

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

21 APRIL 2007

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## MAYDAY: A LOOK AROUND THE GLOBE

The Mayday march, only recently revived in the UK, is a global celebration of working people beating state and business for the betterment of all.

The UK now sees one of the larger events with the Mayday Rally in London and others across the country. The occasion is one not just for TUC unionists, it attracts a huge variety of people from across the left, including anarchists, who mark the contribution of anarchism to class struggle.

This year's anarchist bloc has mainly been organised by members of the South England Anarchist Federation – an anarcho-communist class struggle group working to abolish capitalism in favour of a society of free federations.

'Tacks', a member of the organising group, said: "Having attended TUC maydays for years, whilst the talk of one day strikes for mayday is exciting I assume they main talk will be about how the Unions will save social democracy and send 'a strong message' to the next Prime Minister.

"It doesn't really matter how they wrap it up, that box has been empty for over 50 years now: regulated capitalism does not work. Nobody is 'listening' to the unions from the ruling class, they can take action or give up.

"We may well be looking at superfast destruction of the welfare state under a Tory government by next year – not fighting back isn't an option for any of us."

The bloc will form at 12pm at Clerkenwell Green, and is marked by the Red and Black flag. At the other end of the country, a march in Edinburgh will be happening on 5th May.

Mayday events around the world, both large and small, will stretch from late April into May.

In the US, a major initiative is looking to build on the mass movement of last year against anti-immigration laws to wake the 'sleeping giant' of millions of hyper-exploited workers in the country to fight for their rights.

In Edmonton, Canada, there is a week-long labour festival, and in Florida there is a similar week-long series of events going on around the state.

In Germany, Mayday is celebrated not only for its labour connotation but also as the day which really launched techno-rave culture in the country. 20,000 ravers are expected in Dortmund for the event.

In Venezuela, the Mayday celebrations are vast, attracting up to one million people to the streets of Caracas, while in India, Mayday coincides with a general festival period. In Brazil, unions are using the occasion to rally against 'precarity', the loss of job security and rise of flexible work, attached to loss of living standards, taking place around the world.

In China, every year the totalitarian state capitalist nation puts on a massive military show in honour of its founders and roots in the labour movement –



REMEMBER: Anarchists at Chicago's tribute to the Haymarket martyrs. The monument was unveiled 118 years after the event – quite an extreme example of civic amnesia.

something anarchists find a travesty.

Many anarchist militants from around the world will be in Paris for Mayday following the i07 anarcho-syndicalist

conference – a full report will follow in a future issue.

Mayday has its roots in the Haymarket Riots of 1886 in Chicago,

USA, when police killed six strikers campaigning for the eight-hour day.

When the next day a bomb exploded

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## WHY THE PCS ARE OUT

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) have announced that their 200,000 members in the civil service will be striking over 'pathetic' pay offers being made by management. This will be the second day of strikes, following a previous one-day strike in March.

PCS members have been conducting ongoing action short of a strike since March, and continue to garner wide support from other unions, who see the pay offer as one that not only attempts to drive down wages and working conditions but also further weaken the labour movement in general.

The Secretary of Wolverhampton TUC, Nick Kelleher, noted that "[the government] are committed to destroying

our public services and the labour movement with it. This is not just a fight on pay, privatisation and jobs – this is a fight for the future of public services as we know it."

Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the union stated that "Low paid workers are being asked to accept below more than half the rate of inflation. This is completely outrageous. Public sector workers are being asked to pay the price of the government's fiscal policies at a time when people in the City are getting billions in bonuses. All of this is at a time when we are fighting redundancies and privatisation."

Further to the strike, the PCS called upon 1st May to be a 'National Day of Action for Public Services', and hopes to bring out the strikers and their supporters for the traditional May Day marches in towns and cities around the UK.

They have also combined this strike action with a 'Make your Vote Count' electoral campaign in response to several elections taking place on 3rd May, seeking

in essence to replace one set of anti-worker parliamentarians with another.

This contradiction involved in the planned PCS strike – between furthering workers' interests, and undermining and misleading them – is a tension in many contemporary unions. Their continuing decline in membership and power reflects this tension through a general disillusionment, even within union full-timers, over their ability to challenge the combined power government and bosses.

Suggestions of joint strike action between the PCS and other unions such as the GMB and UNISON have so far failed, but unions have vowed to support the PCS in its strike.

This comes at a time when greater moves towards union mergers are taking place as unions recognise the importance of broad-based industrial strategies of the likes of the SEIU in the US and many (anarcho)syndicalist unions. This greater impetus is increasingly apparent, and the PCS's attempt at coalition building with other unions is arguably another example.

## THREAT TO DIJON CENTRE

The Les Tanneries squat is facing eviction after Dijon's 'socialist' council has agreed to sell the land to Générale De Santé, France's largest multinational private health provider. Les Tanneries has been occupied since 1998 and after years of campaigning obtained a no-eviction deal from the council in 2002.

The council backtracked on their recent decision to evict after protest, emails and an occupation of a council meeting by 300 people demonstrated concern over the move. Their latest position is that the land may be left out of the deal for a new private health centre.

However, despite the non-eviction agreement, a trusted local government source confirmed to the collective that the council has already made a written agreement with Générale De Santé. The town mayor François Rebsamen is second to Ségolène Royal in the Socialist Party and also a director of Dexia Crédit Local bank, a world leader in utility services finance.

The council told *Freedom* that they recognise the cultural activities Les Tanneries brings to Dijon, that "relations with the occupiers are good" and say they will "find them an alternative site" should there be a change in the situation.

Générale De Santé are well represented in the region already and local people are asking why there has been no public discussion of this decision. Other autonomous spaces in Dijon, L'Eldorado independent cinema, and Les Toboggans squat are now also being threatened with eviction.

Les Tanneries provides space for gigs, performances, anarchist affinity groups, a hacklab, a freeshop, a bike-repair workshop, rehearsal rooms, screen-printing, an organic garden, an alternative media centre, a squatters' help-desk, library, and provides space to dozens of collectives and associations.

Les Tanneries plan to resist any attempt at eviction and are calling for international solidarity. Call Mayor Rebsamen on +33 0380 745151 or email francois.rebsamen@ville-dijon.fr

ISSN 0016-0504



Vol 68 No 08

9 770016 050009

antidhontarian.net

# Home and away

## GM back again

The first GM crop trials in several years are getting underway in Cambridge, and was met by an anti-GM potato protest walk on Saturday 14th April.

The German multinational chemical company, BASF, has been granted permission to plant genetically modified potatoes at NIAB on the outskirts of the city.

An organiser for the walk, from the Cambridge Action Network, said: "This is widely being viewed as a test of public opinion and if we let these trial go ahead with little or no opposition, more GM trials, and eventually commercial growing will be here before we know it."

• There will be a GM Free Potato Picnic on 21st April, meeting at 1pm at the Preston Road Community Centre, Salt End, Hull, for walk to picnic at proposed site for GM potatoes. See [mutatoes.org](http://mutatoes.org)

## Meadowbank roars

More than six hundred people marched from Meadowbank Stadium to the City Chambers to deliver a 6,000-name petition opposing the closure of Edinburgh's only sports stadium.

The march included politicians, local residents and sports stars. It was led by youngsters proudly wearing their club colours, carrying an assortment of banners and chanting 'Save Meadowbank' slogans.

The march ends a momentous month for the Save Meadowbank campaign which saw 600 people voice their concern at a public meeting and over 3,000 put their name to an online petition opposing the plan. 6,000 more have signed a paper petition.

## Work deaths rocket

There has been a dramatic rise in workplace fatalities at work, official figures show. Statistics for the six months up to the end of September last year released this week by the Health and Safety Executive show 124 workers died in the six month period, compared to 212 in all of 2005/06. If the same trend continued until the reporting year ends this month, it would push the fatalities figure to a five year high of 248 deaths, up 17% on last year.

(From Hazards Magazine)

## Major unions catch on

More superunion mergers could be on the cards after it emerged general unions Amicus and the TGWU are talking to United Steelworkers in the US about creating a single international union group.

The UK unions, which announced earlier this year that they would be merging to create Unite, a two million-member union covering industries across the UK would aim to pool cash and mount cross-atlantic campaigns.

The international concept is not a new one, with anarchist unions such as the IWW and internationals such as the IWA having practiced directly democratic versions for over a hundred years.

## Ford strike threat

Ford workers are considering nationwide industrial action following the decision to close the company's Leamington foundry.

Union bosses addressed the 387 workers set to lose their jobs at a series of meetings recently. They sent a strong message to the Ford management that they are prepared to take strike action and are calling on colleagues working at Britain's other Ford plants to back their protests.

# Around the world

**ARGENTINA:** A general strike saw thousands march through Buenos Aires on 10th April in protest at the killing of Carlos Fuentealba. Fellow strikers had blocked roads across the province on 5th April after Carlos was killed.

Carlos, a teacher, was sitting in a car that was part of a rolling blockade when the shot was fired. According to the driver, Gonzalo Arroyo, the car was surrounded by 20 officers who began to hit it with rifle butts so they would stop. An officer then fired a tear gas grenade into the back windscreen. Carlos, who was in the back seat, was struck in the neck.

Teachers have been striking since the 5th March after the Neuquen state government refused to raise wages. In response strikers' pickets began to block roads in order to increase the pressure. Riot police were then sent in.

**CUBA:** A new facility at Guantánamo Bay has instituted an even harsher regime for inmates at the prison facility, according to a new report.

Conditions at Camp 6, which opened in December 2006, are described as "cruel and inhuman" in an investigation by Amnesty International. Detainees are confined for 22 hours a day to individual, steel cells with no natural light and minimal human contact. No activities are provided, with detainees subjected to 24-hour lighting and constant observation by guards.

**IRAN:** It is alleged that 45 teachers in Hamadan province have been arrested by the government by the Teachers' Trade Association of Iran.

It is thought the teachers were taken on Sunday 8th April and transferred to

an unknown location. Around 30 of the arrested teachers were arrested in the Association's offices in Hamadan and a number of others were arrested at their homes and elsewhere. This included all members of the board of directors of the association in Hamadan.

The new arrests in Hamadan took place as other teachers were released on high bails, charged with attempting to hold illegal gatherings and failure to comply with police order. As *Freedom* goes to press, there are rumours strike action and protests could take place on 15th, 16th and 29th April. A further rally may also be organised for 8th May.

**SRI LANKA:** Armed conflict in Sri Lanka between government forces, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and other armed groups, which has escalated since April 2006, continues to be marked by widespread human rights abuses.

Amnesty International has expressed strong concerns about the rising number of civilians being killed or injured as a result of deliberate attacks in Sri Lanka's increasing violence.

Unlawful killings, abductions and enforced disappearance of civilians are daily occurrences, as is arbitrary detention. Both sides to the conflict systematically violate their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect from harm those taking no active part in hostilities. Tens of thousands of families have lost their property and their means of livelihood, and the number of conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs) nationally has risen to at least 290,000. This adds to the large

numbers of IDPs who have been kept away from their homes due to lack of safety there including ongoing fighting and fear of heavily mined areas for over a decade.

**VIETNAM:** A series of wildcat strikes have swept Vietnam over the last three months after a wide range of workforces lost patience with pay, working conditions and social insurance.

Up to 43 strikes have hit, with several beginning in February after the lunar New Year festivities in February. The strikes follow a similar pattern to last year, when workers successfully fought for a 25% wage hike and an end to company demands for a 70-hour working week, eventually imposed by government intervention.

Thousands have walked out of companies who have been flouting labour laws and renege on pay and hours promises. Workers at All Super Textiles, a Taiwanese company, demanded a wage hike and the ending of demands that they work up to 1,000 hours overtime a year – five times what is allowed under Vietnamese law. The company agreed to reduce overtime, close on Sundays and raise wages by 6%.

Other strikes happened at Peaktop, a candle making company in Bien Hoa who had halved their promised payrise, and Epic Designer II who threatened workers with the sack if they struck over a 5% raise.

**WORLDWIDE:** LiveEarth, a massive worldwide concert organised by green groups and headed by Al Gore, is hoping to attract a two billion-strong audience on 7th July when it launches

across seven continents.

The concerts aim to bring the issue of climate change to a wider audience and set an example by using 'eco-friendly' methods of running such as carbon offset (debunked when it was pointed out that to make up for Britain's pollution alone it would require one billion trees a year to be planted). For more see *Imagine If* (Page 8).

**ZIMBABWE:** A day before the ZCTU's planned walkout, President Mugabe unleashed his security agents, the uniformed and plainclothes police, the national youth service and the youth league that were bussed from all corners of the country to scuttle the stay away.

On the first day of the mass strike on 4th April armed riot police with electric baton sticks, vicious dogs and AK 47 rifles descended at Overspill Shopping Centre, Ruben Shops and Munyuki Centre in Epworth and ordered the closure of all night clubs and bars.

Riot police entered Zimunhu Bar and Restaurant and began to brazenly assault anyone they found inside. During the melee three people Munyaradzi Manda, Davison Chandira and Tandawa Kwenyu had their legs broken. The trio, because of the beatings had bruises all over their bodies, while Chandira lost his right eye after an electric baton stick beat him.

The same brutality was also reported in Mufakose, Mbare, Dzivarasekwa, Budiro, Glen View, Highfields and Kuwadzana-where the riot police attacked everyone they saw in bars and nightclubs.

# Prison news

## Il Silvestre

The Italian courts have ruled that Silvia Guerini and Federico Bonamici should be released under house arrest. This means that only three Il Silvestre members, Benedetta Galante, Francesco Gioia, and Costantino Ragusa, are currently imprisoned. Please send messages of support to:

- Benedetta Galante, Casa Circondariale, Contrada Capo di Monte, 82100 – Benevento (BN), Italy.
- Francesco Gioia, Via Maiano, 10, 06049 Spoleto, Italy.
- Costantino Ragusa, Casa Circondariale, Via Prati Nuovi 7, 27058 Voghera (PV), Italy.

## Parole for Dave Blenkinsop

Former animal-rights prisoner Dave Blenkinsop has been released on parole. Dave thanks everyone who wrote to him, and those who supported him in other ways, during his sentence. He has also requested that his privacy be respected following his release.

## Marco Camenisch

A recent attempt by the Swiss Minister of Justice to get Earth Liberation prisoner Marco Camenisch detained for the rest of his life has failed. Marco will instead be imprisoned until

at least 2012, and most likely until 2018, when he will have spent 28 years in jail. You can write to him at: Marco Camenisch, Poeschwies, Postfach 3143, 8105 Regensdorf, Switzerland.

## Josh Wolf released

Freelance journalist Josh Wolf, who was imprisoned for refusing to hand over unpublished footage of a San Francisco protest where a cop was injured and a squad car damaged, has been freed after seven and a half months in jail. Following his release, Josh, who has always maintained his film captured neither incident, posted it on his blog.

## Brian McCarvill

Long-time US prison-resister Brian McCarvill is appealing for correspondence and for publications. You can write to him at: Brian McCarvill, #11037976, OSP, 2605 State Street, Salem, Oregon 97310, USA. As when writing to all US prisoners, please put your name and address on the outside of the envelope as well as at the top of the letter.

## Memorial to dead cop damages police cars

In Manchester, a marble memorial to a slain cop was destroyed, and then the

pieces were used to damage police cars outside Cheetham Hill police station over half a mile away. The memorial was installed last September in remembrance of Special Branch officer Stephen Oake, who was killed while trying to 'subdue' an Al Qaeda suspect. Oake was described at the time by his wife as "no saint". The police are very upset about the incident, which they called a "new level of evil".

## CGT protest treatment of Laura Riera

Since 2001 Laura Riera, a 27-year-old resident of Terrassa, Spain has been a prisoner of the Spanish State under fascist inspired anti-terrorism laws widely criticised by international human rights organisations. At the time of her arrest Laura was a member of Assembla d'Okupes de Terrassa, a squatters union affiliated with the local federation of the revolutionary syndicalist CGT and active in local feminist and anti-fascist collectives.

After a brutal arrest and imprisonment and a trial marred by irregularities Laura was convicted of a charge of aiding a group of armed Basque nationalists in an attack on a ruling class political party. Ironically, she was found not guilty of a charge of co-

operating with an illegally armed group. She has insisted on her total innocence of both charges and stressed that an alleged confession was obtained under duress. She is currently serving a nine year sentence. Since the trial, the persecution has continued. Forced prison transfers, restrictions on visitation and denials of rights extended to other prisoners are among the grievances cited by the CGT.

The CGT states that they regard the prosecution as an attack on alternative social movements in Catalunya, particularly the Assembla d'Okupes de Terrassa, defend not only Laura's innocence but her lifestyle and militance and stand in solidarity with her family.

Laura continues her struggle for justice inside the prison with hunger strikes in defence of her rights and those of other prisoners and in the courts with a union attorney. Send messages of support to:

- Laura Riera Valenciano, Centro Penitenciario de Valencia, Ctra. N-340, km. 225 46220 Picassent, Valencia
- Confederació General del Treball de Catalunya, Via Laietana, 18, planta 9, 08003-Barcelona. tel: 933 103 362, fax: 933 107 110, e-mail: [spccc@cgtcatalunya.cat](mailto:spccc@cgtcatalunya.cat)

compiled by Mark Barnsley

# News

## National Socialism on the march

### Rob Ray looks at the BNP's drive to capture hearts and minds at the council elections on 6th May

An all-in effort to make major gains across the UK has led the British National Party to put out 827 named candidates in the largest ever campaign by a far-right group in district elections.

Yorkshire, the North West and West Midlands have been the most heavily targeted, as the BNP continues to take advantage of spiraling poverty to try and cement influence. Leeds and Birmingham in particular look set for clashes between established parties and Nick Griffin's new-look BNP with 73 seats being contested between them.

Coverage of the nominations has remained subdued in the major media, as previous high-profile denunciations have failed to severely blunt its momentum, but anti-fascist campaigning has nevertheless begun in the run-up to 6th May.

Most high-profile will be the efforts of *Searchlight*, the largely discredited anti-fascist magazine headed by Gerry Gable whose extensive links with the secret service were exposed in *Searchlight for Beginners* by Larry O'Hara.

Unite against Fascism, whose own links with the Socialist Workers Party are well known, have already begun campaigning, and several major unions will also be prominent.

Tory and Labour candidates will be fighting to retain their seats in most of the areas targeted. But disengagement from communities and the promotion of policies directly harming working people has severely weakened their capacity to present themselves as a more humane choice to the BNP.

Leaked documents have hinted at difficulties in finding enough active support in conflict areas. In Birmingham, a leaked letter to the TUC noted a lack of Labour party activists and an elderly turnout. The Tories meanwhile had a document leaked explaining some of their anti-BNP tactics, which rely on presenting themselves as "keeping the BNP out" rather than really challenging them ideologically.

Repeated efforts from mainstream parties and campaigning groups to break the back of the BNP has met

with little success, and it has been able to capitalise on the lack of a strong left-wing alternative to cloak itself in progressive language.

Although its nationalism, racism and homophobia have been a heavy drawback for mainstream acceptance of the BNP's politics, its criticisms of a privatisation agenda led by Labour and given impetus by private interests, its attacks on cronyism, defence of free speech and socialist-sounding policies have appealed to a large sector.

Simultaneously, in its most recent campaigning, it has made efforts to look more business-friendly, by increasing its presence in rural areas, putting forward candidates to try and capitalise on the liberal shift of David Cameron's Tories.

Its success in distancing itself from the worst excesses of its days with John Tyndall, and pledge against violence have strengthened its position in comparison to the right wing parties and press currently dominating the mainstream.

For anarchists, the elections themselves are a secondary issue, merely keeping tabs on how viewpoints at a grassroots level may be pointing. Campaigning is not for a political party, but to discredit the viewpoint the BNP represents.

While the vote remains low, what seems to be a growing acceptance – if not active support – of the BNP could suggest a growing far-right radicalisation which must be stopped on the ground.

Go to [antifa.org.uk](http://antifa.org.uk) for more information about anarchist activism against the BNP, or phone 07880 697 831.

#### BNP standings

Region	Candidates	Highest-activity districts (candidates)	
Yorkshire	207	Leeds (33)	Kirklees (22)
West Midlands	129	Birmingham (40)	Coventry (17)
North West	119	Burnley (10)	Liverpool (9)
East Midlands	102	Charnwood (14)	Lincoln city (12)
North East	94	Sunderland (25)	Sedgefield (17)
East	73	Thurrock (16)	Basilidon (11)
Southeast	58	Chichester (5)	Maidstone (5)
Southwest	45	Torbay (6)	South Gloucs (5)



Nick Griffin meeting some of his supporters in Leeds, 2006

## A poet and anarchist

### Olive Dehn

(29th September 1914–31st March 2007)

After a lifetime of true worth, bound up with her poetry and her willingness to change the world, the writer Olive Dehn has died at the age of 92.

Born in Manchester, Dehn was sent to Germany to learn cookery (education being seen as a pointless for a woman) as Nazism began to rise to power, and wasted little time in getting herself sent back when a poem sent to *Punch* magazine, Goebbelchen, was intercepted by the German authorities in 1933. She was deported under armed guard for the piece, which ridiculed fascism.

A talented writer, Dehn's works were highly successful.

In 1937 she married the radical fire-brand and anarchist David Markham, an actor and original member of the Committee of 100 (a famous anti-war group in the 1960s), in a relationship

which would endure until his death in 1983. The pair worked together on numerous campaigns, most famously for the freedom of Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky in the 1970s.

Throughout the next 46 years they remained dedicated to the cause of justice and anarchism, fighting against not only western capitalism but the Soviet state-capitalist model as well.

Olive remained highly active for most of her life, and after David Markham's death she took the Central Electricity Generating Board to court for "conspiring with the government to make plutonium for the making of nuclear weapons" in 1988. She was also involved as a contributor in the publication of the first ever anthology of anarchist poetry in 1994, *Visions of Poesy*.

Along with individual poems and articles, she wrote 16 books, mostly for children, between 1935 and 1980, her last being *Good-bye Day*. She largely stopped after her husband died, but saw a collection of her works, *Out of my mind* published last year and an

anthology containing two more of her poems, *Unsuitable Companions* came out just before her death.

A jointly published recorded work, *My Mother Myself*, was published in 2002 with her daughter Jehane, and featured the pair reciting their own poetry, including 24 of Dehn's on one side and 16 of her daughter's on the other.

Olive, a tenacious activist and highly talented writer, combined her writing with work on the family farm in East Sussex, which was tended organically and which she continued to run in one form or another until her final days.

They leave behind four children, Petra, Kika, Jehane and Sonia, three of whom are famous in their own right.

She remained an anarchist until the day she died. Her story, and her works, should stand as an example of how a life can and should be lived in the pursuit of freedom and a better world. *Visions of Poesy*, edited by Clifford Harper, Dennis Gould and Jeff Cloves, Freedom Press, £9.50 (post free).

## Spring into Action

A precursor to the major radical environmental events of the year has taken place in Nottingham with the week-long 'Spring into Action'.

The event has called on three separate buildings in the city to host a wide range of events from guerrilla gardening to community compost and bike maintenance. The Sumac centre and Asbo squatted social centre both helped with the event, which took place at a specially occupied venue at the ex-J.B. Spray factory in Radford.

Spring into Action was helped by the large number of closed properties in Nottingham – around 500 council buildings are lying empty at any one time.

The event showcased existing projects in Nottingham including Country Parks, allotment projects and the Attenborough Nature Straw-bale building and urban foraging, complete with a history of its connection to subversion throughout the ages, were among other workshops put on by a wide range of people.

Guerrilla planters plant tree and shrub seedlings, plants and seed bombs (seeds mixed in clay) mainly in unused or abandoned spaces.

In an action to accompany the week, climate activists managed to stop some operations at Radcliffe on Soar Power Station after climbing onto conveyor belts and dumper trucks inside the plant on 10th April. The power station is located just outside Nottingham and is the third biggest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the UK.

The blockade lasted for three hours and eleven people were arrested all of which were later released.

The owner of the plant, E-On, said operations ran as normal and that their environmental record is good with aiming to be a clean coal-fired power station. A spokeswoman for the protesters said: "Putting pressure on individuals to reduce emissions when companies like E-On are profiting from this polluting industry is obscene and irresponsible. We should not be burning coal in the twenty-first century."

# News

## Jute mills out on Mayday?

**An indefinite strike has been called by workers in Bangladesh as it approaches three months since they were last paid**

In the latest clash between Jute mill workers in Bangladesh and the state-owned Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, 5,000 workers have walked out of the UMC Jute Mills in Narsingdi District (see picture) on indefinite strike.

The massive mill complex ground to a halt after workers struck over unpaid wages, in a third major conflict over the same issue in just eight months. Nearby shops and subsidiaries have also closed due to the strike.

Alongside the main dispute, another 10,000 workers have laid charges at the feet of managers who they say are corrupt and looting profits at their expense in connivance with senior trade union officials, while enforcing ever higher workloads.

The workforce has not received wages from UMC in over ten weeks, and in the BSCIC Industrial Area it is alleged this has gone hand in hand with beatings of trade union militants, and the enforcement of a 12-hour working week (the maximum is supposed to be eight) without overtime pay, sickness benefits, and with the threat of sacking if they are off sick for an entire day.

In their complaint, the workers signed a declaration that one company director mercilessly brutalised two workers, Hafun-ar-Rashid and Akash, after calling them into his office on 5th April.

Jute mills are the single largest employing industry in Bangladesh and the final sector in a trade which spans the nation, farming and refining around 15% of the world supply and thus setting international prices for the product, which

is used mainly in rope and packaging such as sack cloth.

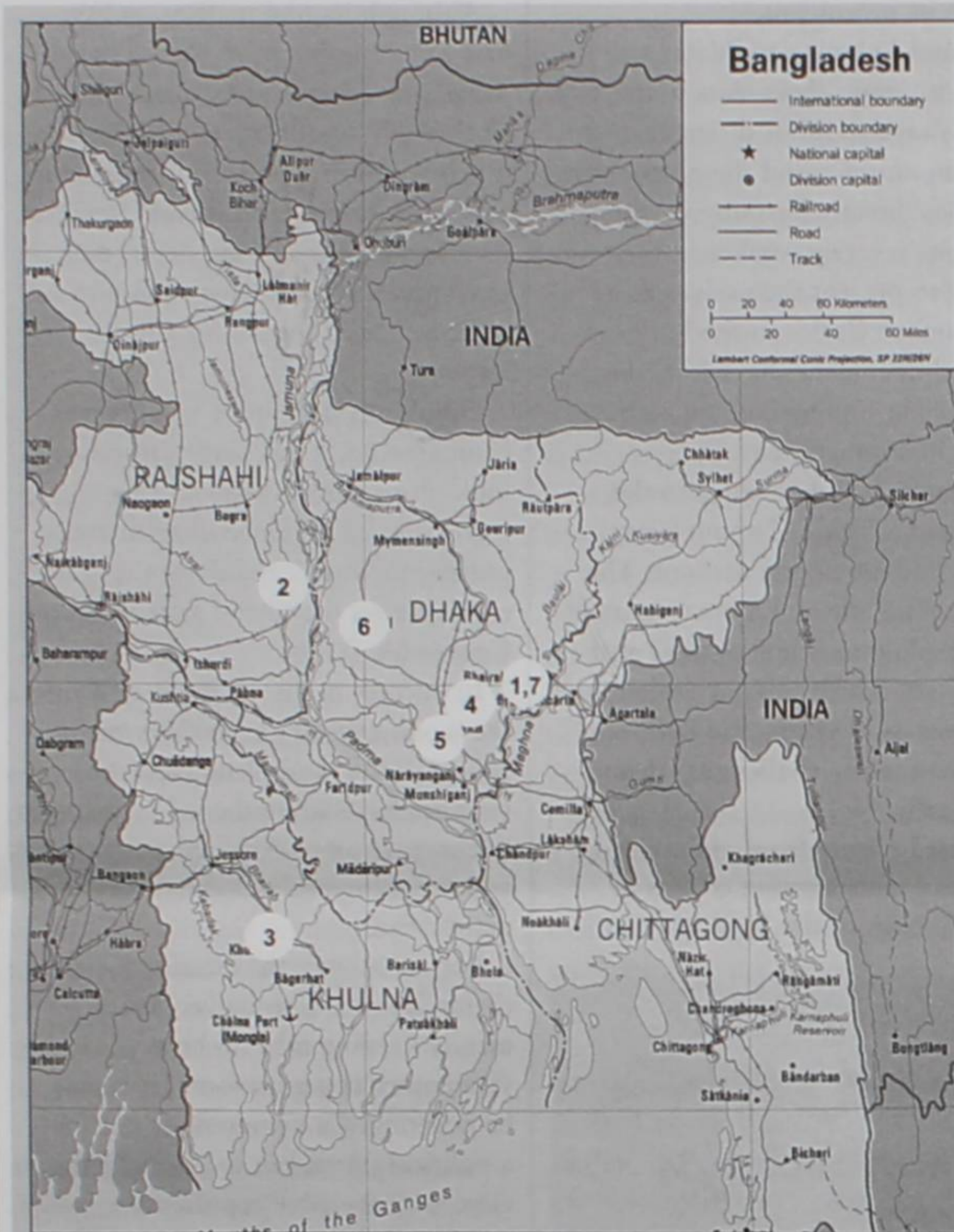
The last decade has seen a three-way battle between the government, which runs the massive Jute mills as a state-owned enterprise, international interests attempting to force privatisation of the potentially highly profitable trade, and organised labour attempting to force up wages and increase job security.

The situation is complicated by massive corruption within the sector, with state managers, union bosses and government officials skimming vast sums of money off the top.

This corruption is so problematic that although Bangladesh holds a huge and influential chunk of a guaranteed market, while paying minimal wages – usually far in arrears – it has nevertheless been haemorrhaging money. Lobbyists for international business have succeeded in turning this situation to their advantage, pushing the government into an attempted privatisation of much of the Jute mill network.

Conditions in Bangladeshi Jute mills are among the worst in the world, and of two million workers in the sector, most work for starvation wages of \$20 a month or less – under half minimum wage. There are no worker's rights. Although unionisation has been progressing since a showdown in May last year helped force the government to bring in union rights, corruption in the existing union structure continues to undermine militancy in the sector.

Of 16 unions representing garment



1. In the most recent conflict on **April 7**, some 5,000 workers and employees of the mill strike after not receiving wages for ten weeks. 10,000 workers submit a written complaint to the local army camp in protest against alleged torture and failure of the mill authorities to pay wages.

2. **March 20**: 5,000 workers are thrown out of work after the closure of the Sirajganj Quami Jute Mills, one of the largest enterprises in the region.

3. In **September 2006** 25,000 workers from eight mills in Khulna begin a two-day strike. They demand payment of wage arrears and the re-opening of closed jute mills. Hundreds are injured and at least one person killed in riots. In the north, workers at the Quami Jute Mill (2) come out on one-day strike with similar demands.

4. **May 22 2006**: Workers at Universal Garments Limited gather at the factory to demand payment of three months owed back wages. They are attacked by security staff. They call out nearby mill workers for support. By the afternoon hundreds of other factories join the strikes. Two are torched and hundreds ransacked. Eventually the clashes escalate and cops respond with bullets. \$140m damage is done and government is forced to relent, and support unionisation demands.

5. **May 2006**: in Sripur in the Gazipur district of Dhaka. 1,000 garment workers strike on behalf of arrested colleagues. Factory bosses lock them in the factory, cutting power and water supplies. Workers fight their way out, barricade the highway and fight police. One person was killed and 70 others are injured.

6. **2005**: The planned privatisation of the Satrang Textile Mill in Tongi is blocked after a fierce-fought campaign found legal issues over the land use.

7. The Adamjee Jute Mills, which employed 26,000 people at their height, are closed in **2002** after a massive pitched battle between the state owners and the labour movement.

workers, according to the Democratic Workers Party "They act more like extortionists, taking money from management to keep the employees in line while at the same time collecting dues from their members."

The much heralded major exception

to this has in recent years been the The National Garment Workers Federation, which claimed a membership of around 20,000 in 2004. The current status of the union, which briefly communicated over possible affiliation to the anarcho-syndicalist international IWA

in 2002, is unclear, but recent news has suggested the union is trying to move the industry towards a 'multi-stakeholder' approach where workers' representatives, trade unions, factory owners and the buyers negotiate over terms and conditions.

## US notes

The protests in 1999 against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle, Washington, were a turning point for many: alternative strategies for demonstrating emerged which were to be used with effect at subsequent WTO 'events'. But many were arrested that December – nearly eight years ago – in Seattle's Westlake Park.

At the beginning of April this year, the authorities in the city agreed to pay \$1 million to 160 of those good people and seal their records, officially clearing their names. Attorney Tyler Weaver said, "I am hopeful that this case will send a message not only to the City of Seattle but to cities around the country that mass arrests of peaceful, law-abiding protesters will not and cannot be tolerated." The city has already had to find \$800,000 to settle multiple claims involving police behaviour during the same events. At the same time, though, City officials made it plain that they believed they could have appealed against this

judgement but their insurers advised the settlement.

### Surveillance

Giant retailer Wal-Mart seems to be mounting a remarkably sophisticated surveillance operation on their employees, on journalists, critics and even shareholders. Bruce Gabbard (now dismissed) admitted to helping to run the 'project' which has been logging web usage and intercepting and recording phone calls and emails between employees and the press. Further, Wal-Mart infiltrated (presumably illegally) the pressure group Up Against the Wal by sending 'long-haired, hippie-looking' Wal-Mart staff to the group's meetings.

### Because they wear black

Lastly, police logs were unearthed and released this April pertaining to an incident five years ago: in 2002 a group of war protesters in a Washington DC parking garage was stopped, detained and interrogated – largely because some were wearing black, and the secret FBI

'Intelligence' Unit perceived them to be anarchists. Agents in civilian clothes isolated the detainees and questioned them about any protests they had attended, which contacts each had spent time with recently, what their political views were and the significance of their tattoos and slogans. They were instructed to reveal any such 'hidden' body decorations.

After the incident and follow up protests, local law enforcement denied that this illegal stop and search – or indeed anything like it – had ever taken place. Now, though, the protesters are suing the police with the aid of the DC-based Partnership for Civil Justice. The partnership's Mara Verheyden-Hilliard comments: "Law enforcement can't be in the business of collecting purely political information without any allegation of criminal activity and without any criminal basis. But that's exactly what's happening here and exactly what we think is happening around the country."

Louis Further

## Indymedia libels?

Two separate court cases against online newsgroup Indymedia and its supporters look set to come to a head over the next month as prosecutors in Brazil and Lille accuse them of libel.

Indymedia, which hosts collectives and individual contributors from all over the world on its servers, is being brought to trial in Brazil over an alleged defamatory image which has been altered to show Pope Benedict XVI as a Nazi and accompanied by the line "Nazi pope – happiness to all the faithful. After the anti-communist reactionary, now comes the ultra-reactionary Nazi".

The image was originally posted in Italy, and gained some notoriety when it was publicly condemned by the Catholic church, who tried and failed to use an obsolete piece of legislation against 'contempt against a minister for the Catholic faith' to shut down the website when it was established as satire (and not libellous) under Italian law.

When it was discovered the image was also hosted on a Brazilian server, the Vatican switched its efforts there and have filed a letter of request that the Brazilian superior court of justice consider prosecution.

In Lille, a former volunteer for the local Indymedia collective is to be prosecuted over an alleged defamation of the police after writing an article on police raids against immigrants at Calais in 2004.

The defendant, whose charges were brought by the leader of the CRS (Republican Company of Public Security) and by Dominique Villepin has been identified as the 'director' of Indymedia Lille and thus as the target for prosecution, despite the stated policy of Indymedia itself that it runs on a non-hierarchical basis.

Indymedia Lille have released a statement, saying: "The indymedia network is a true countervailing power to the mainstream, and it is this which the police force and judiciary want to attack."

## Feature

# The spirit of Liverpool

In this exclusive extract from the work of Dave Douglass, he looks at how 'unofficial' unionism beat employers

Events on the Liverpool waterfront in the 1870s can be seen as part of a continuing collective struggle of port labour, and also as a part of a general movement which spread across the country.

Large sections of the working class, particularly those with unions, but also those without them, felt themselves to be in a period of advance, when it would be possible to push forward their living standards.

A successful strike by dockers in Southampton or Hull for example would strike sparks of militancy in dockers all over the country and this can be readily seen. What is perhaps less easy to grasp is the fact that a victorious strike by fruit pickers in Somerset or agricultural workers in Warwick would lead totally unconnected workers in far distant regions to strike also. There was a growth of a common class identity which transcended trade. The Liverpool strikes of 1872 were but a microcosm of the developing national situation. *The Beehive*, a Trade Union paper of the period, had this to report:

"The spirit of the unionism is taking possession of all sorts of employed persons, carters, men servants and maid-servants among the rest. The 'domestics' of Dundee have set an example which is sure to spread southwards. In many respects, no doubt, a service in families is very comfortable, and it is paid wages.

"But a large portion of men servants are subjected to an endless drudgery little removed from slavery. The men servants who met at Leamington to discuss their grievances were told by their chairman that their condition is 'even worse than that of slaves'. They have formed a union to comprise of butlers and footmen, coachmen and grooms, gardeners and porters. The carters of Liverpool are on strike to the number of two thousand, for

increased wages, shorter hours and extra pay for overtime. It is calculated that the strike has put a stop to the work of five thousand dock labourers. Many of the masters are described as driving their own teams in their silk hats and kid gloves."

General unrest on the British waterfront and seaways was rife that year. In March the Hull Dock Labourers Association were the catalysts of a general strike in that port following a resolution put to the Hull steamship owners demanding an increase in wages. A short time later the seamen at the port of Southampton struck for various increases, particularly the men employed by the famous P&O line. Liverpool in May saw the simultaneous strikes of many port workers.

Four years after the upsurge of 1872, some sections of the press expressed their astonishment that workers were still going on strike. In April 1876 *The Journal Of Commerce* reported: "Yesterday morning a strike of the most unexpected character occurred in Liverpool, and unless measures of a conciliatory kind are speedily taken, it is feared that a great deal of inconvenience and annoyance will be experienced by several of the Atlantic steam-ship companies, whose vessels are advertised to leave Liverpool this week for New York and other ports."

Actually, dockers had struck in a wildcat, hence 'the unexpected character'. Dockers strikes on Liverpool's waterfront had not been, nor were they, unusual features of the port's life.

This strike was of a different nature than previous ones, however, in that it was defensive.

The owners and masters were trying to pass, as they have done before and since, the losses of a national recession in trade upon the backs of their workers, as such they had instructed the dockers that they were to receive a



Liverpool dockers at work in 1906

reduction in wages. On the 1st April a placard was posted very prominently along the docks to the effect that on and after Monday 3rd April, the hours worked for stevedores, dock porters and quay men would be from seven o'clock in the morning until six in the evening, and on Saturdays from seven until five; instead of hitherto from seven until five and on Saturdays from seven until four.

This was in essence an attempt by the masters to take the workers back to the pre-1866 conditions of labour. A 4pm finish on a Saturday had been a crucial part of the demands of '66. The men for their part were not prepared to return to the conditions of the past and the day the masters' placards went up, so did the notices for several meetings that night.

The dockers unanimously decided to strike on Monday unless the notices had been taken down by the same people who had put them up. Work was entirely suspended at the vessels belonging to the White Star Company, The National Company, Guion Company, The Cunard Company, Burns and MacIver, The Dominion Company, Richardson Spence and Co, Allen Bros. and Co, The Inman Company, and several of the Mediterranean Lines including Messrs F Leyland and Co, and the South American Steamship Companies. The whole of the men who were employed by Messrs Durant and Mack, master porters and stevedores numbering 1,300 men struck right away.

Many of the placards had been torn down in anger and as such quite a few of the men turned up in ignorance of the reduction. As soon as they got to know however they struck immediately. In the neighbourhood of the Wellington Dock, something like

1,400 congregated refusing to go in on the new terms. It was rumoured that the move had been initiated by the arch 'militants' among the masters Messrs Durant and Mack, although they denied it and issued a £20 reward to whoever could track down the people who first started blaming them for it.

The day after a fire broke out on the steamship *Andean*, a vessel belonging to the West India and Pacific Steamship Company. She had been inward bound from Port-au-Prince laded with cotton. The *Liverpool Mail* reported "No clue has been discovered as to the origins of the fire. The hold of the steamer had been closed since Saturday last and none of the cargo has been disturbed."

Meetings were held on the Saturday at which it was decided unanimously by stevedores, porters and quay porters not to work at the proposed hours. The local press were confident, and said so,

that the depressed state of shipping and employment must render the masters victorious. However The press was meekly to announce on the 5th that Messrs Burns and Mac Iver returned to the old conditions and the men accordingly returned to work.

As soon as the strike had started Mr Harver the proprietor of a public house right opposite the gates of the Bramley-Moor Dock posted the following notice in his window: "Notice - Men that are on strike and that have used this establishment during the last six months as customers can have their pint of ale and bread and cheese free every day from twelve to one. - G Harver."

On the Monday and Tuesday hundreds of his customers were served as promised free of cost.

Posters containing the new hours had been posted on all docks; by the 6th all of these bills had been removed, much to the blushes of the press. The men subsequently resumed work at the previous hours, all increases in work load having been withdrawn. Finally when further placards went up withdrawing the earlier changes the men could claim a total victory to their action.

The victory of the dockers of 1876 is a clear demonstration of the way in which large groups of workers are capable of moving in a common direction even without the benefit of formal co-ordination. The reduction notices had been served at the North End only, here no union organisation existed. The employers thought they were hitting the weakest link and starting a chain of reduction right through the docks. The men were certainly without the benefit of a union no matter how loosely one uses the term, they were not however disunited, their labour and society was their 'union'. The common assault served to weld the men into a close knit 'association' of common interest. When they struck they did so in an 'affinative' manner rather than an organised way.

This affinative bond however was equal to the strength of the employers, coupled as it had been with the immediacy of the 'wildcat'. The employers may have gambled that the impact of the changes would take time to sink in, that the lack of organisation, etc. would give them time to get their ships away before unrest manifested itself, however the swiftness and directness of the men's response caught the masters and owners off guard and all shipping in the port became at once stranded.



Police mobilising during the docks strike in July 1912

# Commentary

## FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 08

### 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

Another year, another Mayday comes around, and it's a good time to look back and remember our forebears.

Freedom Press was founded in the same year as the Haymarket riots, and can boast one of the proudest pedigrees of any anarchist (or even leftist, for that matter) organisation in the world.

The paper has hosted or launched some of the greats of libertarian theory and practice across the UK and the world. Founder Charlotte Wilson, Peter Kropotkin the historical big beast of anarchist-communism, Ethel Macdonald the celebrated chronicler of the Spanish Civil War, publishing giant and agitator Guy Aldred, Vernon Richards, the internationally respected Colin Ward, US class struggle titan Murray Bookchin, and of course Noam Chomsky have all put pen to paper for the Press.

More recently celebrated anti-prison campaigner Mark Barnsley, Dave 'the Red' Douglass, the McLibel two, anti-war campaigner Milan Rai, and Iain Mackay (driving force of the anarchist FAQ) have contributed, as we continue to journey with the movement through its many rebirths and struggles.

It's a record of which we can be very proud.

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### Next issue

The next issue will be dated 5th May 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 26th April. Send articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

### IWA corrections

I would like to correct a couple of misapprehensions in the article on '1,000 revolutionary songs in your pocket' (page 4 of Freedom, 24th March 2007). It is not true or fair to say that the IWA has 'outlawed' the CNT-Vignoles of France. The IWA neither has the power or the wish to illegalise any union. That there are tensions between the Vignoles and the IWA is evident. In part this stems for their (until recent) continued use of the IWA name as if they were still part of the International.

The article also talks of "other expelled IWA sections". What precisely are these? Maybe the article intimates the SAC of Sweden. The SAC was not expelled from the IWA – it left of its own accord given the serious differences in strategy that had grown up. Maybe the article is hinting at the Spanish CGT? The CGT, as it became after losing the battle to usurp the CNT's name in a manufactured split in the late 1970s, was never a part of the IWA.

The article itself seems to hint that the IWA is somehow a miserly or sectarian organisation. On the contrary, it has learnt that it is necessary to defend itself against people and organisations that seek to use the name of the IWA or of its member sections to advance their own political and union strategies that are not in concert with IWA aims: the construction of a revolutionary anarchosyndicalist movement that has direct action as its *modus operandi* and libertarian communism as its goal.

In solidarity,

Richard Cleminson  
International Secretary, SF-IWA

*Author's note: Thanks for the correction Richard, sorry if the article sounded that way it certainly wasn't meant to – mainly a victim of trying to find new ways to describe old stories I think.*

*Having said this, I don't think outlawed is too strong a word to use if a group has been declared an 'enemy of the IWA'. It may not be in a strictly state legislative sense (as if an anarcho-syndicalist international would need such a formality) but other groups have been strongly warned against even talking to them.*

*If we were being picky of course, the absolute literal term 'outlawed' could be correct, as Vignoles have been placed outside the scope of the IWA's membership/terms and conditions and are barred from returning in their current form.*

*The other one I was thinking of*

*was indeed the CGT in Spain. Okay it was a split rather than a direct expulsion but as it was decided by Congress to welcome the CNT as opposed to the CGT, again the meaning isn't exactly far off the mark.*

*And of course while the SAC technically left, I don't think anyone's under any illusion that expulsion wouldn't have followed had they simply stayed.*

*The ins and outs can be argued (and no doubt will be in years to come), but to clarify, I don't think the IWA is sectarian in itself (members and affiliates are sometimes a different matter!). When its terms and conditions are broken there seem to be ample investigations, votes etc, and while 'strict' I think can be applied on occasion, that's not necessarily a bad thing.*

### Shameful NATO secrets

Three issues of your paper arrived today, for which thanks. I fear the 10th February quiz is over-complimentary to the movement on the question of attitudes to NATO. One of your correspondents does mention how anarchist kibbutzim went pro-NATO.

Gaston Laval supported NATO as did Augustin Souchy; the 'Free Society of Chicago' (a group of mainly anarchist exiles in the USA, whose numbers embraced some very major figures in anarchist history) brought out a symposium pamphlet in the early fifties, most of whose authors came down in favour of NATO, albeit reluctantly.

*Partisan Review* which briefly turned from Trotskyism to anarchism, then moved to support for NATO though many of its writers later though better of it and were major opponents of the Vietnam war.

Dwight Macdonald broke from these latter, opposing NATO, and launched *Politics* as an anarchist journal, but he eventually succumbed.

When the CIA-sponsored *Congress for Cultural Freedom* was launched, its first issues contained articles from Rosmer, Herbert Read and Isiah Berlin (which last remained pro-NATO, even during the Vietnam War).

The SAC (Swedish anarcho-syndicalist union) – which, contrary to your article on it (page 5, *Freedom* 24th February), broke with the AIT in the early '50s – was seen as pro-NATO (two break-away factions left it because of this) though this was never confirmed by vote.

Bertrand Russell was generally classed as an anarchist sympathiser, and (though he obviously changed

later) he supported NATO: as did Middleton Murray (previously on the communitarian anarcho-pacifist wing of the ILP).

George Plume (who had during the war edited *Solidarity*, and had been the only leftist anti-militarist tried for treason, not just subversion at the end of the war) supported NATO and joined the Tories, as also – however much he subsequently denied it – did (ex-*Black Flag* editor) Meltzer.

No doubt there were many others such. A few, such as David Prude, reacted so far the other way that they became apologists for Stalinism.

No doubt we would rather pull a veil over this part of our history (just as it is uncomfortable remembering that Kropotkin supported the First World War, as did the former editors of the *Torch*) but doing so would hardly be an anarchist action.

Laurens Otter

### Dealing with debt

With £1,300,000,000,000 of consumer debt in the UK, before Christmas, and with the January sales on top there's plenty more stuff for us to buy with so called 'interest free credit' to help us get what we want straight away.

Overdrafts, bank loans and credit cards are keeping the world economy bouncing along. The plasma telly might cost a grand, but if you chuck it on the plastic it's yours right away (at no extra cost, of course). And how much unsolicited post have you thrown away (well, recycled) offering you instant access to consumerist heaven with an unsecured personal loan? Everyone from Tesco's, the RAC, and millions of families are using credit just to keep above the breadline.

Surrounded by multi-million pound advertising campaigns using the latest psychological gimmickry to persuade you to keep them cash registers ringing, no wonder so many people find themselves out of their depth. Personal lending is one of the few aspects of banks' financial behaviour that isn't rigorously controlled by law – instead it's governed by a voluntary code of conduct. Banks and other loan sharks activity chase those with a history of not being able to handle their finances. Lower down the food chain some lending organisations trawl through a court listings looking for those on the receiving end of county court judgements to make generous offers of the 'turn all your little problems into one big problem' variety.

The 'Home Credit' industry is booming and no wonder – it typically charges its unemployed borrowers interest rates of more than 400%!

Loan sharks like Brighthouse and Prudential are expanding across Europe. Those making the cash are the usual suspects based in London's boardrooms. The 'debt sale and purchase' market in the UK has been mushrooming, as financial institutions buy up banks' debts for a fraction of their value to then hassle the hell out of the debtors to pay up. Around £4.5 billion worth of debt has been sold for a cut price £300 million, and so far collectors have squeezed almost £.500 million out of people in debt. Nice little earner!

Barclays are the real financial

muscle behind companies like Cabot, who hosted a 'debt collections conference' recently jointly organized with industry rag, *Credit Today*, the conference had workshops like; 'What every debt collections manager wants for Christmas'. Meanwhile possible new powers for bailiffs to enter houses will make 'debt recovery' that much easier and profits that much bigger.

The amount of consumer debt! in the UK would be enough to buy you 236 years of food for the world's starving children or keep the Iraq war going for 23 years. Ethical consumption and Fairer Trade are increasingly being used to justify continued guilt-free consumption, so hey why not stick those hemp trousers on your Greenpeace credit card? But Fair Trade is becoming more about big business than small producers: Now, even Nestlé is moving in on the fair trade game, L'Oreal have bought the Body Shop and Bono Ltd. launched the 'Product RED' credit card last year (build up your own debt white they give a penny a time to Africa).

We need to support each other. What is needed is a fight back against the debt profiteers. We need a mass non-payment campaign like the one that defeated the poll tax. We need neighbours to help defend each other from bailiffs and debt collectors. It's not going to be easy but we need to start somewhere.

Phone us on 0845 223570 (local rate) or email [debt@haringey.org.uk](mailto:debt@haringey.org.uk)

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### Mayday

➔ page 1

in the crowd, killing police and demonstrators, eight anarchists were arrested and brought to the dock in what became one of the most infamous show-trials in the history of organised labour.

No evidence was given, but Spies, Parsons, Fischer and Engel were nevertheless found guilty and hanged. Linn killed himself in his cell while Schwab, Fielden and Neebe were subsequently pardoned

### Quiz answers

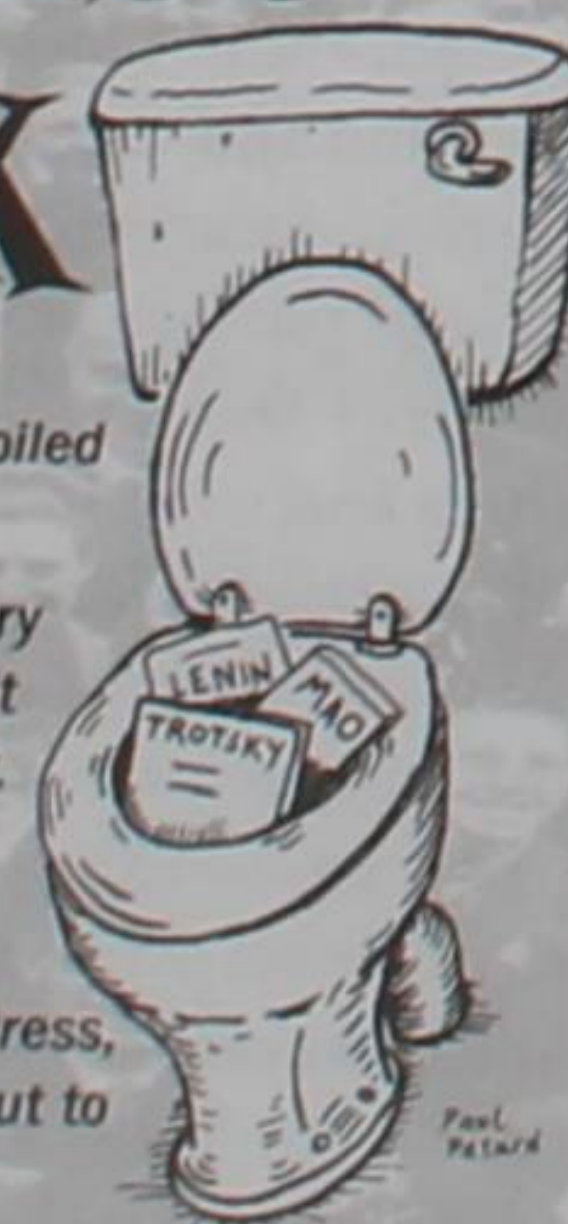
1. He threw dollar bills on to the trading floor, leading to a melee as everyone scrambled for the money.
2. From the protestation, or declaration, made by Martin Luther and his followers against a decree of the Diet of Spire of the Holy Roman Empire in 1529. The decree affirmed the Diet of Worms earlier resolution against the Reformation.
3. The Army. Probably saved a lot of money as it couldn't have beaten the only feasible external aggressor.
4. Abortion, though the gains in Catalonia were soon rolled back with the victory of the ultra-Catholic Franco in 1939.

## The Anarchist Quiz Book

Who said "I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet"? Find out in the new *Anarchist Quiz Book* from Freedom Press, compiled by Martin Howard and illustrated by Paul Petard.

Some say that it should not be the highest priority of a revolutionary movement to ask itself obscure questions, but it's good fun and if it encourages an enquiring mind to find out more, than all the better. So agitate, educate and organise, all in this very handy question and answer format!

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# REVIEW

## Babel, though a mainstream flick, attempts a subtlety rarely seen in the cinema we know and love, says Tom Jennings

**T**his third collaboration with writer Guillermo Arriaga concludes Alejandro González Iñárritu's depiction of contemporary collisions of fate, upping the stakes from class divisions in Mexico City (*Amores Perros*, 2000) and suburban US ruminations on the meaning and value of existence (*21 Grams*, 2003) to *Babel's* worldwide web of violent correlation.

Here a Berber peasant family are framed as terrorists when an American tourist is accidentally wounded, derailing her husband's attempt to salve their unhappiness, while back home their two kids and illegal nanny fall foul of border police after attending a Tijuana wedding. Interspersed with these escalating disasters, a well-off Tokyo deaf-mute juggles frustrated teenage sexuality, grief at her mother's suicide and the neglectfulness of her father – whose generosity, it transpires, originally set the story in motion. Drawn in by acute cinematography and sympathetic performances, the deft manipulation of narrative fragments and jumbled time-lines prompts the viewer to ponder contrasting worldviews and life-chances.

### A world within ear shot

These diverse melodramas across the planet are woven with the pointed

McGuffin of power from the barrel of a gun; common threads being desires and conflicts associated with love and family. Then, disparities of wealth and mobility massively influence both the scale of fulfilment that can realistically be sought and the consequences of mistakes and misfortunes. So, when a subsistence lifestyle encounters modern Third World realpolitik, embryonic imaginings of a fuller, safer future are stillborn.

Meanwhile, the neo-colonial service economy vampirises its serfs in a callous class apartheid; whereas the relatively affluent are blind to the human costs of what they take for granted. Insulated by consumerism, their self-obsession allows them neither to connect meaningfully with each other nor avoid trampling over the less fortunate upon whom their comfort depends.

However, the miscommunication hinted in the biblical title flows not from faulty translation between cultures or linguistic systems, but the contradictions of underlying social and political subtexts – the conceptual frameworks shaping our understanding and action. Events hinge on the characters' negotiations of the corresponding institutional discourses which regulate lives and constrain potential, yielding misery for rich and poor alike – the texture of which varies considerably, with outcomes



more tragic for those whose interests are marginalised most.

*Babel* may be scarcely able to capture the deep structures of power radiating globally through social

fabrics, but such ambition is rare in a mainstream cinema preferring simplistic conspiracies and cartoonish heroics.

It's also much subtler than the fluffy

liberal marketing hype suggests – though the latter hoodwinked the critics who, in seeing only pretension, merely confirmed their own.

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

## MAGAZINES

Two new issues of long-running anarchist magazines have appeared recently.

### Direct Action

#38 (Spring 2007), £1.50

Very much a return to basics (and form) for the magazine of the Solidarity Federation. The mag has been given a redesign and the articles are more focused on SolFed's core

issues. Passing swiftly over the lead article, there are items on casualisation, the National Health Service (including a very useful piece on what Foundation Trusts are and what they mean for the future of the health service,) and Tesco's.

The International aspect is covered with articles on workers struggles in Iraq, contemporary Spain, Argentina and Oaxaca in Mexico. There's a

review of Seidman's book on the CNT in Spain, a basic critique of capitalism and 'multi-culturalism'.

### Total Liberty

v5/4 (Spring/Summer 2007), £1.00

Billed as a journal of evolutionary anarchism, this is very much a magazine devoted to the 'idea' of anarchism as opposed to the 'active

movement'. Many of the authors in the mag will be familiar to readers of *Freedom*. Brian Morris contributes a piece on 'Islam and Anarchism' (which is actually a review of v14/1 of *Anarchist Studies*), Richard Griffin writes on 'Rights and Wrongs' and some older readers may remember Colin Johnson, who has an item advocating a positive definition of anarchism.

There's also a book review of Harold Barclay's autobiography, Jonathan Simcock on language, Patrick Cullen on student radicalism in London (or the lack of), Dick Frost on myth and a couple of other pieces.

Whatever your personal take on anarchism, both these publications will have something that should stimulate both thought and action.

Richard Alexander

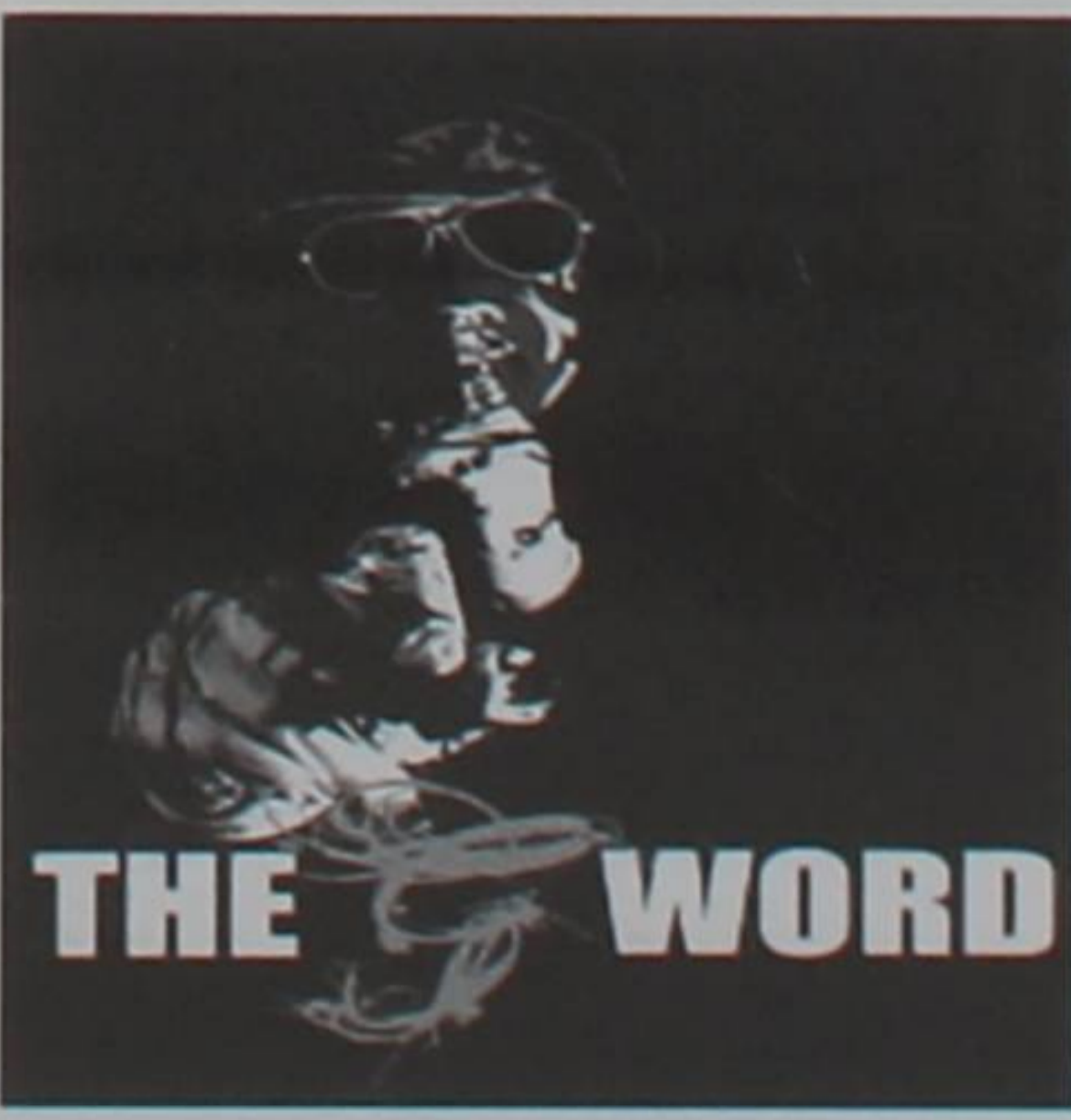
## ART

### The 'G' Word

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead

Postscripting the disappointing Spank The Monkey international street art and design extravaganza (see *Freedom*, 16th December 2006), thirteen local graffitiists filled one floor of the Baltic for ten days with massive wall pieces, a thumping soundtrack, and a large van in the middle submerged in aerosol bodywork. Encompassing many popular styles, most were based on conventional building blocks – expanding and exploding graphic signatures (tags) to transcend the grey desolation of urban environments and experience with vibrant spraypaint dreamscapes, sexualised cartoon

fantasies, and generally inventively troubling renunciations of the domesticated surfaces of institutions and egos. This 360-degree in-your-face sensory riot of colour and shape urged emotional immersion, making no



concessions to 'white cube' architecture's clinical bleaching out of passion in rarefied distance from the fragmented packaging of sanitised art.

### Bombing Babylon

These artists typically commit surreptitious 'mindless vandalism' rather than having everything laid on – and with several actively sought by the law for their exploits, the arms-length New Line Graffiti conferred anonymity. This pragmatic necessity allowed several conventional artworld pomposities to be pleasingly traduced. The traditional 'private view' opening barred the usual worthy suspects in favour of a piss-up for artists, friends and families – who in turn comprehensively tagged the entrance. Having ascribed authorship to

social networks rather than individual creative genius, the collective nature of the work was further emphasised by a speeded-up video projection in a side room showing its convivial accomplishment. Despite the legendary competitiveness of the scene, the crucial role of successive overlayings of rival tags as substrate and embellishment also makes explicit the sedimented history of sites and emphasises the ongoing rebellion of daring to claim expressive space.

Most of The 'G' Word contributors simulated a dirty, flaking, crumbling background for the monstrous beauty of their creations, suggesting that this was an exhibition about graffiti rather than the 'real' thing. But then it has no proper context, specifically perverting

'official' contours of geography, ownership and activity. Whereas illegal graffiti is only anti-social if the obscenities of modern capitalism represent an otherwise healthy urban garden sullied by such artistic weeds – and its subject matter routinely asserts otherwise, as in Zee TTK rendering the Tyneside skyline as simultaneously alien, exotic and toxic, or Inch adding architectural features to make sense of a dysfunctional gallery surface. So while bureaucrats and politicians inevitably bleat about providing opportunities for safe, legal locations for inoffensive muralism, the passionate determination and painstaking skill demonstrated here originated and developed precisely beyond the pale of polite society.

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

# A Sideways Look

Hooray for Defence Minister Des Brown! I hope he keeps his job. In poll after poll, people here are asked which institution they trust. The military comes out at or near the top nearly all the time, with politicians and political institutions usually near the bottom. While I'm happy with the politicians being on a par with estate agents and lawyers (which they often are as well) I'd like to see the armed forces a bit less popular.

It's not hard to work out why they are popular – compared to most things the government are involved in, the military does what it sets out to. Despite some of its members' dalliances in coup plotting in the '70s, it's generally seen as above politics. Since conscription was abolished, it has relied on a mixture of volunteers and economic conscripts, ensuring a more professional approach than many other countries' military. If you ask foreign commentators about what is admirable about Britain, many will say the armed forces, though of course we should remember that such commentators are often starting from a reactionary viewpoint.

So, it does make you wonder whether there is some sort of subversive in charge of the Royal Navy's press relations. It is unheard of for serving members of the armed forces to sell their stories to the press. Why did the Second Lord of the Admiralty, or whatever Ruritanian rank it was, decide to allow the former hostages to sell their stories. Of course, they'd been traumatised by the experience, though not as traumatised as many others connected to the imperial adventure in Iraq. It must have been particularly galling for families of the soldiers and medics killed the day that the sailors and marines were released. Not a lot of takers in Fleet Street for stories from Iraqi victims of the violence, either. And try getting a hearing for the British residents imprisoned in Guantánamo.

The point of the sailors selling their stories is not that they shouldn't have had something for them, but the effect it will have on the way that the army operates. Unlike many commentators who approach this from the view of how bad the effect on morale will be, I can only applaud the effect. It will result in a slight breakdown of respect for the institutions that make up the armed forces. If that means they are a less effective fighting force, however marginal, it means that there will be less likelihood of them being used in future wars. This might be quite a marginal gain, but hey, at least it's a few less dead civilians in the next politician's *Boy's Own* adventure. It may also discourage some people from joining up – if their comrades are more concerned with marketing their experiences than covering each others' backs, it makes the whole exercise a lot more dangerous. Unfortunately, this is a double-edged sword – perhaps many people will be more attracted by

the opportunity to cash in on any potential trauma. (Maybe this is the real Machiavellian reason behind the sale of the stories.)

The Iranians must have been jumping, for joy – they release the hostages and undermine their potential enemies all in one go! But as an anarchist, I can't help but smile at the state shooting itself in the foot in such an obvious way.

Svartfrosk

## Bookworm notes

Unlike, say, Marxism, anarchism has no 'founding father'. This is one of its great strengths. True enough, there are great anarchist writers – Bakunin, Kropotkin, Emma Goldman. Their genius is not in their originality, although they can be that, too. Instead, it's in their ability to reflect on the struggle of working class people to free themselves from the twin yokes of capital and the State, and show that this can only happen when working people act for themselves.

A classic introduction to anarchism that stresses throughout the role of the working class in their own liberation is Rudolph Rocker's *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*. This pamphlet is a shorter version of Rocker's *Anarcho-syndicalism*, and was written in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. As well as offering a survey of the thought of the famous men with beards, Rocker is keen to stress that anarcho-syndicalism is a movement born of struggle, out of the coming together of anarchism and revolutionary tendencies in the labour movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Far from being a work of history, however, Rocker's pamphlet still speaks to us today. To those who would place their faith in politicians of any shade, Rocker insists that to do so robs "the people of their initiative by giving them the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above." As anarchists, we might think we know this. But we know a lot more people who don't. Pamphlets like this are a way of brushing up our arguments so we might be able to go about persuading a few of them.

Bookworm

Rudolf Rocker's *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism* is available for £3 (post free) from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

## The quiz

1. How did Abbie Hoffman disrupt the American Stock Exchange?
2. Where do Protestants come from?
3. What was abolished in Costa Rica in 1948?
4. What was legalised in the Soviet Union in 1920, Iceland in 1935 and Catalonia in 1936?

Answers on page 6



From Donald Room's Wildcat ABC of Bosses (Freedom Press, £3 post free)

## Imagine if...

Saint Bob sat opposite Saint Al and glowered.

"So, not content with stealing the ball from the greens, you want to take my big concert idea as well!"

The big American, running slightly to seed but still with a marvellous head of hair that the lank-maned Irishman could only envy, shrugged. "This is the future of the planet, Barb, who could possibly complain about that?"

"I can!" Bob spat, his rubbery features creasing up in anger. "How am I supposed to save the Africans with big concerts if you're doing them as well?"

"Africans schmafricans, Barb, move with the times. I thought you'd sorted it all out in 2005 anyway. Remember Barb? Live 8? Wasn't that supposed to Make Poverty History or something?"

Bob looked shifty for a few moments, but rallied "And what about you? Carbon offsetting to 'make up' for all the ecological damage this seven-continent concert is doing? Sure you're paying for the artists to fly out with a few trees but hundreds of thousands driving, flying to the concerts doesn't come with a cheap carbon sole, Al."

Al went a bit pink. "We're raising awareness!"

Bob laughed "Yeah of your ego. Come off it Al, who doesn't know about it except the Yankees these days?"

"Fuck of Barb, just fuck off, you've had your limelight, it's my turn!" As the bickering subsided, they went back to glaring at each other.



## Listings

26th April Blockade of Faslane to commemorate Chernobyl Day, for info see faslane365.org

28th April to 1st May i07 conference in Paris, details at cnt-f.org.

28th April London Anarchist Forum review Sonia Johnson and Jade DeForest's book *Out of This World* followed by a discussion of the sado-masochism of everyday life, 3pm at the Rampart Centre, 15 Rampart Street, London E1, for more see eventsandissues.bravehost.com

1st May London May Day demonstration, assemble Clerkenwell Green, EC1 at 12 noon, to move off at 1pm to Trafalgar Square for rally.

1st May Space Hijackers May Day protest, Suited and Booted – advance warning of a party right in the heart of the corporate financial centres of London, bring concealed instruments and radios, drinks, cakes and smiles to share, spread the word and get an outfit sorted (a city worker disguise) for more details see spacehijackers.org

1st to 3rd May Anarchist bookfair in Poznan, Poland, at the Rozbrat squat, see http://biblioteka-poznanska.bzzz.net or www.rozbrat.org

11th to 13th May SchNEWS Alternative Media Conference, a coming together of independent media with discussions, screenings, stalls, practical workshops, plus the obligatory messy party on the Saturday night, at the Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton, see schnews.org

12th May Southampton Cruelty Free Festival, with an emphasis on fair trade, organic and sweatshop-free items, from 11am to 6pm at Southampton Guildhall, for details email info@sarconline.co.uk or see crueltyfreefestival.com

18th May Save Titnore Woods benefit to raise funds for the protest camp and campaign near Worthing to stop a

shopping and housing development on woodland, from 7pm to 11pm at The Rooms, Western Road, St Leonards, one minute from Warrior Square station, email squirrybottles@yahoo.co.uk or see protectourwoodland.co.uk for info

18th to 20th May Projectile, a festival of anarchist film, culture and ideas at Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, see projectile.org.uk for details

18th to 20th May rampART Social Centre's third birthday, at 15 Rampart Street, London E1, for details of events see http://rampart.co.uk

2nd June Strawberry Fair, free festival at Midsummer Common, Cambridge, see strawberry-fair.org.uk

6th to 8th June G8 Summit at Heiligendamm on the north coast of Germany near Rostock, for more see wombles.org.uk/article200609109.php

14th to 21st July Camp for Climate Action – after the success of last year's at the Drax Power Station, this summer the camp will take place near to a target relating to aviation or the coal or oil industries (to be disclosed over the next few months), for info see climatecamp.org.uk



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