

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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HOW NOT TO SOLVE CHILD POVERTY

During the Thatcher years the number of children living in poverty in Britain trebled. New Labour promised to tackle this. They have failed. A recently published government report shows that the gap between infant mortality rates for rich and poor families is growing not falling. Infant mortality rates for the richest are four deaths per 1,000 live births. For the poorest it is 8.1 – twice as high.

The official statistics were published in the same week as UNICEF reported that Britain came 21st out of 21 of the world's wealthiest countries in terms of children's well being. A major factor why Britain is bottom of the league table for children is the income gap between the rich and poor, something Labour has done little to counter.

Inequalities start at birth. There are a number of reasons why infant mortality rates are higher amongst manual workers. A report published last year by the Fabian Commission on Life Chances and Child Poverty (Narrowing the Gap) pointed out for example that mothers from poor families cannot afford balanced nutritious food. Even if they can they to not have access to shops selling healthy food. The Commission also noted that poor families frequently live in sub standard housing. Cold and damp affect the health of mothers and the life chances of their unborn children.

Crucially though poor families have unequal access to maternity services – this is particularly true in the case of ethnic minority families. Lack of resources, access to affordable child care and the absence of public transport stop pregnant woman on low incomes attending antenatal clinics. Access to high quality care after birth also means that death rates amongst the young of the poor are higher than the rich. Cuts to public health services have also had an impact.

While on the one hand setting targets for reducing infant mortality rates, Labour is actually pursuing policies that will increase rates. The start of February was a busy time for reports on maternity and child care. A third report published by the government announced the closure of dozens of maternity units. Private Health Care UK announced on its website that as a result of the closures "many more expectant mothers may be seeking the services of privately run maternity hospitals". The site reports that a private birth in London is likely to cost between £7,000 and £10,000 – an unlikely option for poor working class people faced with the closure of their local maternity unit.

Maternity services are already stretched to the limit. A poll of 102 out of 216 maternity department heads by the Royal College of Midwives found two thirds thought their units were understaffed and one in five had lost staff in the last year.



ANTI-FASCISMO: An antifascist demonstration in Madrid saw 600 people march "constructing another Madrid, and organising against the fascists" in a demonstration by the 1984 group, comprised mainly of young people in the Aravaca-Pozuelo zone of the city. The group organised the march after a number of Nazi threats and beatings which have left people hospitalised, and have pledged to "Kick fascists out of our districts through self-defence and punishment for the facists".

Trust deficits are forcing the cuts in maternity services across the country. Last month for example a group of

mothers formed a campaign group to fight to keep a Derbyshire maternity unit open. They fear the Darley Dale

unit at Whitworth Hospital near Matlock will be shut as part of a review of services.

GROUPS AND CENTRES

Anarchism in Merseyside looks set to take a major step forward over the next few months as both a new anarchist group and a new social centre are founded in the city.

Merseyside Anarchist Group and a new Liverpool Social Centre are in the process of being set up for the city, following a lengthy hunt for the new venue and organising which has been taking place within the Liverpool Social Forum.

The founding meeting for the Merseyside Anarchist Group will be on 1st March, at the partially-completed social centre which has been established in the basement of

radical bookshop News from Nowhere on Bold Street. A follow-up meeting will be held on 15th March starting at 7.30pm.

In a statement, one organiser said: "Anarchism – or libertarian socialism – is an increasingly strong political current within society and has for a long time been championing the case for a fair, ecological and sustainable global community that may be our last best hope for humanity."

The Liverpool Social Centre is being developed by a loose group of people from the Liverpool Social Forum and people are already having meetings there despite its half-finished condition.

A member of News from Nowhere said: "The basement was just storing junk for the building and people started looking for a place for a social centre last year. Now there are new people there ready to put in an effort.

"It's going to be used for meetings, benefit nights, film nights etc, and there will be a kitchen but no café.

News From Nowhere is going to be the landlord but several of our members are quite involved. We're working towards having an official opening some time in April."

A website is currently being built for the project at liverpoolsocialcentre.org.

In other news...

- The Basement in Manchester could be threatened with closure, as their joint tenants in the building may be moving out and the organisers don't have funding to rent the entire space on their own. The Basement has since its opening become a centre for various groups and runs its own bookshop, café and free internet facilities.
- A new group could soon be set up to run on a similar basis to the long-lived Haringey Solidarity group, combining a "campaigning focus with a social activity base". Contact 'Jason Cortez' on Libcom to find out more.

ROSSPORT DIRECT ACTION

Protestors have moved to direct action at the Bellanaboy refinery in Ireland as part of the Rossport anti-Shell campaign.

Work at the site was halted on 16th February by a breakaway march of around 100 militant protestors, working in support of a larger 500-person demonstration that was going on the same day.

The breakaway began as protestors ran across bogs and passed barbed wire fences before marching for twenty minutes alongside Shell's unland pipeline to reach the construction site where they surrounded Shell's construction vehicles.

Workers were immediately called off site stopping work for the first time in almost five months. Protestors chanted "workers, workers, join with us", which met with laughter. In a deal with local campaign members the workers had been bussed onto site at 6am that morning to avoid the 7.30am demonstration. The crowd consisted principally of

people from Dublin, Cork and Belfast with roughly twenty locals joining them. John Monaghan, a local resident, addressed the crowd several times urging them to remain peaceful and to stick together. Monaghan also acted as negotiator for the group.

Roughly 100 gardai, with 50 on standby in a bus, surrounded the protestors and allowed them to march peacefully off the site following a short stand-off. A crowd of 50 protestors gathered outside the gate to meet those coming off the site.

The day's main protest saw a march from Glenamoy Bridge at 7.30am to the gates of the site. Local campaigners acted as stewards ensuring the march did not disrupt the flow of traffic or block the site, in keeping with a deal struck with Shell and the gardai. Protestors were prevented from banging on the gates of the site and some complained of being pushed and shouted at by stewards who they claimed "were acting just like the gardai".

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Home and away

New asylum decision centre opens

A new Home Office facility designed to speed up asylum decisions opened in early February near Heathrow Airport. Amadeus House – the new purpose-built asylum centre for West London and the southeast – was officially opened by Immigration Minister Liam Byrne, who said it will help the government meet its goal of handling asylum decisions more efficiently every year. The centre will be home to one of six regional teams now handling asylum cases around the UK.

Already work on asylum applications is moving more quickly – asylum applications are at their lowest level since 1993, and in the first half of 2006 the government broke records for the number of failed asylum seekers returned to their home countries.

The Home Secretary John Reid has promised to make the system even faster and more efficient, with an ultimate goal of resolving 90% of new asylum cases within six months of the first application.

During his visit to the new centre, Mr Byrne met some of the 48 case-workers who will be working there, as well as local government representatives and members of volunteer groups who work with asylum seekers.

He told them the new regional teams will improve the processing of asylum claims.

“The new system ensures genuine refugees have their claims settled quickly, while those whose claims are unsuccessful are swiftly removed, making this a system that is firm, fair and meets the needs of the individual,” he said, adding, “It is in nobody’s interests that asylum claims should be left unresolved for years, and the government is taking the necessary steps to ensure that doesn’t happen.”

Royal Mail to abandon final salary pension for new staff

Leaders of 190,000 Royal Mail workers have registered “shock and anger” over a decision by the state-owned company to close its final-salary pension scheme to new recruits to fill a massive £6.6bn black hole in its retirement fund.

The £1bn increase in the pension deficit means that Royal Mail arguably has the biggest pensions shortfall of any organisation in Britain.

The growing liability helped to cut the Mail’s interim profits by 86% in the first six months of the financial year. Returns fell to £22m between April and September last year compared with £159m in the same period a year earlier.

The Royal Mail sought to sweeten the pill by unveiling plans to give ‘phantom’ shares to its workers, which it estimated would be worth £5,300 per employee over five years, depending on financial performance.

The Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) said the pensions announcement was a “complete shock” and that the promise of shares for employees was “nothing but jam tomorrow”. Employees’ leaders believe the equity promise presages moves to privatise the corporation.

Paul Reuter, national officer at Amicus, said his union would “vigorously oppose” any suggestion that the share scheme might lead to privatisation.

Ministers have tried to end final-salary schemes for new entrants in other parts of the public sector but have been forced to compromise.

Around the world

FRANCE: Public sector workers have gone on strike over pay and job losses as the national auditor warned of a need for further budget spending cuts.

Thousands of teachers, tax collectors and post office staff walked out, joining train drivers and other public sector workers on demonstrations in Paris and 20 other cities.

The strikes were over plans to cut 15,000 jobs in the public sector and impose below-inflation pay rises. The government estimated around 1.1 million people went on strike, around a fifth of the total number of public sector workforce.

GUINEA: Police and armed forces have reacted violently to a second general strike called just weeks after a similar confrontation between unions and the government saw the country shut down for 18 days.

Several people have been reported killed during the clashes earlier this month, which saw standoffs between unionists demanding that President Conte step down and police using deadly force.

The renewed clashes follow a perceived cheating of a deal made by Conte that he would appoint a successor and retire from his position, which he has been accused of keeping by force and deception.

But Conte’s named replacement, Eugene Camara, is widely known as Conte’s man, and is heavily linked with the regime, which is listed as the second most corrupt in the world behind Haiti.

INDIA: A general strike has been called in Bangalore over an announcement

which will see a major water diversion away from local farmers in the area.

The 12-hour stoppage in the southern state of Karnataka, whose capital is India’s technology hub, Bangalore, came a week after a federal tribunal ruled the state would get less water from the Cauvery River than neighboring Tamil Nadu.

JAPAN: NHK, a subsidiary and a production company were sentenced to pay 2m Yen in damages to the Violence Against Women in War-Network Japan (VAWW-Net), an NGO that NHK had asked to collaborate on the documentary programme. The verdict said that last minute changes were made in response to comments by right-wing politicians who held financing strings for NHK, and that the company had “abused its editorial rights,” violating VAWW-Net Japan’s “right to expect” a certain pre-agreed use of the materials they had contributed.

The documentary was supposed to educate the Japanese public about the issue of institutionalised sexual violence by the Japanese military during World War II, when captured women were subjected to sexual slavery as part of an officially sanctioned ‘comfort women’ policy.

The final judgement as reported to the UN noted that Japan has “repeatedly acted to obstruct the disclosure of the truth of the ‘comfort station’ system” and “remains under a continuing obligation to acknowledge and disclose the truth of crimes against humanity and war crimes,” and that it

had “not fulfilled this obligation in regards to the ‘comfort women’.”

Changes to the documentary saw some crucial testimonies buried, and the introduction of highly controversial far-right speakers who attempted to throw doubt on the situation.

PORTUGAL: The Council of Europe’s Committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CPT) published a report on 25th January, that accuses the Portuguese authorities of various human-rights violations. The document is based on several visits made by members of the Committee in the year of 2003, having evaluated various district commands of the Public Security Police (PSP), prison facilities, and the detention center for immigrants in the Lisbon airport.

The report relates that the year 2003 showed an increase in police-brutality complaints, concluding that the basic guarantees against abuses of authority are still far from being fully applied. The report also warns about the precarious situation in Portuguese jails, mentioning various cases of beatings, as well as increased rates of overcrowding and insufficient provision for basic needs of human life (the immigrant detention center, for example, reportedly denies access to the outdoors.)

Despite the gap between the facts reported and the date of its publication, the document does not omit recent tragic news. The 2006 Amnesty International Report mentions cases of police violence, namely the murders of José Reis and

João Martins, by officers of the PSP. In 2006, on two separate occasions in the space of five days, Republican National Guard (GNR) military officers shot at unarmed civilians, resulting, in one instance, in the death of a young man.

MEXICO: In Oaxaca City, hundreds of primary school teachers who spent months on strike were negotiating with the Oaxaca state government to demand that replacement teachers be removed and they be allowed to return to their classrooms.

While a group of government officials talked with teacher representatives at a hotel in the state capital, a large group of teachers waited for a response, some reading newspapers while others sat in the shade of trees.

Many of the teachers were still offering classes in homes or parks, and most were still receiving a wage. But they demanded that the government return them to classrooms now occupied by replacement teachers sent in during the six-month strike.

Parents sympathetic with the strike sent their children to the makeshift classrooms, while those against it sent their kids to the schools.

The conflict began in late May as the teacher strike suddenly exploded into a broader movement including indigenous groups, students, farmers and left-leaning activists. The teachers eventually accepted pay raises and returned to work late last year, but other activists have continued to demand the ouster of Gov Ulises Ruiz, who they say stole the gubernatorial election in 2004.

Prison news

Uprising at Dovegate Prison

At the end of January there was an uprising by prisoners at Dovegate prison in Staffordshire. According to the Home Office (so take it with a big pinch of salt), around 30 prisoners were involved in smashing TVs and lighting fires after a refusal to bang-up at the end of evening association. The ‘disturbance’ is said to have lasted for six hours, and was only put down after 120 screws were brought in from other prisons in the area. In the wake of the uprising, a number of prisoners were moved out of the jail, and some cells were said to be unusable. Dovegate, a category ‘B’ prison, is run by Premier, which is in turn owned by the American private prisons and strike-breaking company Wakenhut.

Shut down Guantanamo protests

All dressed up and nothing to do on Friday night? Then get yourself down to the US Embassy in Grovesnor Square and join the weekly protest organised by the London Guantanamo Campaign. Weekly protests will take place between 6pm and 7pm.

Russian antifascist needs support

In May 2006, Vahtang Devitlidze, a member of the Russian Federation of Revolutionary Anarchists, was attacked

by a gang of fascists in the centre of Krasnodar. In defending himself, Vahtang stabbed one of the neo-Nazis in the leg. Despite being hospitalised himself, Vahtang was charged with causing grievous bodily harm and sentenced to a two and a half year probation order. As a result of this he went on the run, but was arrested while visiting his family and sentenced to prison. Vahtang escaped, but was caught and badly beaten up, before being sent to a more secure prison. Anarchists in Krasnodar are raising money to support Vahtang in prison, as in Russia relatives and friends of prisoners have to feed them. If you are in a position to make a donation please contact Leeds ABC at leedsabc@riseup.net.

Vahtang welcomes correspondence, but can only read and write in Russian. His address is: Vahtang Devitlidze, ul. Libbedova 42, UO 68/2, otryad 14, brigada 142, g. Hagyshensk, Krasnodarskiy Kray, 352680 Russia.

Campaign Against Prison Slavery CAPS now has a new e-mail address: againstoprisonslavery@riseup.net

Protest at Peterborough Prison

On 31st January there was a demonstration outside Peterborough prison to protest against the tragic

death of Lucy Wood, 28, the second woman prisoner to die this year. HMP Peterborough is run by private company Kalyx Ltd, the US security and services giant, which was recently fined over £5m for performance failures at Harmondsworth detention centre.

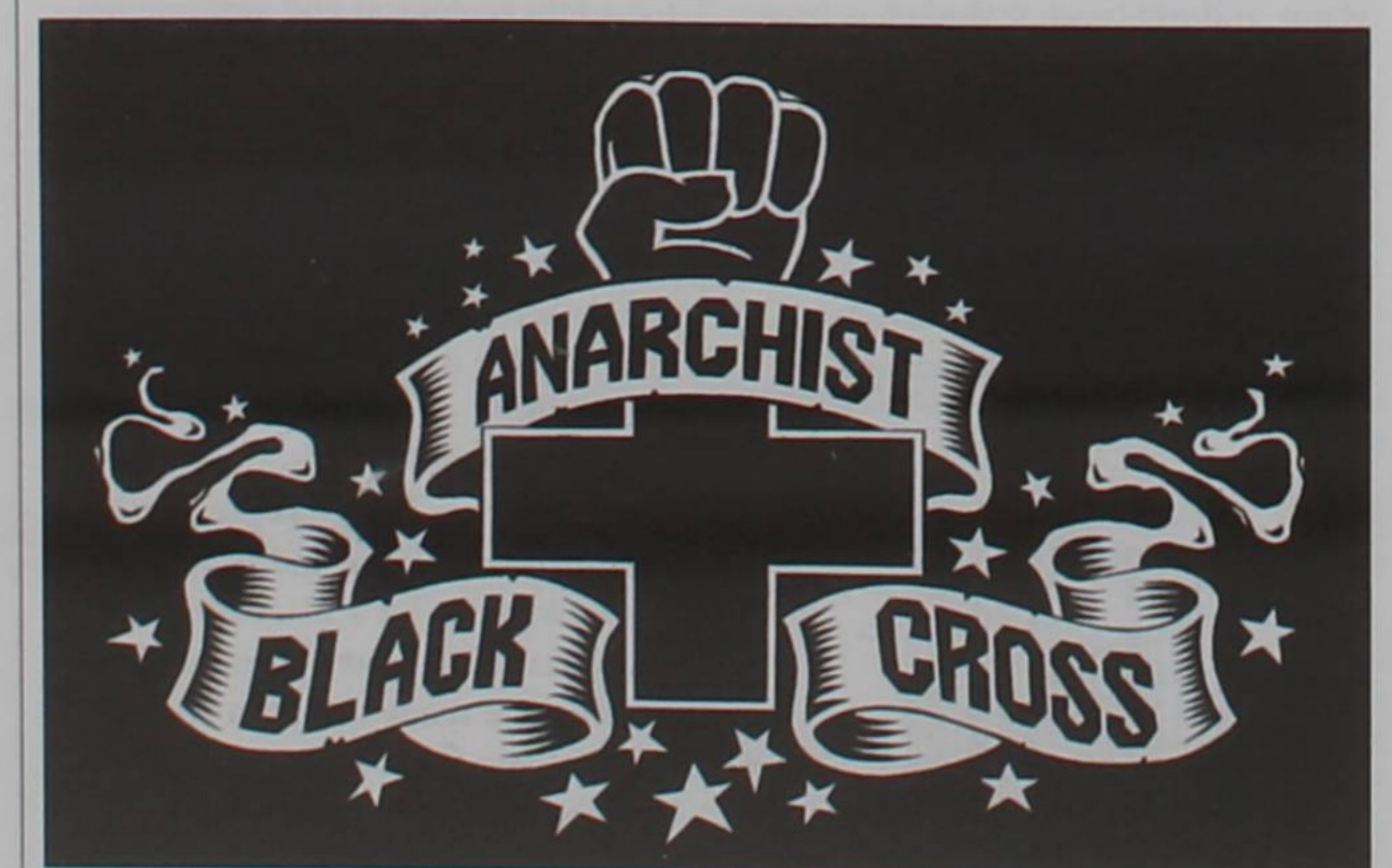
Kalyx Ltd (formerly UKDS: United Kingdom Detention Services) runs a number of private prisons in the UK. Protesters (including representatives from the ‘No More Prison’ campaign group) had travelled from Norfolk, Yorkshire, London and Cheshire. The protest lasted for four and a half hours and is the 21st demonstration since

2004, called in response to the deaths of women held in prison custody.

ABC T-Shirts

Leeds ABC have produced some great T-shirts featuring a classy new rendition of the ABC logo (see below). White design on a high quality heavyweight black cotton T-shirt. Only £8, and profits go directly to supporting Anarchist and class struggle prisoners. If you want one by post send a blank postal order for £9.50 to Leeds ABC, PO Box 53, LS8 4WP. Or check out your local distro.

Compiled by Mark Barnsley



News

Supermarket sweep

Rob Ray looks at the preliminary findings of the Competition Commission on supermarkets and groceries

The Competition Commission last month brought out their preliminary findings on monopoly practice in the groceries sector, in a report which could set the stage for the next few years for the officially sanctioned future of the major supermarkets.

Amid a deluge of facts and figures, the Commission reported a number of factors which would be addressed in the main report, but noted that its remit was not wide enough to cover all the issues, such as supermarkets' contribution to the hyper exploitation of workforces around the world.

The report stated: "Banana Link submitted that many plantation workers employed by companies supplying British supermarkets were failing to earn either a living or legal minimum wage. Banana Link considered that there was evidence to suggest that this was a direct result of the prices paid to suppliers by British supermarket chains. Similarly, Traidcraft told us that the large grocery retailers, due to their size, were able to pass disproportionate risks on to their suppliers, who then passed risks on to workers and smallholder farmers, particularly in developing countries. ActionAid and Women Working Worldwide told us that these pressures were reflected in lower pay, excessively long working hours, forced overtime, increased use of temporary contracts and dangerous working conditions."

Environmental concerns have also been raised that supermarket dominance is encouraging more food being transported over longer distances, substantially increasing pollution. The commission said: "We need to be sure though that we are acting within our statutory powers, and where evidence submitted to us bears on issues beyond competition,

these are not things that we have the power to investigate or resolve."

One possible failing of the report criticised thus far has been in the parameters and statistics used in the commission's investigation. For example, they note that the number of product lines was up 40% in the supermarkets over six years, but without comparing this figure to the total number of product lines in existence or taking account of the loss of localised varieties through independent shop closures.

The report also played down the significance of widespread closures and buyouts in agricultural points of production, despite looking specifically into pig and milk production and finding that the number of companies involved has fallen dramatically in recent years.

In its notes on submissions, a major factor in the closures is alleged to be supermarket 'buyer power', as only the largest of agricultural concerns have the mass-production capacity to absorb supermarket demands for low prices.

While both of these factors are likely to have a significant impact on the varieties of foods produced – fewer producers concentrating on a reduced number of strains – this unlikely to be picked up by the commission's current research.

Similarly, the Commission has been attacked by Sainsbury's after it rejected the supermarket's own warning, in parallel with Friends of the Earth, that Tesco's could develop a 47% stranglehold on the market, given its landholdings and scope for expansion. In a public argument, Sainsbury's lambasted the commission's research patterns for the project.



'ASYLUM' FAILURES: Protestors kick fences outside Harmondsworth detention centre. The activists turned out in solidarity with a campaign to stop the deportations of Iraqi-Kurdish asylum seekers to Iraq, following the charter flight of some 38 prisoners to Erbil, Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) earlier this month. The deportations, which have seen repeated warnings from national and international human rights organisations go unheeded, are the third set in under two years. Other protests took place at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, where the flight left, Manchester and Leicester.

Retail sales of groceries in the UK amounted to £123.5 billion in 2006, approximately 16% of total consumer expenditure in the UK. Around 72% of this trade is now done in supermarkets, almost entirely within ten

major suppliers, and 20% is done in convenience stores. Tesco and Sainsbury's have bought nearly 4% of the total convenience store trade in the last six years.

On the supply side, it has also been

found that 16 major wholesalers have taken control of over 80% of the market, with 40% dominated by the two main players.

The commission's final report is due later this year.

BA stall over pensions

As *Freedom* goes to press, the possibility of a stewards and stewardesses strike remains at British Airways after unionists reacted angrily to T&G negotiators caving in over a major issue in the dispute.

On top of the development, the GMB, which mainly organises baggage handlers, has accused BA of favouring cabin crew over their own membership. Members have also rejected BA's new contracts, raising the possibility of a strike from both unions.

BA had given some ground last month to cabin crew after a threatened strike saw them lose as much as £80m before a single walkout had occurred, thanks to passengers switching to other companies.

Originally the company had attempted to impose an unacceptable sick pay regime, which saw workers having to explain any leave to managers, and had made a low pay offer.

Most important to the workforce

however were moves to change the pension system, and up to 10,000 workers were expected to walk out over the issue from the T&G. 96% of unionists voted for a strike with a huge 80% turnout on the ballot.

While negotiations continued BA attempted to undermine solidarity within the union by offering bonuses of up to £1,600 to each member of staff who scabbed.

Negotiators called off the strike following a new promise on sick pay procedures and a proposed 4.6% pay rise for the workforce. However, the dropping of pensions as an issue has enraged workers, after a recommendation was made that BA would only maintain pensions if people agreed to work longer for less reward.

The BA plan includes annual company contributions of £280m for the next 10 years and a one-off cash injection of £800m to try and catch up with some of the deficits company directors

have allowed itself built up in recent years.

At present, BA have said the pension deal is the best the unions are going to get.

Union chiefs have been accused of dealing with only three of twelve major grievances including pensions, a two tier system of pay scales and the sickness regime. In the areas covered, BA have been allowed to present changes to the sickness regime as a concession, on the grounds BA crew have an above-average amount of sick leave.

However the company was already on shaky ground over the issue as it is well recognised within the profession that by coming into contact regularly with travellers, BA staff have a higher susceptibility to sickness.

Amicus and pilots union Balpa have agreed to the pension changes, but the GMB have rejected them outright, and negotiations are going on behind closed doors between the union and BA.

Mental health strike

A strike and demonstration in blistering cold was held on 7th February by workers at Manchester's mental health service, who are facing cuts and a humiliating scramble for jobs with less pay.

Up to 33 posts will be cut from the service, which has infuriated workers who point out that at the same time 24 new managers are about to be taken on in the area as the front line workforce is weakened. At the same time, pay is being cut as grades are changed.

Workers speaking to *Freedom* on the picket lines were worried at the complete lack of movement from management in the early stages of the strike ballot, as union negotiators were told that there would be no compromises made. Following the strike, Unison have nevertheless called off further action for March, hoping for progress at the negotiating table.

Between 60 and 70 people demonstrated and picketed at the administrative

building at Chorlton House where the cuts were being discussed, in front of a huge inflatable banana provided by Unison. Forms telling workers to come to a meeting to compete over how suitable for the reduced number of roles were burned. Prior to the demonstration, picketers and supporters had protested outside the hospitals.

It's thought around 250 people stayed out on the one-day strike, of a total 260 Unison members in the branch. Speakers condemned the moves, which continue a theme of cuts more savage than is being seen in the rest of the NHS.

Freedom reported last year that the cuts were being disproportionately meted out to the sector despite strong evidence that it would lead to enormous problems both historically and through warnings from service users. Since cuts in Suffolk in 2006, there has already been one suicide and demands for help from users who say the system is not functioning properly.

News

Iran blamed for US Iraq failure

Milan Rai analyses the divisions even within the elite who could be planning a US assault on Iran

The Bush Administration shows signs of significant division as it presses on towards a military confrontation with Iran. The propaganda device of the moment is the accusation that Iran is supplying insurgents in Iraq. One motive for emphasising this allegation is the Bush 'surge' in Iraq. Commentators (including former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski) have warned that the US will need a scapegoat when the deployment of an extra 20,000 US troops fails to reduce the violence in Iraq. Blaming Tehran for the continuing violence leads naturally to military action against Iran to 'defend' US troops in Iraq.

Not everyone in the Administration thinks this is a sensible course (attacking Iran would inevitably escalate the violence in Iraq). There are reports that Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State, and Robert Gates, Rumsfeld's replacement at the Pentagon, are both trying to hold back the rush to war.

The divisions were plain to see in the week that the US finally unveiled its 'killer evidence' of Iranian weapons supplies to Iraqi insurgents. On Sunday 11th February, three anonymous US officials briefed reporters in Baghdad that the 'highest levels' of the Iranian government were definitely involved in supplying deadly roadside bombs to Iraqi insurgents.

The day before, Defence Secretary Gates had sounded a cautious note:

"Well, I think that Iran is very much involved in providing either the technology or the weapons themselves for these explosively formed projectiles." Markings on the explosives provided "pretty good" evidence Tehran was involved.

Even the 'senior defence analyst' making the Baghdad presentation was uncertain, admitting that there was no 'smoking gun' linking the Iranian government and Iraqi militants (curiously, no 'quality' British newspaper reported this crucial admission).

Then the head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff has openly intervened on the side of caution, as Marine General Peter Pace weighed in to say that "things made in Iran are being used in Iraq to kill coalition soldiers", but that this "does not translate that the Iranian government *per se*, for sure, is directly involved in doing this".

Pace forced Bush into an awkward tangle. At a press conference Bush claimed that weapons were definitely being supplied to insurgents by a branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, but "what we don't know is whether or not the head leaders of Iran ordered the Quds Force to do what they did."

Parallels are being drawn with the WMD allegations in the run-up to the war on Iraq, but perhaps a better analogy is with the claim that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaeda (and might have assisted the 9/11 attacks).



An opinion poll in December found that 50% of the US public still believes this, despite a complete lack of evidence, and Bush Administration admissions that the link never existed.

The current news reports have created confusion, but the belief is steadily being implanted that Iran is 'behind' the insurgency. In fact, Iran's closest allies in Iraq, such as the

Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), are part of the US-dominated government and being thanked publicly by the Bush Administration for their help.

Provocation is coming from Washington, with raids on Iranian offices in Iraq, the seizing of Iranian diplomats, the Presidential order to capture or kill Iranian 'agents' in Iraq,

the deployment of a second naval battle group to the Gulf, and threats from Bush himself. The Bush Administration is divided, but leaning towards war.

Milan Rai is a coordinator of Justice Not Vengeance and a detailed briefing on this topic can be found at www.j-n-v.org. His latest book is *7/7: The London Bombings, Islam and the Iraq War*, available from JNV.

Notes from the USA

In the first week of February George Bush sent a \$2.9 trillion budget to Congress for its approval. It would increase military spending by

10% and bring it to nearly half a trillion dollars annually. That's the rough equivalent of £1,000 sterling each year for every child, woman and man in the United States.

Bush also wants to spend \$245 billion for his terrorist activities in Iraq and Afghanistan – or about £5,000 sterling every second of the year. This comes on top of \$70 billion already allocated by congress for this year and \$141.7 billion for 2008.

A parallel increase (12%) in US foreign grants will see Israel the biggest recipient with \$2.4 billion for next year and would allocate more money to expand US government propaganda broadcasts into North Korea, Iran and Cuba.

A recent article in the *New York Times* calculated that just half the money so far spent on the war on Iraq could have paid for universal healthcare in the US, and nursery education for all

three and four-year-olds in the country as well as complete immunisation against many diseases for children round the world.

If passed, these budget increases will cut funding for several federal projects: \$80 billion would go from Medicare and Medicaid health projects over the next five years. Facing a similar degradation are such projects as Head Start (schools), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and funding for housing for low-income elderly people.

The Democrats now control both houses of Congress. They and their 'soft left' followers have a sparkling new candidate for president in 2008: Illinois senator Barack Obama. He supported the war on Iraq and announced in mid-February that he too would increase Pentagon spending if elected. But of course it's unlikely that in the end he or the Democrat majority will do anything other than support Bush: House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi has promised that US troops will not be left high and dry.

Occupation

One new response from certain corners of the peace movement has been the 'Occupation Project'. Launched at the same time as Bush's budget proposals, the Chicago-based Voices for Creative Nonviolence is asking activists to occupy the offices of their congresspersons if they refuse to vote against additional war funding. It's a campaign which has the support of several peace groups, including CODEPINK, United for Peace and Justice, and Veterans for Peace. If those involved have no illusions about what the politicians are likely to do, to force an immediate and complete cutting off of funding would make the war difficult to prolong.

Within a relatively short time of its launch ten activists were arrested at the offices of John McCain (Arizona).



ESF prisoners free

The detainees jailed following the European Social Forum in Greece last year have been released with restrictions pending trial.

The three detainees, who had been on hunger strike since December, have been the subject of prolonged solidarity demonstrations and clashes with police from comrades across Greece demanding their release.

They were part of a group of people who were arrested after the riots that erupted during the European Social Forum march in Athens on 6th May 2006. Seventeen people had already been charged and released and await trial for multiple felony charges. Three have continued to be detained since May 2006, two were on hunger strike, protesting against their ongoing eight-month imprisonment, until their release.

During the riots, it was reported that there were clashes with police outside the British embassy, the War Museum, the US embassy, Athens Police Headquarters and Parliament. Riot police arrested at least 30 people.

All three detainees are now being released after a decision by the Jury Council.

Since the first day of hunger strike there have been dozens of solidarity actions by anarchist comrades all over Greece and further afield; ranging from demos and the taking over of radio stations to attacks on police stations, bank explosions, even a huge banner demanding their release, attached to helium balloons and set off in the air amongst hundreds of unsuspecting police during the New Year's eve fireworks display, to the embarrassment of gathered politicians and television crews that were broadcasting live the celebration. Also, in Thessaloniki, the baby doll for Jesus Christ was stolen from the city's Christmas crib while in its place a cd was left with propaganda material demanding the release of the prisoners.

Most recently, an international game of football saw a pitch invasion by supporters of the imprisoned three, holding a banner demanding their immediate release.

Feature

Sweden's free fighting union

The SAC is one of the largest anarcho-syndicalist unions in the world: Joni reports after meeting its Solna branch last year

The SAC Syndikalisterna Solna local group's offices are hard to miss. Home to about 60,000 inhabitants, Solna is a small municipality bordering Sweden's capital city, Stockholm. The offices are located on the ground floor of one of the apartment blocks in a quiet working-class neighbourhood. Red and black curtains cover part of the windows. Posters with political slogans, red and black colours and even one with the Spanish CNT logo on it cover the rest.

We meet with eight members of this 70-strong SAC local. They come from various industries: two janitors, an administrator in a university, a postal worker, temporary workers and social workers. The past few months have been busy for the local with strikes, disputes and organising drives. Workers from local cinema have just joined the SAC and a conflict at the workplace looks likely in the future.* The cinema workers preferred to join SAC because they also organise temporary workers unlike the reformist unions.

The Solna local celebrated a recent victory over a month long conflict with the large outsourcing company Snille. Snille provides services to a Nordic energy giant Fortum and was breaking labour legislation left, right and centre. The last straw came when they fired a SAC member, breaking the contract which was supposed to last for six months. A campaign started and Snille was quick to sue SAC for damages in a Swedish equivalent of an industrial tribunal.

Knowing that direct pressure towards Snille would do very little and the prospect of a strike among casual and vulnerable workers was not promising, the syndicalists decided to put pressure on the hand that feeds Snille: the Fortum energy consortium. Head offices were blockaded, public events disrupted, people were leafleted. After

couple of months Fortum had enough and forced Snille to sort the problem out. The result was that Snille agreed to all SAC's demands, and also paid 40,000 kronas (about £2,700) to Solna SAC for "costs of running the campaign". As it happens in many of these cases, Snille was quick to make a deal with a reformist union to keep the SAC out from organising the staff into the union.

A similar kind of blockading tactic brought another victory in August. 'Illegal' immigrant cleaners from Latin American countries were being shorthanded at couple of luxury hotels via a proxy outsourcing company. Few of them are members of the SAC and striking was not an option due to the nature of their immigration status. SAC comrades decided to picket the hotel as long as it is needed to get the workers a better deal. The hotel caved in before banners were unwrapped.

Syndicalists have always had relatively good presence in the postal services sector. Currently there are about 80 SAC postal workers in the Stockholm area alone. Some sorting offices only have a few members, but still SAC is able to mount effective strikes and disputes in the workplace. Initial questions about how this is possible were met with surprise: in an already stretched workforce losing just a couple of members of staff will result in chaos, provided the reformist union doesn't step in to provide scab labour.

It is an election year in Sweden when I arrive and millions of pieces election material have been delivered by postal workers. Bad enough for anarcho-syndicalists, but the last straw came when postal workers were expected to distribute racist material from Sweden's National Democrats party – equivalent to the BNP. SAC members simply refused to deliver it, while the reformist union demanded that their membership deliver whatever

is requested by the postal services management. As a result many members of the reformist union called in sick on the day in question, or simply threw the racist material into the bin.

Another dispute which is still ongoing has been about the amount of commercial advertisement postal workers should be delivering; a familiar area of dispute for UK postal workers as well. This dispute culminated in an argument about whether postal workers should be delivering the free newspaper *Metro* packed with property ads to people who have stated on their letterboxes that they do not wish to receive advertisement or free newspapers. This dispute led to a lockout of SAC members from their workplaces by the management every Friday when *Metro* was supposed to be delivered.

SAC structures

SACs core group is the local, which organises according to the member's place of residence. This organising model has proved to be an effective one because of the modern nature of ever changing workplaces and temporary jobs, especially among young and migrant workers. There are 78 locals at the moment ranging from around a dozen members to 250. SAC has close to 8,000 members nationally.

Locals are the main decision-making body, but questions on the job are always decided among the syndicate or the workplace sector. Locals collect the membership fee, much like in the UK's Solidarity Federation, locals do not have any say in what the syndicates do in workplaces and the decisions are made on the level of the workers. For instance postal workers have a meeting every month which is open to all members to decide on current issues. There are also mandated positions, such as a contact person, which are elected every year in the yearly general meetings.

In the case of a strike or lockout, the local will pay at least 500kr (about £37) per day to the worker for the first two weeks. After that the strike pay is paid from national funds.

While SACs focus is firmly in the workplace, it campaigns on other areas as well. For instance Stockholm local has specific migrant worker meetings and provides advice for immigrants and asylum seekers. SAC also has a strong feminist agenda and has a concrete strategy to get women



more involved in the unions affairs via women's committees. Over one third of the members are female, though the statistics are slightly skewed by

the fact that SAC has a sizeable retired membership from the old male-dominated industries like forestry.

SAC is sometimes accused of being a reformist union. This stems mainly from the fact that SAC, like the trade unions in Nordic countries in general, administer unemployment benefit funds which are paid by the state. Consequently the unionisation level remains very high in countries like Sweden (around 80% of the workers). In case of unemployment, a worker will receive 80% of their former income from the unemployment fund. Participation on this scheme is of course working with the state, though the alternative of living on minimum state benefits in the case of unemployment doesn't sound appealing either.

The decision to join the scheme and 'social partnership' with the state on this issue created a split in SAC in the 1950s with a minority of members opposing the decision. However the group which was established by resigned members soon died and joined back to SAC when the realities of life became clear.

The union, which had been affiliated to the anarcho-syndicalist IWA, also split off from the international organisation in 1958, being joined later by the CGT, and CNT-Vignoles, from Spain and France, with which it maintains contact.

Another area of accusations is common for all syndicalist unions. Because the organising is done on the job on the basis of practical issues, rather than purely politics like in some anarchist political groups, this will inevitably lead to workers joining from various different backgrounds. This is an issue syndicalists have to recognise if they are to keep the union revolutionary and firmly rooted in the anarcho-syndicalist internationalist politics. For instance in one local seven newspaper delivery people out of eight from a daily newspaper joined the SAC after being stabbed in the back by the reformist union. Clearly they were not all committed anarcho-syndicalists, but rather militant workers seeking improvements in their working conditions.

To mitigate this SAC puts a great emphasis on internal education and access to material, events and courses on various political subjects. At the same time it is clear that the diversity of opinions and the heated discussions that follow are very different from that of the tight-knit anarchist political groups more common in the UK.

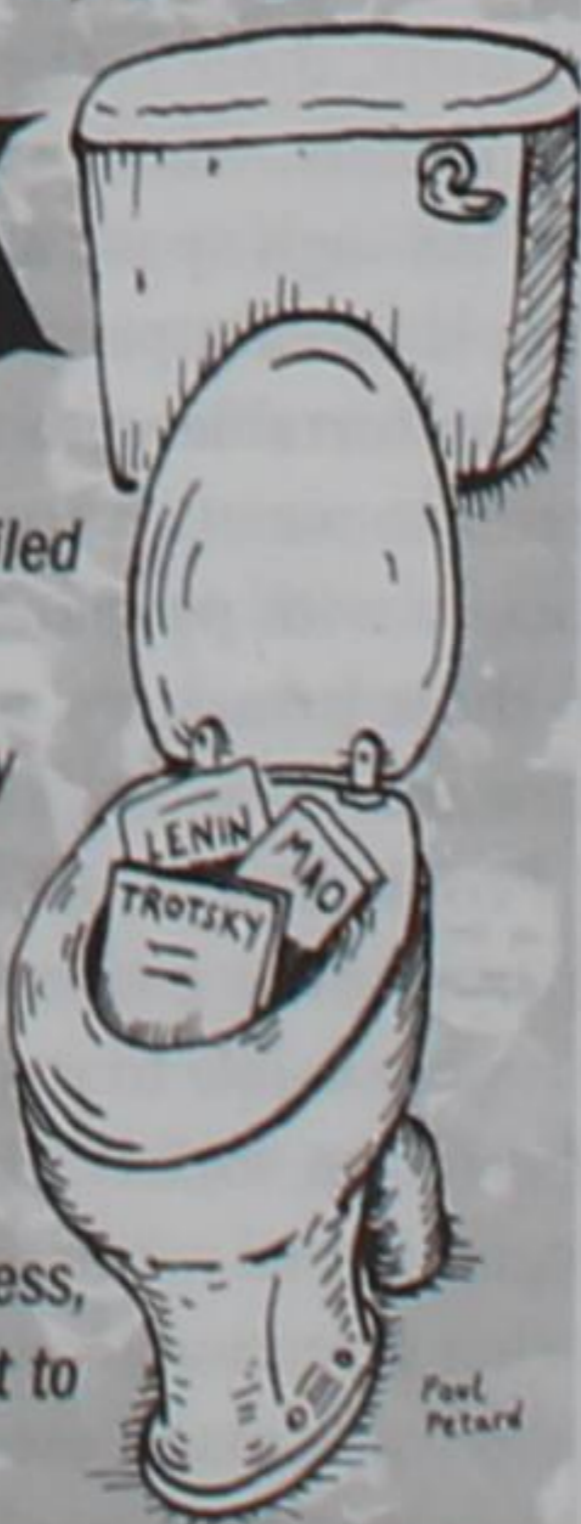
* Following the visit, the Solna cinema workers took on their bosses over a pay dispute, and won outright.

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Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 04

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

Having been away from the Alley for the last few weeks, I'm not entirely sure what's going on in the building at the moment, but it should be safe enough to reiterate that we are in desperate needs of volunteers to help with mailout, hacklab, editorial, etc.

On a slightly broader level than is usual for the Angel Alley column, two events should be mentioned in the anarchist media which have recently been announced. The first is the imminent relaunching of *Black Flag*, which subs and writers for this publication are likely to be involved in, at least as it starts up. Iain Mackay has set a 28th March date for the inaugural meeting, at the Freedom Bookshop at 7pm, and you are all cordially invited to come and offer your services and opinions for what the magazine should be.

The second is a likely May launch of a big media event in Brighton, which is being organised by Schnevs. While we are still trying to find out more about the ins and outs of the project, it could be highly useful for building anarchism's media presence, so again, the more the merrier!

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 10th March 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 1st March. Send articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

Zionism and the Kibbutz

Again, Mr Shute (Letters, 27th January 2007) misrepresents what I actually said; nowhere in my articles did I claim that since 1948 the kibbutz has not become entwined with the Israeli state – it has, and John is right when he says that a disproportionately high number of Israeli politicians, not to mention top-ranking military leaders and many others involved in the many crimes of the State of Israel I might add, came from the kibbutzim. By the late '30s most of the original self-professed anarchists who came over during the '20s and earlier had changed their tune, and many went on to become prominent Knesset members. Although the state has generally made life extremely difficult for the kibbutzim, the kibbutzim on their part have always officially been loyal to it, which to an extent makes them complicit by default in the atrocities committed by Israel's government since 1948 irrespective of the political views of individuals within the movement. With this element of John's argument I agree wholeheartedly, and I would also emphasise that don't deny for a second that the specific incidents to which he refers are absolutely accurate.

But the purpose of my third article was to communicate the fact that there is another side to the history, pre-1948, which is often ignored by the Left, and to hint at the possibility that it is through a reconnection with moves made by certain sections of the more extreme Left during the very earliest years of the movement, (roughly in the period between the first decade of the 1900s and early/mid 1930s), that we may find solutions to problems which currently ravage the region.

Since we appear to have wandered into the realm of a completely different subject to that explored in my articles, I would just like to say that I very much look forward to reading a detailed and in-depth account of John's solution to the Israel/Palestine impasse. I suspect, from what he has said in his letters, that it would involve nothing less than the wholesale withdrawal of the Jews from the Middle East. Apart from being completely unrealistic (some might say 'delusional'), it's not very anarchistic is it? As far as resources are concerned the land can quite easily support both peoples, and from an anarchist perspective, as both sides have an equal claim to the land the real question is about how to develop a form of organisation which allows both national entities equal access to resources, a system conducive to genuine autonomy, direct democracy and self-determination for both peoples and the dispersion of power across a diffuse range of centres. This, in my view, is where groups like Ma'agal Hakvutot and their Arab counterparts come in; by definition coexistence cannot happen under the current system which sees Jewish monopolisation of every aspect of the region's existence. Neither, given the peculiar socio-political dimensions of the region's polity and the nature of the conflict, is it likely to happen under a binational state system. On the other hand, it could potentially happen if we re-examine the idea of a binational society envisaged by certain factions involved in the formation of

the original kibbutzim, and for this we need to look to the alternative forms of socio-political organisation like those being tried out by the urban collectives and other communal groups in the country (both Jewish and Arab).

However, I again emphasise that this is a separate issue altogether, and one about which it's eminently pointless to speculate in the letters page of *Freedom* newspaper. My original point was this: for the anarchist movement there are important lessons to be learned from the kibbutz's socio-economic and political model, particularly in its early incarnations: the participatory economic system, the way industry is organised, the internal political and economic decision-making structures, job rotation and the absence of remuneration and a division of labour are all things that anarchists seek to see replicated in our society, and therefore we would be doing anarchism a grave injustice if we did not take note of how they have been actualised in the kibbutz and learn the lessons provided by the kibbutz experience. The internal – I'll say that again, INTERNAL – workings of the settlements provide an empirical example of how anarchist principles can be applied to industry, agriculture and politics, and how worker self-management and direct democracy both in the socio-political sphere and in the workplace can be an effective way to run a society. For this reason many writers from Chomsky to Ward have observed how close the kibbutzim have come to the anarcho-communist ideal – Graham Purchase for example has suggested that the early kibbutz network was "exactly the kind of society Kropotkin had in mind". I'd also point you to Colin Ward's comments in his postscript to *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* and Christopher Warhurst's analysis of the management structure of kibbutz industry in *Between Market, State and Kibbutz*.

Moreover, micro-ethnographic sociological studies of the kibbutz have supported the traditional anarchist notion that such a reorganisation of society, putting property, decision making and the means of production in the hands of the workers, results in the disappearance of social disorder and the manifold problems with which our own pathetic excuse for a society is riddled.

Therefore it is possible, provided we don't fall into the trap of reductive rationalism and one-sided arguments that John's criticism exemplifies, to look at the kibbutz objectively and take on board the lessons it provides, to separate what might be potentially useful from what is quite clearly and unarguably repugnant, and to learn from the good things that are there.

In this respect (and in this respect alone) the kibbutzim's relationship with the Arabs is neither here nor there – another comment which I can predict with some certainty is bound to be misunderstood. That's not to say I deny, condone, or am in any way an apologist for the atrocities with which the kibbutz is/has been or is seen as having been complicit, either directly or by association – I don't, and I'm not. Similarly, having spent several years studying the kibbutz I am perfectly well aware of the events to which John alludes in his letter, and for that reason I'll thank him kindly to desist his accusations of my being

'delusional'. But unlike many of the more closed-minded sections of the anarchist movement, the like of which have throughout history succeeded only in hindering the practical development and implementation of anarchist ideas, I am capable of separating the elements of the kibbutz experience which are useful from those which are repulsive.

For some people it will be impossible to make that separation, and given the highly emotive situation of which the kibbutz has become a part, that's something I fully understand and accept. But just as we can't and shouldn't ignore the several valid and important points John makes, neither should we ignore the valuable lessons that can be learned from the kibbutz.

But for the record, what really is dangerous is when people like my esteemed interlocutor (and to be fair he is, in my experience, in a minority) denigrate or belittle the activities of the sections of Israeli society who are making genuine and sincere efforts to foster relationships of mutual aid and cooperation between Jew and Arab. While the kibbutz of today does not fall into that bracket – at no point in any of my articles, incidentally, did I claim that it does – the urban kibbutzim and graduate groups I have discussed certainly do. As such, given the good work they do, their efforts, however insignificant they might seem, should be applauded by anyone who claims to stand for peace, justice and equality, and to tar the Ma'agal Hakvutot groups with the same brush as the monolithic, trigger-happy behemoth of the Israeli government is not only ignorant and counter-productive, but frankly nothing less than a downright insult. It is made particularly abhorrent given the fact that these individuals often find themselves marginalised and looked down on by mainstream Israeli society for standing up for what they believe in – as an example, several members I spoke to have done time in Israeli military prisons during their compulsory national service for refusing to serve in the illegally occupied territories. They have taken a massive and some might say impossible task on their shoulders, and as such they deserve all the support they can get. It is a sorry indictment of the international anarchist movement if these projects really are looked down on as mere 'communal indulgencies'. Pathetic.

James Horrox

Evolution of the child

I was interested to read the letter by Odessa Steps in *Freedom* (on 23rd September 2006). I have some difficulties with the argument presented.

Firstly, there is the concept of "the last society, whose principles would last through space and time as long as people remain people". I am very uncomfortable with this. I feel that it seems to mean a very static, unchanging society with people always going back to those principles and not moving forward.

People do change. Also I do not see anarchism as a closed system, it may not be possible to implement completely libertarian society. For me, it is about beginning to move society in a libertarian direction, in which there may have to be many compromises.

Another paragraph with which I

have problems is the one which says "the child must have the right to form nurturing bonds and become socialised in whatever manner and from whoever he/she chooses". The right of the parent in our society to control this process can have no force in a 'free' society.

Now unless this is a society of conformist automatons even a free society would have to deal with deviant behaviour. Part of children growing up is testing the boundaries of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour. If children wanted to spend the whole day in bed, watching television and eating junk food would the parents not have a right interfere?

I think some process of schooling/education would be needed even in a more libertarian society. Has a child the right to completely refuse to participate in this? If the parents are not involved in helping children with this issue – who is? We need to remember some other institution would be brought into play.

Letting children have every whim they want amounts to indifference. It should be remembered that many men in prison in the society where we live now, have a background of family breakdown and institutional care. I feel this is all food for thought before making statements about children and families.

David Dane

TUC Conferences

There are people in Brighton who call themselves socialists, anti-zionists, even anarchists. And yet come of these people help organise security for TUC Conferences in Brighton, which means they will be guarding Toy Blair! Will they be liasing with Special Branch too? They are a disgrace. They know who they are, some of them read *Freedom* (and may even have contributed to it).

Worthing Radical

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Groups/centres

➔ page 1

- And finally, a squatted project in Bridgewater, Somerset is looking to bring a social centre concept to the town later this year. StudioQvillage are looking to open the centre with a library and vegan café.

Quiz answers

1. It ran from 1949 to 1966 in France, edited by David Stetner.
2. It stands for Growth Employment And Redistribution and is the local application of neo-liberalism, implemented with gusto by the ANC government.
3. 1986. It was only 91st.
4. English anarchists.

REVIEW

Tom Jennings interprets Nas' provocation that 'Hip Hop Is Dead' in terms of the limited liberal horizons of civil rights

Twelve years after *Illmatic* – his definitive new-school rap debut – the eighth Nas release declares the party over. *Hip Hop Is Dead* (Island Def Jam) finds the genre's pre-eminent word-smith continuing in the combative mood following a celebrity beef with Jay-Z (New York's other street lyricist superstar) which energised *Stillmatic* (2001) through to the superb autobiographical *Street's Disciple* (2004).^{*} However, his consistent output of ghetto-centric quality is persistently misperceived by subcultural elitists deaf to the effective musical marriage of hip-hop tradition and cutting-edge populism and blind to the vision's integrity in mobilising observation and personal resonance to chronicle and critique the anguish and aspirations of the contemporary US inner-city Black poor. Now mature enough to question the evolutionary status of this profoundly influential cultural movement, Nas challenges its adherents to similarly transcend self-importance in response.

The album opens with no-nonsense potted summaries of rap's 'hoodrats clawing their way to fame and fortune, couched in the favoured gangsta condensation of capitalism-as-crime: "From crack-pushers to 'lac pushers, and ambushers / And morticians to fortresses / Case-dismissers, laced in riches, caked ridiculous / From nickel-and-dimin' to trickin' them diamonds" ('Money Over Bullsh*t'). The bravado segues into admitting its protagonists' culpability for the artistic price paid: "Hip-hop been dead, we the reason it died / Wasn't Sylvia's fault or 'cause MCs' skills are lost / It's 'cause we can't see ourselves as boss / Deep rooted through slavery, self hatred" ('Carry On Tradition'); and "Heinous crimes help records sales more than creative lines / And I don't want to keep bringing up the greater times / But I'm a dreamer, nostalgic with the state of mind" ('Can't Forget About You'). The title track nails it: "Everybody sound the same / Commercialised the game / Reminiscent when it wasn't all business / They forgot where it started / So we all gather here for the dearly departed".

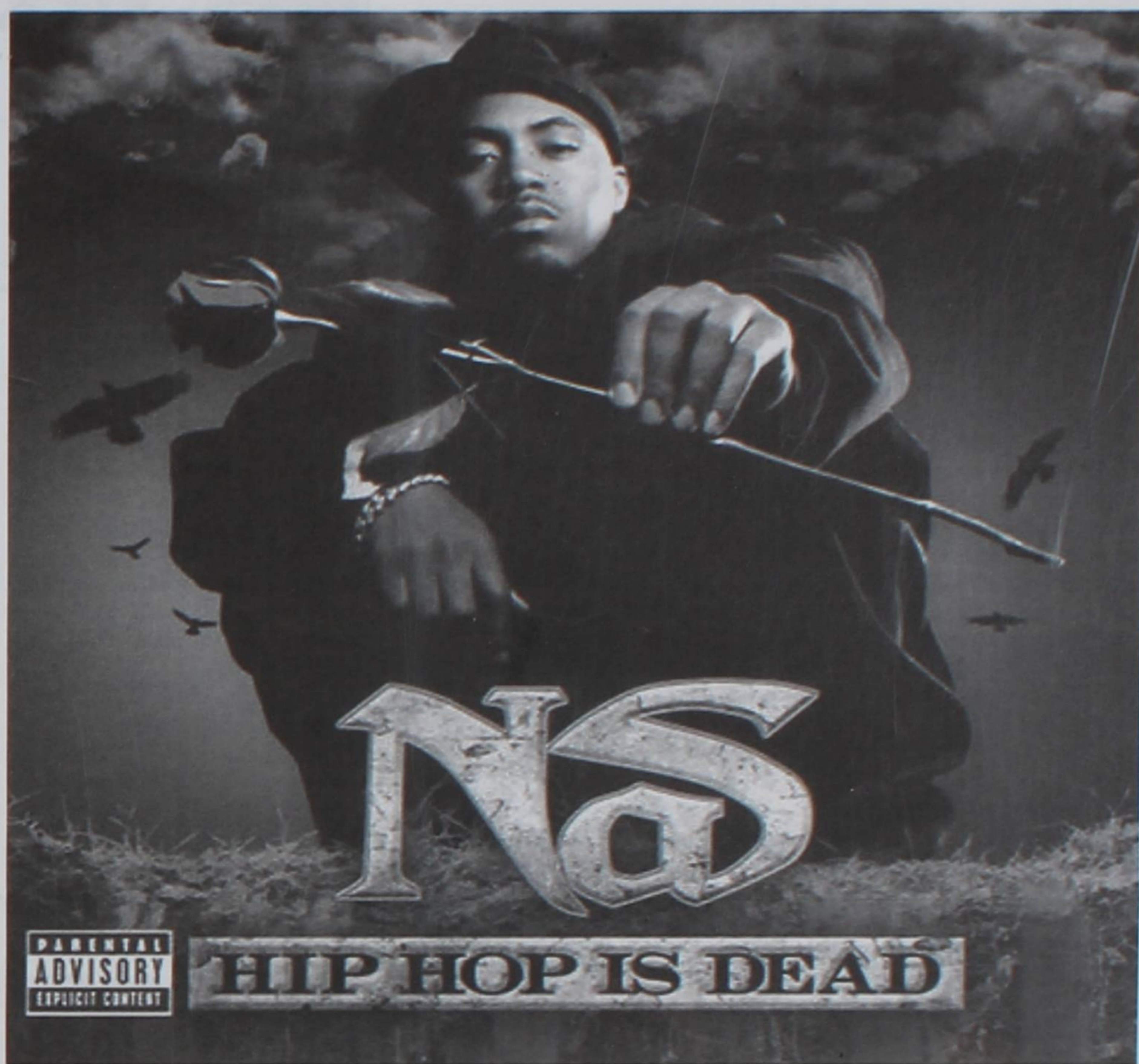
The pivotal 'Black Republican' then juggles Jay-Z: "I feel like a black republican, money keep comin' in" and

Nas: "I feel like a black militant, takin' over the government", followed by "Can't turn my back on the 'hood, too much love for them / Can't clean my act up for good, too much thug in 'em / Probably end up back in the 'hood; I'm, like, 'fuck it then'." Implicitly recognising that individual advancement neither resolves class contradictions nor fulfils hip-hop's emancipatory potential leaves the set oscillating between honouring the Black traditions which nourish struggle and reasserting under-class self-confidence in developing agendas expressed in their terms. With intricate wordplay literate in urban provenance, Black Arts and contemporary reference, Nas echoes Rakim's cool philosophical cadence and 2-Pac's passionate arrogance grounded in Panther politics. Beyond their mystical paranoia, though, he senses that the project is constitutionally incapable of breaking on through – despite the muscular, sensuous beats and brooding intelligence here representing living disproof of the title. Still, *Hip Hop Stalemate* would hardly inspire as an alternative.

Premature ejaculations

Alongside tiresomely predictable 'I-told-you-so' music press taste parades, insider critiques of Nas' obituary similarly misfire in citing the rude health of southern states 'Crunk' – whose synthetic sonic minimalism re-energises grass-roots dance credentials yet rarely showcases lyrical craft or consciousness (ditto rave-friendly UK Grime). However, the Dirty South boasts Atlanta's Ludacris – the genre's greatest ever humorist – and Outkast's sophisticated reverse-colonisation of pop, among many vital signs of hip-hop life. Major label rap poets elsewhere regroup independently under corporate radar – witness Talib Kweli's triumphant return to fundamentals *Right About Now* (Koch, 2005) – while Dead Prez hope to preserve the audience gained for their outspoken radicalism (Sony's sabotage notwithstanding) with more modest, regular and collectively-oriented niche production, promotion and distribution on the trail blazed by Paris, Public Enemy and The Coup. Whether underground or mediated, this is one hell of a hyperactive corpse.

In a *Village Voice* piece reproduced on



the Anarchist People of Color website (www.illegalvoices.org/knowledge), Greg Tate contextualises the conundrum in assessing the political implications of hip-hop's commercialisation over three decades. Its viral spread – first infiltrating American youth, then, crucially, via industrial dissemination abroad – decisively shifted the conditions of possibility for a global lower-class discourse on poverty and powerlessness, which can no longer simply be silenced by repression and fragmentation. On the downside, merged media's cultural pincers commodify Black style for middle-class fashionistas while hypnotising local core communities with hyper-real fantasies of superhuman prowess to conceal the intensifying subhuman treatment meted out by the state – tactics requiring the active collusion of

rap aristocrats in exchange for egos bloated with pieces of silver.

Nevertheless, such uneasy, conflicted recuperations are always inherently prone to rupture – however many times they tell us there's no alternative. In this case the fault lines trace the troubled history of US race reform since the Second World War, with the classic liberal compromise of civil rights the palliative for a working-class generation of revolutionary Black militants framed and massacred by the government's COINTELPRO. Before residual resistance was mopped-up in narcotic flood and economic drought, the meritocratic rhetoric of dual spiritual/worldly uplift doubtless seemed viable, but street dreams of respectability surely unravelled with Rodney King, O.J. Simpson, 9/11, New

Orleans, and Iraq – voting Democrat being as inconsequential as Million Man Marches and millionaire MCs. As Tate specifies: "If enough folks from the 'hood get rich, does that suffice for 'all the rest who will die tryin'?" No, but a popular movement to dismantle structural dispossession and enslavement – which Nas' poetry and hip-hop's unifying language could significantly contribute to – has yet to re-emerge. Until then, politically speaking, it's not dead ... only sleeping.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

^{*} see my 'Beautiful Struggles and Gangsta Blues', *Variant* magazine, issue 22 (2005). Further extensive discussions of the grass-roots relevance of urban music can be found in *Variant* 17, 20 and 25 (also at www.variant.org.uk).

TELEVISION

Ethel MacDonald: An Anarchist's Story

My dear wife Keri and me watched the television programme *Ethel MacDonald: An Anarchist's Story* shown on BBC2 (Scotland) at 9pm on Wednesday 24th January 2005. In 1936 the CNT/FAI in Spain appealed for an English-speaking anarchist reporter to broadcast on their Barcelona-based radio station.

Ethel was at that time working with Guy Aldred on an anarchist publication in Glasgow. She didn't have much money but she more or less hitch-hiked her way down through France and across

the Pyrenees to Barcelona, where she did indeed become the international voice of the CNT on their radio station. When fighting broke out between the anarchists and the Stalinists in Barcelona she was unequivocal in blaming the Stalinists for this in her broadcasts.

When the Stalinists ended up in control and many anarchists were being arrested and/or killed, she helped many to escape, leading to the British popular press describing her as "The Scottish Scarlet Pimpernel". When arrested herself, she was (at least according to this television programme) eventually

rescued by the intervention of Fenner Brockway, a prominent member of the Labour Party.

All of this was portrayed in the programme by reconstructions using actors, interspersed with commentary, including from Noam Chomsky, from Mike Gonzalez, a prominent Trotskyist SWP member in Glasgow (not sure why they chose an SWP member, but Gonzalez was, surprisingly, very positive about the anarchists) and by a Spanish anarchist who was a young woman back in 1936.

I had rather been expecting the pro-

gramme would end with some 'dream that failed' type stuff, but in actual fact there was some remarkably positive comment from Noam Chomsky and from this Spanish anarchist woman (sorry, forget the name) about how the anarchist cause of freedom burned in human hearts and would triumph sooner or later. When the programme ended, Keri said to me "I'm amazed that they actually showed that on the BBC", and yes, it is fairly amazing. But what you have to remember is that the BBC is a very large corporation, and that within that corporation there are

different 'parties', different interest groups, etc., and of course different regional power bases. This was shown only on the Scotland region of the BBC, so those watching BBC2 in England, Wales or Northern Ireland would have seen a totally different programme.

Unfortunately I did not make a video recording of the programme (I don't know how to handle that new-fangled technology) but hopefully somebody else may have done so. Certainly *An Anarchist's Story* is well worth watching if you can get hold of it.

Dave Coull

A Sideways Look

London's congestion charge has just been extended to include a swathe of inner west London, mainly the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. The congestion charge applies to most vehicles driven into a zone in central London between 7am and 6pm on a weekday. The disabled are exempt if they qualify for a blue badge and residents pay just 10% if they register.

Allies of London Mayor Ken Livingstone have painted this as somehow progressive. The reality is that the congestion charge is a flat rate tax dressed up with environmental green-wash. However, that does not mean we should necessarily get too worked up about it.

The first point worth making is that parking in central London costs a lot. Nine hours in a car park near Russell Square would set you back £14.30, while the same time in Mayfair would be a whopping £41. Central London does also have the best public transport in Britain, even if it is probably the most expensive. Once other factors such as congestion and petrol are taken into account, it is clear that central London commuters are not exactly priced off public transport and into their cars.

Of course, this isn't the whole story. The charging zone currently skirts around some of Britain's poorest areas, such as Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Southwark. There is no way of easily avoiding it if you need to get from the Elephant and Castle to Whitechapel, for example, because the nearest river crossings are all included in it. This is also the area where public transport becomes worse. It is geared to getting commuters into and out of central London, getting people to or from Hackney has never been high on the agenda – you need to take a bus and will do for a few years yet. It's very easy for many, particularly well off greens, to condemn people who need to get their kids to school then get somewhere else entirely for work and know they can't rely on public transport. There are exemptions for some, like people who can afford expensive new 'clean' cars, but never for the poor.

One factor that Livingstone hasn't addressed is the increased number of people able to apply for a residents' permit, which will slash the amount of revenue he brings in with this tax. But who are the most deserving people for this largesse? Would it be the people who live in the poorest areas of London, on the eastern fringes of the City? Or would it be the residents of the two richest local authority areas in Britain? Once again, we see 'socialists' hand a big discount to the well off. Coming on the back of the latest transport price hikes, it is easy to imagine that driving will become a lot more affordable for the residents of Chelsea. One parking website even trumpeted the extension as "Good news for driving residents of the extension zone", encouraging them to "start driving into work in central

London". So, that's the green credentials established!

There have been protests about the extension, but mainly from small businesses unable to bear the extra costs. The congestion charge is a business-friendly initiative designed to save business from the costs associated with congestion. It might make parts of central London a bit more pleasant some times, but don't mistake its intent.

Svartfrosk

Bookworm notes

I've had the same conversation with two different people in the same pub in a matter of weeks. "Excuse me, who are you lot?"

"We're black-hearted anarchists, intent on the overthrow of capital and the state," I reply, or words to that effect. Silence. "No, seriously. We are."

And then the question I bet most of us dread. "So what do anarchists actually do, then?"

It's not that we don't do anything. The problem I find is to make what we do sound in any way interesting.

One group of anarchists who wouldn't have had this problem are those featured in the Kate Sharpley Library book, *The Assassination Attempt on Franco from the Air: 1948* by Antonio Tellez. This book tells two stories. The first is contained in the title. The second is drawn out by Albert Meltzer in his introduction – what is the relationship between groups and individuals who are forced to act undercover, and mass organisations such as the CNT?

At one level, it might look like those involved in the assassination attempt were conforming to the nineteenth century stereotype of the bomb-throwing anarchist. They were planning to throw some bombs, after all. However, Tellez makes it clear that the attempt on Franco's life was in line with the democratically-decided policy of the CNT at the time.

Despite the efforts of the KSL, the history of anarchist resistance to Franco is still little-known. If you want to know more about it, this book is an excellent place to start.

All titles reviewed in the Bookworm column are available from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

The quiz

1. Where and when was the Yiddish-language magazine *Der Freie Gedank* (*Free Thought*) published?
2. In South Africa, what is GEAR?
3. When did the United States ratify the 1948 Treaty against genocide?
4. What wikipedia category unites comedian Mark Thomas, William Blake, Lemmy from Motorhead, photographic pioneer Wordsworth Donisthorpe and Alan Moore?

Answers on page 6



LEADERS
ARE PEOPLE WHOSE INITIATIVES
ARE FOLLOWED VOLUNTARILY.
WHEN BOSSES CLAIM TO BE LEADERS
THIS IS A SWINDLE.



Cartoon taken from Donald Room's *Wildcat: ABC of Bosses*, available from Freedom Press at £3 (post free)

Imagine if...

Rupert Murdoch was feeling good about himself.

The ageing, but undisputed emperor of world media had just moments ago secured the future of his children with six equal payments of £100m each in News Corporation voting stock, more than any single human being could spend but to Murdoch, who had made billions, just a drop in the ocean.

In fact, he mused with a grin on his face, just under four of the endowments had been paid simply from the vast amount of corporation tax he had personally dodged over the years. Adding in all the other tax evasion practices his company used, he probably wouldn't be paying a penny of it in actual profit, just from money he had hidden from the government.

He didn't feel any remorse about that. After all, he was a (technically American) libertarian, an anarcho-capitalist. He was a man who believed in a state so minimal its only function would be to defend his control of the media, and of course, that of his progeny in the future. In a truly fair world, he thought, a man should be free to make sure his children had the ability to crush underheel anyone who opposed them, no matter how poor a bunch of wastrels they might turn out to be.

James strutted into the room. There had been some concern when the youthful heir apparent was made CEO of BSKyB despite a poor record and little experience, but clearly nepotism was the libertarian way.

"James, good to see you." The emperor cracked a smile. His son would carry on his line, for what is freedom if it can't be used as the cudgel to build a dynasty of the all-powerful?

Listings

Until 4th March Art Not Oil exhibition at the Pogo Cafe, 76 Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5, phone 0208 533 1214, open Wednesday to Sunday, 12.30 to 9pm, see pogocafe.co.uk

4th March Madalyn: The Most Hated Women In America, her life, her campaigns, her money, her murder, a talk by Barbara Smoker at 11am, and at 3pm 'The Omega Course: The Need For Secular Evangelicalism' discussion led by John Edwards, both presented by South Place Ethical Society (SPES), Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, for more see www.ethicalsoc.org.uk/events.htm

10th March The Sixth International @lternative Bookfair in Gent at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2, Gent, Belgium, from 10am-8pm – as well as books, etc., there will be a programme of conferences, workshops, video showings and performances, for info see www.aboekenbeurs.be or contact aboekenbeurs@yahoo.com

17th and 18th March The Twelfth Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair at SF County

Fair Building, Golden Gate Park, 9th Avenue & Lincoln Boulevard, San Francisco, USA, from 10am until 6pm (on 17th) and 11am to 5pm (on 18th) – this year back at the old location with all the space needed to walk around, to talk with other visitors, to look, to enjoy the programmes and the cafe, and over two days. Contact The Bookfair Committee, c/o Bound Together Books, 1369 Haight Street, San Francisco, CA 94117

19th March Global Day of Action against the 'War On Terror', on the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, to find out what's happening see <http://m19wiki.pbwiki.com>

25th March What is the Importance of Hegel Today? by Joseph Tendler. 11am at South Place Ethical Society (SPES), Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, for more see www.ethicalsoc.org.uk/events.htm

28th March The Future of Black Flag magazine, meeting at Freedom Bookshop, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1, from 7pm

Art Not Oil is at Pogo Cafe
until March 4th
a multi-media exhibition about the effects of our oil obsession has on the environment and our future.

Pogo Vegan Cafe, 76 Clarence Rd, Hackney, E5. www.pogocafe.co.uk
Open Weds-Sun 12.30-9pm

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