situation. For media contacts go to arabmediawatch.com/amw/Default.aspx?tabid=150

Contact admin@palestinecampaign.org and/or info@palestinecampaign.org, or call us if you can help to bring the big message straight to the companies complicit in the illegal actions of the Apartheid State of Israel.

Palestine Solidarity campaign

Benefits

page 1

who do not trust the government.

The proportion of the working age population in receipt of incapacity benefits (or previous equivalents) has increased from around 3% in the 1960s to over 7% today. Much of the increase occurred between the late 1970s and mid-1990s when the caseload rose from 0.7 million to 2.6 million. Since then caseload growth has slowed and after over two decades of substantial growth, in the last year overall numbers have fallen by 61,000 to 2.71 million.

Tribunal

page 1

Keevil has noted two incidents in particular.

Having been assigned to one project via an agency, and been recognised, Mr Keevil was let go after one day without explanation. The same thing happened at a second project, where he was dropped before the day was even finished.

Haden Young, fellow Balfour Beattie subsidiary Balfour Kilpatrick, Carillion Plc, Crown House Engineering and Drake and Scull Engineering have all been implicated.

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Quiz answers

1. Louise Michel on Line 3.
2. It was renamed Stalingrad. During the '60s, activists made new signs for a station called 'Commune de Cronstadt'.
3. They invited the Gaullists (right wing French nationalists) to escape with them and left the anarchists behind because 'of their anti-patriotic attitudes'.
4. He said that there was already a 'workers government'.

REVIEW

Richard Alexander enjoys the true tale of the notorious Bonnot Gang, inventors of the motorised get-away, despite an unhappy ending

At a time when governments are demanding an end to the glorification (or even justification) of 'terrorism', it takes a brave publisher to issue a book about a famous anarchist bank-robber, one that attempts to understand what forces drove him to do what he did. Yet here we have Paul Sharkey's translation of Pino Cacucci's novel about the life and times (and crimes) of Jules Bonnot, member of one of the most notorious (if short-lived) criminal gangs seen in France, in the period shortly before the First World War. And generally speaking the novel makes for a good read. It is fast-paced, informative, evocative and Sharkey's translation serves the original text very well (not that I have seen the original text or can read Italian, but the translator has produced a text that reads very well.)

For those who have little idea of who Jules Bonnot was, a short biographical sketch is appropriate. And here is one stolen from wikipedia: "Bonnot was born on 14th October 1876 in Pont-de-Roide a town in Doubs France (the same département in which anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was born). At the age of five, his mother died, leaving Bonnot in the care of his father (a factory worker) and grandmother. As a teenager, Bonnot served time in prison on two occasions (the latter, for assaulting a police officer) and was compelled to leave his work at the factory after being accused of stealing copper shavings."

Cacucci shows Bonnot at this time of his life very much as a victim of circumstance and of his own inability to ignore the painfully obvious nature of the brutal environment he lived and worked in.

"At the age of 21, Bonnot was conscripted for service in France's infantry, where he served three years as a truck auto mechanic. He was an excellent rifleman and left the army as a corporal first class."

His time in the Army seems to have been well-spent (and he may have wished to have served longer than he did) as it trained him in the use of firearms (he was crack-shot), explosives and auto mechanics.

However, even after leaving military service he found that his past kept catching up on him and he often found

himself unemployed because of his criminal and political past, which saw him return precisely to those activities to sustain himself.

One such period of employment, in the book, is that as the chauffeur to the well-known writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes. Now I have had a problem finding out just how 'true' this is.

According to Richard Parry's book *The Bonnot Gang*, this was nothing more than a folktale or legend. However (according to items on the net) in Peter Costello's book *The Real World of Sherlock Holmes*, Conan Doyle discovered in 1921 that his former driver was indeed Jules Bonnot who had subsequently discovered another use for his driving skills.

Strangely this revelation has yet to make its way into any other biographical material about either Conan Doyle or Bonnot, that I have accessed. However, rather than quibble about 'historical accuracy', one should note that Cacucci makes good use of the story for his own ends, not least by it enabling a discussion about writing crime novels, crime and its causes, etc.

According to the novel it was whilst in England that Bonnot met with another illegalist, the Italian Platano, and they decided to get involved in counterfeiting coinage. Other sources have this happening in France.

Bonnot became loosely associated with individualist / illegalist anarchists around the journal *L'Anarchie*, among them Victor Kibalchich (later better known as 'Victor Serge'), who, in the novel at least, acts as a counter-point to the illegalists, pointing out the repercussions any active illegal activities such robbery (even if it is to raise funds for the 'movement') would have on the wider anarchist scene.

However, the illegalists were not prepared to wait out a lifetime for the proletariat to come round to their way of thinking, they were for living now, hoping that possibly they could light a spark of revolt that would set off something much larger. It should also be noted that their politics were of a 'lifestylist' nature, many being vegetarian and teetotal, and keen on body-building.

As an aside, the novel does a good job of combining Bonnot's life story with those of other associates such as Victor Kibalchich and Raymond 'La



Above, a still from the film *La Bande à Bonnot*; below left, the getaway car.

Science', who first meet up as youngsters in Brussels. And interwoven with their lives are those of the policemen who were keeping an eye on the anarchist milieu, in particular the illegalists.

It should be noted that there was considerable tension between the illegalists and the wider anarchist movement at this time and it's probably one of the few failings of the novel that in focusing so closely on Bonnot and his associates one doesn't really get an idea of the wider movement, in particular the large syndicalist movement that was proving so influential in certain sectors of the working class at this time.

As the wikipedia on the Bonnot gang states: "French anarchist communists attempted to distance themselves from illegalism and anarchist individualism as a whole. In August 1913, the Fédération Communiste-Anarchistes (FCA) condemned individualism as bourgeois and more in keeping with capitalism than communism. An article believed to have been written by Peter Kropotkin, in the British anarchist paper *Freedom*, argued that 'Simple-minded young comrades were often led away by the illegalists' apparent anarchist logic; outsiders simply felt disgusted with anarchist ideas and definitely stopped their ears to any propaganda'."

The counterfeiting gang eventually progressed to robbery and there developed a spiral driven by several factors: the fact of illegal activity causing more such activity to generate

the finances to continue the 'struggle'; the illegal activity drawing increased police surveillance and repression of the wider movement leading to isolation of the illegalists; the police policy of letting the hares run until they had done something so outrageous that there was a widespread public clamour for repression; not to mention a sense of fatalism and inevitably amongst the illegalists themselves – the feeling that they were already beyond the pale and doomed but they would go down fighting, making as big an uproar as they could.

Having decided there was little to more to lose, the Gang, of which Bonnot was just an influential member, not the 'Mr Big' much beloved of police everywhere, used Bonnot's driving skills to develop the armed robbery with added get-away car, apparently the first people to do so.

Their raids drew such a response that the police then mobilised their full resources to smash the gang and, whilst they were at it, engaged in widespread suppression of revolutionary activists and sympathisers.

As the opening of the novel makes clear, this is not a story with a happy ending, with the main illegalists all being either shot or executed, whilst other associates were jailed or transported for lengthy sentences.

Inevitably a novel such as this will raise all sorts of questions for readers, not least how far is it sensible to go in pursuing 'revolutionary' goals when one is in a situation that shows no signs of approaching a 'revolutionary tipping

point'; what is the relationship between such illegalist groups and a wider movement; how far becoming an illegalist (or any form of revolutionary) a question of upbringing, environment, temperament or rational decision making?

It's to the credit of the text that it allows readers to make their own minds up about these matters. It doesn't engage in moralising, but rather tries to get behind the motivations of the participants and the political / economic / social background to what happened. It also fleshes out the lived experience of the illegalists by showing how their political acts impacted on their private lives.

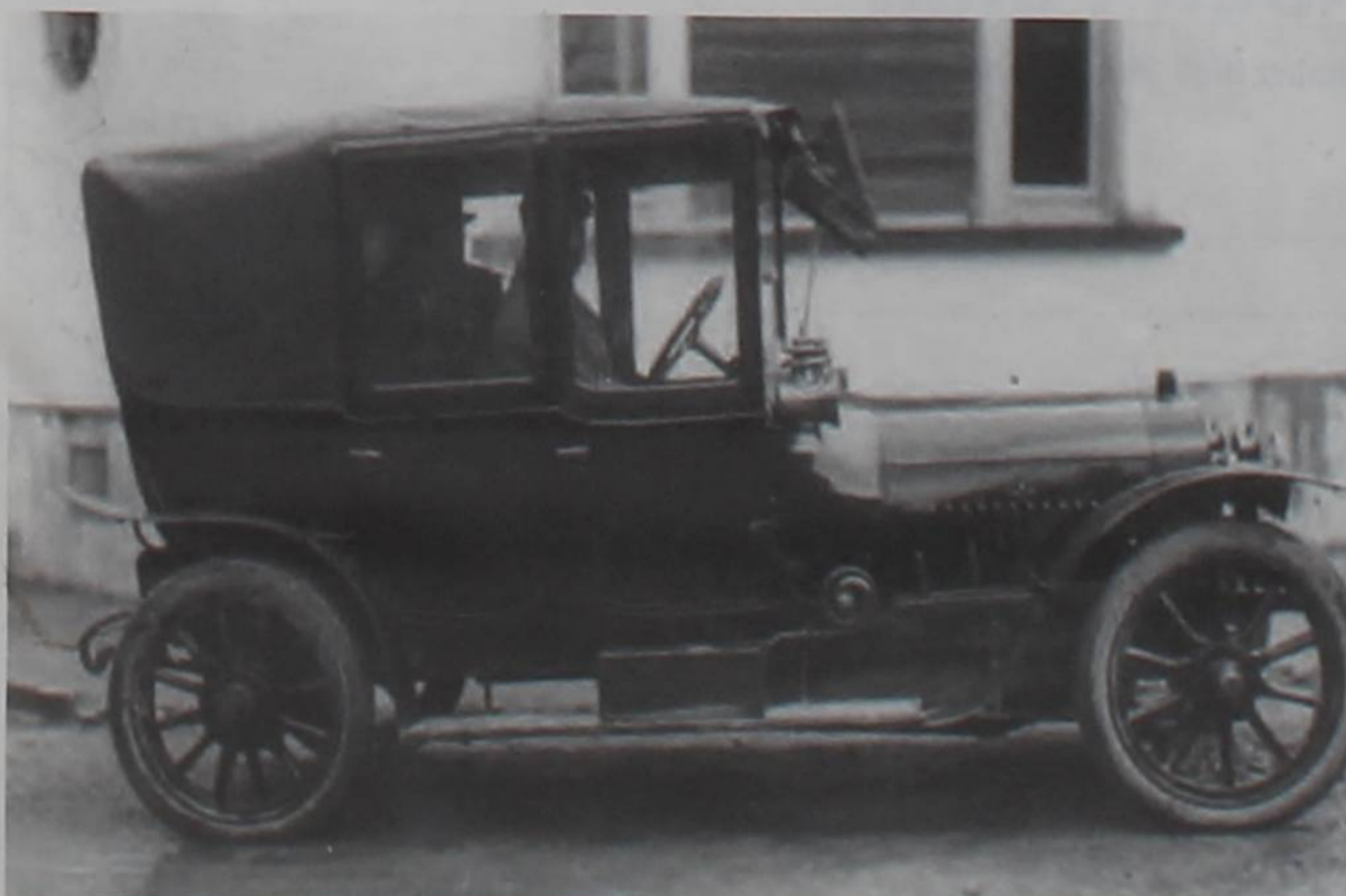
This is a 'crime' novel with a difference, in that it is also explicitly political, but it is so well-written that it should appeal to those who would not usually buy an explicitly 'anarchist' title. One can only hope it does well enough to justify further titles in this series.

The production values are good (economics dictates that the illustrations are printed on paper that doesn't do them justice) and the few typos are doubtless there for those nit-pickers who like to comment on such things.

Overall, reasonably priced and a cracking read.

Without a Glimmer of Remorse by Pino Cacucci, Read & Noir, £9.99

The Bonnot Gang by Richard Parry, Rebel Press, £5.50



A Sideways Look

Events have forced my household into a rather urgent spring clean recently. It forced me to look at all the possessions we have, how much room they take up and whether we really need them at all.

When I was a child, I lived in a three bedroom house as part of a family of five. It was never really too small, though as I was forced to share a bedroom with my brother I felt that it was. Inside, we fitted all the clothes, shoes, furniture, toys and appliances we needed. We had one TV, no freezer.

Instead of a washing machine we had a twin tub and an eye-level grill to make toast. This isn't some Hovis-advert prolier than thou reminiscence – I knew middle class people who had little more than we did. We even had books, if you count my Mum's collection of Mills & Boon and the family dictionary.

My first memory of a new 'need' was around 1976, after a holiday where my dad had watched a colour television, we acquired one. My mum had just started to work – for her own independence and to pay for luxuries like holidays and colour tellies. Like millions of other families across the country we were being sucked into a level of consumerism we'd never known before. And elements of it were good – on colour TV you could see who was playing for what side at football, which ball was being potted in snooker.

Since then, I have watched hundreds of new commodities come into being, and have consumed quite a few. We can all think of examples I'm sure. CDs replacing cassettes replacing vinyl, and about to be supplanted by entirely different ways of consuming the same basic product. I'd wager that quite a few music fans my age own their favourite records on vinyl, tape and CD, and have probably downloaded them as well.

Bottled water is another favourite – what exactly are we paying for? The taste? The greenhouse gases used in transport? The romance of it coming from somewhere with lots of background radiation? A recent look at a kitchen appliances website listed them in 21 categories! And many of them are there to get round other problems created by consumer capitalism. No grill on your cooker? Buy a low-fat grilling machine! No baker in your area – just factory pap – buy a breadmaking machine!

And capitalism doesn't just create new needs in terms of consumables. There are now cleaning companies who do your housework for you, because you're too busy out at work all hours to pay for the things you've realised you need. And of course, that's not the only service that busy people with loads of possessions need. Not far from where I live, in the suburban sprawl that surrounds the South Circular, there used to be a dairy. It's now demolished – and there's a big sign saying 'Another Site Acquired by Big Yellow Self Storage'. Here's another company that's

fulfilling a need we didn't have 20 years ago, when storage was only used by people moving abroad or into hospital. As it happens, the Council, backed by local residents, have said no to this particular site being used for storage, though the company has appealed seven times. There are plenty of other firms offering the same service, though.

Atomised, alienated, more unhappy than any time since measurements began. Yet we carry on filling our homes with stuff. Perhaps the two are connected?

Svartfrosk

Square closes

The Square Occupied Social Centre was formally dissolved in the aftermath of a four-hour garden barbecue. Around thirty people, including most of those who had had a sustained relationship with the space, had come together to decide the term of the resistance that had begun on the Friday.

Sadly, or perhaps it was for the best, it very quickly became clear that there simply wasn't the energy to go on.

People's reasons differed. The most significant and widespread was exhaustion – physical, emotional and political. People were just tired, and wanted a summer in the sun, not barricaded into a building. Others felt the social centre had drawn to its natural conclusion given the limits that had been placed upon it, and wanted summer for reflection and reformulation of the project.

Still others were concerned that the symbolic weekend of resistance, which burnt so brightly, would be diluted by days and weeks of events for events' sake. What everyone with a long-term engagement agreed upon was that this game was up.

The space has now been passed on to a handful of residents who wished to remain and a few people who wanted to continue to run the place as a political and cultural venue. But the Square, which was the network of friends and comrades that ran and maintained that building for five months, has now ceased to be.

It should be emphasised what a glorious explosion the weekend of the resistance was. Quite apart from the official events – the well-attended resistance in the morning of the Friday and the remarkable eight-hour gig on Saturday, attended by 250 kids from all over England – what was most remarkable was the level of emotional fragility, as we all began to sense that we were approaching a profound ending. This building has been sustenance for us, a place to socialise with like-minded people, a place in which to play, to party and conspire. That it was ending – for all of its flaws and tensions – made a lot of us take stock of what was being lost – and it was more than we had thought.

The Ex-Occupation Committee of The Square



Imagine if...

James Forbes, the new non-executive chairman of Thames Water, looked icy as he surveyed the Ofwat report.

"You mean they told us we actually have to spend actual profits on repairing our pipes? Just because we took all the money raised through price hikes and gave it to our shareholders instead of fulfilling our promise of less leakage?" He asked, amazed.

His aide shrugged. "It's the very least Ofwat could get away with, I mean they weren't about to punish us for ripping off the public, but they had to appear to be doing something".

Forbes shook his head in exasperation. "This is not a world I understand lad. I've spent many years in the public utilities post privatisation, and I have to say I am appalled. If this was my old company, Scottish and Southern Energy, we would have been given more public funds to sort this mess out. Hell, in my last job at FirstGroup, we would have been paid more the worse-run our service was.

"But here, I mean, really, taking money away from shareholders simply because they have been stealing millions off the public in some kind of massive door-to-door scam? They're being treated like ordinary people!"

His aide couldn't help it. "Well not really, if an ordinary person had simply stolen millions of pounds from vulnerable people they'd be jailed."

Forbes screamed and threw the report at him. "You bloody communist! Get out, you're fired!"

As the aide left, he pondered the injustice of shareholders being asked politely to not rip off the general public. The cheek! It's management's right, after all, to manage...

Listings

15th to 18th July G8 2006 to be held 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

21st July International protest camp in Iceland where a series of gigantic dams are 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

23rd July 70th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War: year of homage to the victims of Francoism, introduced by Stuart Christie, at Electric Palace Cinema, 39a High Street, Hastings, East Sussex, for info email info@electricpalacecinema.com or call 01424 720393

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

28th July Radical history walk of Greenwich and Deptford, meet at the Blackheath Gate of Greenwich Park at 3pm, for details call 020 8850 4187 or email tliddle@freeuk.com

29th July Protest march in Canning Town, East London against the return of the DSEi Arms Fair in 2007. Meet at Balaam Street entrance to Plaistow Park at 12 noon for the march through Canning Town to the west end of Victoria Dock for a rally at 2.30pm, for details call 07986 904748 or see www.dsei.org

29th July to 12th August Trident Ploughshares international disarmament camp for 15 days of direct action at Faslane and Coulport naval bases in Scotland, for further details see

tridentploughshares.org/article983

6th August Mass cycle ride from Embankment Gardens to Greenwich as part of the send off for the intrepid Peace Cyclists who are embarking on a six week journey across Europe and the Middle East to Jerusalem to raise awareness about the occupation in Palestine, starts at 1pm with music, speakers and food, cyclists depart at 3pm, see www.thepeacecycle.org

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

19th to 21st September IMF/World Bank Monetary meeting in Singapore where global loan sharks backed by western governments and big business meet to rake in the money from the poor, see targetwto.revolt.org/node/307

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

8th October Lakenheath Airbase demo at main gate, for details call 01508 550446 or see lakenheathaction.org

The quiz

1. Which Paris metro station is named after an anarchist?
2. What was the Aubervilliers-Villette metro station renamed as in 1946? What political act followed on from this some 20 years later?
3. In March 1944, some Communists escaped from Chave prison in Marseille. What was their attitude to their fellow political prisoners?
4. In 1956, as the Hungarian Uprising was being defeated by Soviet tanks, the Communist leader Janos Kadar rejected a demand for a National Workers Council. What laughable reason did he give?

Answers on page 6

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