

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

19 MAY 2007

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THE COST OF CORRUPTION

In the latest twist to the ongoing BAE systems scandal, Saudi chiefs have put their upcoming multi-billion pound armaments deal with BAE systems on hold while waiting to see if the arms giant will survive a series of corruption allegations.

Over the last couple of years, the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) has been running a major inquiry into BAE Systems' dealings with such countries as varied as Chile, Romania, the Czech Republic, South Africa, Tanzania and Saudi Arabia.

At least it was probing Saudi Arabia, until the inquiry into that country's dealings with BAE Systems was mysteriously shut down.

The official reason for this is that to proceed against Saudi Arabia is "not in the national interest". This bears little examination in the light of press reports and may well be in contravention of the OECD's Anti-Bribery Convention of 1997. Possible unofficial reasons for closing down the inquiry are that the Saudis had threatened to pull out of a major deal to buy BAE's new Eurofighter and to suspend diplomatic relations and co-operation in matters of national security.

The timing of the closure is suspicious, to put it mildly. According to a one report, investigators were about to gain access to secret papers implicating the Saudi royal family in a bribery scandal. Then, by a curious coincidence, the inquiry into the Saudi arms deals was closed down.

The OECD's Anti-Bribery Convention states specifically that economic or diplomatic concerns are not to be taken into consideration when investigating corruption. Nor is the identity or alleged identity of those involved to be considered when deciding whether to close such an investigation.

It has emerged that pressure on the supposedly 'independent' head of the SFO to drop the Saudi inquiry came from the very highest level. Tony Blair is reported to have intervened on no less than three occasions, Des Browne, Margaret Beckett and the CEO of Rolls Royce, Sir John Rose, are also reported to have put pressure on the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, to close the inquiry before it could proceed further. In fact, the head of the SFO is reported to have been urged on no less than seven occasions to drop the case against the Saudis, which he eventually did.

The focus of the inquiry will now shift to the other countries implicated in the case, including Chile, Romania, the Czech republic, South Africa and Tanzania. Followers of the arms trade will remember that Tanzania was the country that bought a state-of-the-art military air traffic control system while having difficulty feeding its own people, and it is this deal made again with BAE Systems, that is apparently under investigation.

But official pressure is not the only means by which those with a vested



INTERNATIONAL: The Mayday march following the i07 anarcho-syndicalist conference saw around 2,000 people attend from around the world, dominating the Paris worker's day. Some confusion reigned early on, as a Stalinist group attempted to muscle in front of the syndicalists, who were under the banner of i07 organisers CNT Vignoles. Traditionally, unions march first in Paris, followed by political groups – the Stalinists at first refused to recognise Vignoles' union status.

interest have been trying to stifle action on this case. According to a report in the *Independent*, detectives have alleged that they were being bugged,

as highly confidential information on the case was finding its way into the hands of 'outside parties'. BAE Systems have also been caught spying on the

Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) on no less than two separate occasions. Paul Mercer, a friend of

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CLIMATE CHANGE HEALTH SECRETARIAT BEGINS

First the good news – global warming means in the future we won't be getting so many colds. Now for the bad news – while we won't be sneezing quite so much, the health risks associated with climate change are almost biblical in proportion. In the near future there will be increasing deaths during heat waves, sudden downpours will cause flash flooding, there will be more food-borne diseases and greater incidents of skin cancer. There is even the possibility of malaria appearing in the UK.

These alarming predictions do not come from green groups but from a report published in May by the Department of Health (DH). "Climate change probably represents the largest health threat of

the millennium," says Howard Frumkin director of the US-based Disease Control and Prevention Unit. While Diarmid Campbell of the WHO says "health is moving to the centre of the climate change debate".

Research by the Australian National University estimates that since 1970 global warming has already caused some 5.5 million deaths worldwide through heatwaves, floods, storms, fires and droughts. Europe's heatwave two years ago alone resulted in some 35,000 deaths.

Britain is not immune from this. The DH report, called *The Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK*, predicts that by 2012 it is possible that the southeast will experience a severe heatwave causing over 6,000 deaths. General health problems resulting from rising temperatures range from respiratory diseases caused by increased ozone to the spread of infectious diseases. Every 1% rise in temperature increases causes of salmonella by between 5% and 10%, increasing pressure on the NHS. The DH state that "climate change is

perhaps the most significant environmental problem which mankind will face in the coming century". The UK government predicts that temperatures could increase by 2.5-3°C, although others have argued that these are conservative predictions. Even to 'achieve' a 3° increase will require a 60% reduction in carbon emissions according to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and then, as the *New Scientist* magazine has pointed out, we will still "condemn hundreds of millions of people to water shortages ... vulnerable to coastal flooding and put about 30% of our species at risk".

Like all the problems capitalism causes, the health risks associated with climate change will not be faced equally. The poorest countries will suffer far more than the richest, though they contribute little to carbon emissions (Britain, with 1% of the world population, emits 2% of emissions). Climate change is not just an environmental issue and as ever it is the poorest who will suffer the most.

Richard Griffin

The new secretariat of international anarcho-syndicalist union the IWA has officially begun its tenure following months of delay.

Based in Serbia, the ASI-MUR group took over from the Oslo secretariat in January this year but was slowed initially by its active involvement in mass student protests across the country, where it helped instigate university occupations against tuition fees, along with delays in transfer of the IWA archives.

The new secretariat has announced a series of goals for its term in office, including improving access to information and communication technology across all sections of the international, and the creation of an online database so members can work more closely together.

In a circular to all IWA sections, the Secretariat said: "Strengthening of communicational and administrative infrastructure is what we see as one of the most important tasks of this Secretariat. That, among other things, means

easy accessibility to all documents of the International."

While the secretariat has now caught up on a backlog of communications to send out, a request has been made to members of the IWA asking for English/Spanish translators for its internal documentation.

Among early issues the new secretariat has faced has seen a planned trip to observe the All Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions in March cancelled as new legislation was brought in banning their attendance.

Revelations around the Oaxaca uprising in January, in which allegations surfaced that a front group, CIPO RFM, was attempting to act as an IWA friend in the region to solicit money also raised its head as the new secretariat was finding its feet.

The secretariat has now established relations with various other anarchist internationals, including the IWW and the IAF, and with all IWA sections. Contact: General Secretary – Ratibor Trivunac email: secretariado@iwa-ait.org

ISSN 0016-0504



Vol 68 No 10

Home and away

Jailed for leak

A civil servant has been jailed for six months after leaking a secret memo allegedly detailing a conversation between George W. Bush and Tony Blair over whether to bomb the Al Jazeera media group.

The trial, much of which was held in secret under the Official Secrets Act and was censored from the public, saw David Keogh, a Cabinet Office communications officer, and Leo O'Connor, a researcher for anti-war Labour MP Anthony Clarke. Imprisoned earlier this month.

Trial Judge Mr Justice Aikens said Keogh's "reckless and irresponsible" actions could have cost British lives.

Hiding ID

Under cover of Tony Blair's resignation speech, the Home Office have released new figures showing a £640million rise in the projected cost of ID cards over the last six months.

The Home Office, soon to split into two departments, have been accused of attempting to bury bad news as it admitted the cost of an individual ID card would now equate to £105 per person.

The public will have no option but to pay the fee once the cards are issued alongside passports.

Ministers had a legal duty to update Parliament on the price of the scheme at the end of March. Instead, they waited more than a month to slip out the details at the same time as the Prime Minister – the project's chief supporter – was announcing when he would leave office.

The report, placed on the Home Office website, increases the ten-year cost of the scheme from £4.91 billion to £5.55 billion.

Officials blamed the rise on staffing costs and inflation.

No gains for BNP

After a much headlined one seat gain for the BNP at the May district elections, despite the fielding of over twice as many candidates as ever before, the number has now dropped back down to 49 after the defection of a councillor in Stoke-on-Trent.

Mark Leat is now listed as an independent candidate in the city having seemingly disassociated himself from the party.

Antifascist campaigners have welcomed the failure of the BNP to translate far greater expenditure into seat-winning votes, but have warned a high number of second and third places in districts around the country mean pressure should be kept up.

Hunger strike

On Tuesday 8th May 2007, barely five days after a hunger strike by the women at Yarl's Wood gaol, in Bedfordshire, another hunger strike began at about 11am. According to detainees held inside the prison, over a hundred people, including children, are refusing food. The detainees are refusing to enter their rooms and are staying out in the gardens.

Their protest is against the conditions of the detention: "we are not criminals, we have not killed anybody, yet we are being held here ... this place is a prison really ... the kids are scared of the police when they come in ... no one can sleep, we are all stressed..." said one of the detainees.

Only last December there was another hunger strike at Yarl's Wood.

Around the world

ARGENTINA: Municipal workers in Río Gallegos, capital city of Santa Cruz province and home of Argentine president Néstor Kirchner, were attacked by state police while marching to demand payment of a promised wage increase.

The march on 9th May was entirely non-violent and was attempting to go to the provincial centre of government to register their demands when they were attacked with tear gas, rubber bullets and according to some reports lead shot. Twelve people were injured, including Pedro Biott, secretary of the municipal workers union. Union and social movement spokespersons blame President Kirchner, former Governor of Santa Cruz and a 'left' Peronist for both the economic policies and the violence.

Subsequently Kirchner has forced regional governor Carlos Sancho to resign.

CHILE: A conflict between timber workers and the Horcones processing group saw police rounds kill Rodrigo Cisterna, aged 26, during a road blockade in the Arauco province, Southern Chile.

Dozens more were arrested and wounded during the blockade, who were demonstrating over starvation wages in the industry.

The Organización Comunista Libertaria OCL said: "We express our deep regret and sympathy towards the family, and our scorn towards the henchmen. The government of

Michelle Bachelet is already stained with workers' blood, exposing itself as nothing but the continuity of the repressive legacy of the previous governments of her coalition (Concertación)."

EGYPT: The longest and strongest wave of worker protest since the end of the Second World War is rolling through Egypt. In March, the liberal daily *al-Masri al-Yaum* estimated that no fewer than 222 sit-in strikes, work stoppages, hunger strikes and demonstrations had occurred during 2006. In the first five months of 2007, the paper has reported a new labour action nearly every day. The citizen group Egyptian Workers and Trade Union Watch documented 56 incidents during the month of April, and another 15 during the first week of May alone.

From their centre of gravity in the textile sector, the strikes have spread to mobilise makers of building materials, Cairo subway workers, food processing workers, bakers, rubbish collectors and many others.

FRANCE: France celebrated the victory of its new right wing president Nicholas Sarkozy with *two* days of solid rioting that left several hundred cars burned, 600 arrested and 30 police injured. Sarkozy, who as interior minister inflamed an already tense situation in France's ghettos during recent rioting by saying that he would clean the 'scum' from the suburbs.

Another of his electoral promises was to "liquidate the legacy of May 1968" – the mass movement of students, workers and libertarians. Sarkozy (referred to by many French as, 'the American President') wants to improve relations with the US, and has criticised Chirac for his 'arrogance' in opposing Bush and Blair's push to invade Iraq.

Aiming to bring in a raft of Thatcher-esque style reforms, he plans to end the 35-hour working week and cut benefits. The last time an incoming French president promised something similar was when Chirac was first elected back in 1995. The result? A wave of strikes ripped through the country that forced the government to back down. Plus Ca Change! In response to his victory, and the riots, the riots, Sarkozy decided to go on a short holiday on a luxury yacht.

GERMANY: Police raided about 40 buildings in Germany on the morning of 9th May, including social centres and several private homes in Berlin and Hamburg, as well as the alternative web provider so36.net. Police forces searched the Rote Flora in Hamburg as well as parts of the Bethanien in Berlin. Both social centres are planning to be convergence spaces for the G8 protests in early June. Several people were arrested but released later in the day.

Solidarity demonstrations and actions have taken place in several cities around the world, including Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Goettingen, Managua and Vienna.

One commentator on indymedia said: "The fact that no-one was detained illustrates perfectly that this was nothing more than a long planned attempt to hinder the preparation of the protests against the G8 summit and to scare the public in order to discredit the protests."

VENEZUELA: President Chávez of Venezuela gave international oil companies an unpleasant May Day surprise by stripping them of operational control over four big oil projects worth \$30 billion (£15bn).

Four oil refinery sites in the heavily polluted Orinoco Basin, believed to be the site of the world's largest single crude oil deposit, reverted to state control at midnight local time. State oil company PDVSA now controls at least 60% of the projects, which corporate criminals like Chevron, Exxon Mobil, BP and Total have been forced to give up.

On the surface newly proposed democratic reforms look pretty good. Chávez is instigating the creation of thousands of 'neighbourhood councils', comprising 200 to 400 families, designed to devolve power to local level. The idea is that these councils will also influence national policies. While this sounds promising, and an interesting experiment for anarcho types to keep an eye on, Chávez has also suggested this is best done through the creation of one national party – the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. That's right, one national party, headed by Hugo Chávez, seemingly angling to become President for life.

Prison news

Hands off John Bowden!

Long-term prison resister John Bowden is being victimised for his contact with the Anarchist Black Cross, who the Scottish prison authorities are trying to smear as a 'terrorist' and 'paramilitary' organisation. As part of the campaign of harassment John has been moved from an open prison, where he had regular 'home-leaves', to a maximum-security jail.

Throughout his 25 years in prison, John has been a tireless campaigner for prisoners' rights, a leading prison militant, and an articulate and vociferous writer. He has been a beacon of solidarity over the years and needs our support himself now. The campaign by the Scottish Prison Service is not just an attempt to silence a prison militant, it has ramifications far beyond that, being an attempt to deny all prisoners the right to hold political views, and an attack on the ABC and on anarchism in general.

- Write to John at John Bowden, 6729, HMP Glenochil, King O' Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3AD. Scotland.
- Please send postcards (as many as possible) reading 'Hands Off John Bowden!' to Scottish Prison Service Headquarters, Communications Branch, Room 338, Calton House, 5 Redheughs Rigg, Edinburgh, EH12 9HW. Scotland.
- Find out more about John's situation at www.myspace.com/friendsofjohnbowden
- On 25th May there will be a demonstration in support of John Bowden outside the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, starting at 2.00pm. More info: leedsabc@riseup.net

Belgian anarchist sentenced in his absence

On 24th of April, at the court of Dendermonde in Belgium, Geert Waegemans, a member of the Anarchist Black Cross and a former animal rights prisoner, was sentenced to one year in prison on charges of assaulting police officers and resisting arrest. The charges originate from a demonstration in 2005 in solidarity with two comrades on trial for breaking the windows of a fur shop. As a well-known Belgian activist, Geert was targeted by the cops, who used massive numbers against the demonstration, with 17 demonstrators being arrested. Most of those arrested were released after 12 hours, having been threatened and roughed-up, while Geert and two other comrades were held for 16 days before being charged and released on bail. Having been targeted as an anarchist militant, and then fitted-up in what the Belgian ABC describe as a 'circus' of a trial, Geert did not appear before the Dendermonde court to be sentenced. The judge ordered his immediate arrest. We wish him 'Good Luck' and hope he remains at liberty.

May Day demo at Foston Hall

On May Day a small group of protestors held a three and a half hour demonstration outside Foston Hall Prison to protest against the death of mother-of-two Kerry Devereux, aged 32, the third woman to die in an English jail this year. Kerry died in the segrega-

tion unit of Foston Hall on the 18th April, while on 'suicide watch'. Protesters, including a representative from the 'No More Prison' campaign group, travelled from Yorkshire, Shropshire and Cheshire, to attend the demonstration – the 22nd to be held since protests began in 2004.

Solidarity with Gabriel Pombo Da Silva

Gabriel Pombo Da Silva, one of the two remaining 'Aachen 4' prisoners, is currently facing the hard edge of repression at the hands of the German prison authorities. Since Gabriel's arrest in 2004 he has been held in virtual isolation, and has to spend at least 23 hours a day locked in his cell, with only limited visits. Now the prison authorities are trying to increase his isolation by stealing his mail, and withholding books, CDs and postage stamps sent to him. According to a statement issued by ABC-Gent: "The attempts to isolate Gabriel more and more aim clearly at the destruction of his personality and political identity. They must be stopped. We ask you all to send letters, faxes, emails to the prison of Aachen."

- Letters to JVA Aachen, Dr Hans-Joachim Gries, Krefelder Str. 251, 52070, Aachen, Germany, email poststelle@jva-aachen.nrw.de fax 0241 9173-273.
- You can write to Gabriel at Gabriel Pombo da Silva, JVA Aachen, Krefelder Str. 251, 52070 Aachen, Germany.
- More info at escapeintorebellion.info

Reyes fears for his life

Imprisoned Oaxaca APPO activist David Venegas Reyes is fearing for his life following alleged death-threats from the government. Reyes, a councillor of the APPO in Oaxaca, Mexico, has been under arrest since 13th April. Members of Global Women's Strike have requested international support for the prisoner, who said in an interview to Narconews: "On the day of 1st May, in the morning, I received a surprise visit by an unknown person. Instead of giving me his name he said, call me 'Tacho Canastal', and said that he had been sent by Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and Sergio Segreste Rios, who, in a supposed meeting with them the day before, had ordered him to talk to me. The message was clear: they invited me to accept that someone from my family enter in a dialogue with the government for my liberty. The threats: that they know someone in my family was participating in what he called the 'desmadre' [chaos], asked for that person to calm down, and said that if that person refuses to negotiate they would transfer me to the 'Penal de Altiplano' or [the federal prison at] 'Almoloya' and that the government had all the reason to kill me."

- Letters of protest can be sent to Francisco Javier Ramirez Acuña, government secretary, tel (55) 50933400, email secretario@segob.gob.mx
- Signatures of support and proposals of help can be sent directly to vocal@riseup.net

News

Toff-down management

Ian Bone's latest work exposes the lie of working class representation in government – Freedom investigates further

A blog set up by *Class War* founder Ian Bone has recently focused on looking at the backgrounds of both existing and aspiring leaders of the country.

In a series of exposes, Bone has pointed to aristocratic or Oxbridge-educated backgrounds across the entire spectrum of representative politics.

Starting with the Tories, Bone notes that three of Cameron's key backroom staff were with him at Eton, and others at Cambridge. Four of Cameron's cabinet would be joining him direct from the notorious Bullingdon club.

Labour's own image as party of the working class is largely finished, but nevertheless the level of infiltration by the 'Oxbridge set' is revealing, with a majority of Blair's final cabinet far from being horny-handed sons and daughters of toil.

Nine members of the cabinet went to one of the two universities, and a further four of its 23 members have elite connections through schooling at exclusive institutions or family ties.

Tessa Jowell spent her early life at the £10k-a-year St Margaret's boarding school, while Hilary Benn is the son of the second Viscount Stansgate (Tony Benn, to the rest of the world). Hilary Armstrong is daughter of a Labour MP, and Alistair Darling went to Scotland's oldest boarding school, Loretto.

Of the remaining members, most have denounced any previous connections to left-wing politics they might have had. Brown, now due to become party leader, helped develop the ideological and economic back-

ground to the last decade of New Labour, being instrumental in its practice.

John Reid's New Labour credentials are impeccable, with strong support voiced for the Iraq war, ID cards, anti-terrorism laws, and coming down hard on dissenters. Peter Hain is married to an ex-director of the Welsh Confederation of Business interests, and another stalwart of New Labour policy.

In other parties, the story is much the same. Oxford-educated Green Party spokesperson and copyright expert Sian Berry's class credentials include campaigning against urban 4x4s, while 'eco-socialist pagan Zen Buddhist' Dr Derek Wall came to the green party while studying in the US – having left Oxford "despairing at the seeming impregnability of Thatcher" after a spell as president of the university's Social Democratic Club.

The Liberal Party are led by Menzies Campbell, whose background includes a personal recruitment attempt by John Smith when he was at university, and his second in command, Cambridge-educated Vince Cable, who is a former chief economist at Shell.

The SWP's leading organiser, Alex Callinicos, is grandson to the second Baron Acton and an ex-Oxford student, while Chris Bambery, editor of the *Socialist Worker*, shares his Loretto's background with Darling. Ian Bone, in his blog, further points out: "Paul Foot was, exceptionally for the SWP, honest about his class background. At meetings across the country he would disarmingly characterise



NUKE ROUTE: Allegedly this vehicle in the early hours of Thursday 10th May was part of a convoy carrying nuclear warheads secretly passed through the Stapleford and Chilwell area of Nottingham. The vehicles were spotted driving into the Chetwynd Barracks in Chilwell at 6.30am for a rest stop. The convoy passed through dense populated areas in Stapleford and Chilwell. According to campaigners each lorry weighs approx 44 tonnes and can carry up to two ready-assembled nuclear warheads.

himself as a 'class traitor'.

"People of Foot's class background will rise to the top of any and every organisation. Foot pursued the interest of the class he was silver spooned into as vigorously as any captain of industry. His righting of the wrongs of individual victims of injustice was

symptomatic of his political theory: those in the know – the party – would right the wrongs for the working class as a whole.

"Like Benn, like Ali, like Callinicos – the Trot toffs are the totems of fake opposition based on the hierarchical values they learned from their form

masters and Oxford profs."

And of course the BNP is led by Nick 'voice of the working class' Griffin, son of a wealthy landowner and proud owner of a 3:3 degree ... from Cambridge.

Ian Bone's blog is at ianbone.wordpress.com.

Burnout but no turn-outs

In mixed news for the social centre network, the Camberwell Squatted Centre in London has been given a stay of execution for a month but The Basement in Manchester has been heavily damaged after a fire.

The Basement, in Lever Street, was not directly set alight during the Manchester blaze, which began in a next door building, but the sprinkler system was set off and smoke and water damage has shut the centre.

It is thought embers from the larger Dale Street fire set the building in Lever Street alight.

Although water protected the underground area a large amount of equipment and stock was destroyed, which it is thought will far exceed their buildings and contents insurance.

In a statement, the collective said: "We have had many kind offers of help and support as people from all over the city and beyond move to celebrate the space and the unique place it is. Many thanks to all the individuals and groups who are going to hold benefits for us, and help us get through this

temporary setback."

Many meetings, workshops and events, including the Mutant Media Festival, have had to be rescheduled or moved to The Yard Theatre and Friends Meeting House.

The Basement group is hoping to reopen by the end of the month.

Meanwhile, the Camberwell Squatted Centre have been offered a reprieve from eviction after they were taken to court on 1st May.

A member of the collective wrote: "The judge accepted all our arguments about the failures in the paperwork, questioning John Desmond (acting the front man) about his role in Silverside Ltd. Who was he? Did he have the power to act in court?"

"John Boy replied he would be the project manager, when building work started. Not good enough, said the judge. To bring a claim for possession, you need a Director of the Company, or a properly appointed legal representative. Clearly the case would have to be adjourned until they sorted themselves out.

"Net result: A new court date will be set after 29th May. So we have another month or two at least."

The collective have occupied the site since 10th March, acting both as housing for members and hosting a variety of events including café nights, film showings and meetings since it was opened to the public.

The Basement Social Centre, 24 Lever Street, Manchester M1 1DZ, tel 0161 237 1832, email basementbooks@riseup.net, or see <http://thebasement.clearerchannel.org/drupal>

Camberwell Squatted Centre, 192 Wareham Street (off Camberwell New Road), London SE5, email blackfrog@alphabettthreat.co.uk, or see www.56a.org.uk/warham.html



Workers' day

Marches and demonstrations took place across the country on Mayday alongside a strong strike launched on the same day by civil servants in the PCS union.

In the largest march, around 1,000 people took to the streets in London, with a bloc of around 200 anarchists present. An organiser for the event said: "The turnout for a workday was great. We were the biggest bloc on the march! It also represents the emergence of an active younger lot in the south."

After the demonstration a violent arrest took place in Parliament Square when six police officers approached a lone protestor holding a 'Bollocks To Blair' placard.

At the same time, around fifty people shared food, drink and music in a picnic in Kennington Park organised by the Camberwell Squatted Centre under the slogan 'Workers of The World, Relax!'.

The Space Hijackers, who put on a Mayday Party at Canary Wharf, were heavily outnumbered by a 500-strong police presence compared to the 150

attendees. The Hijackers said:

"Unfortunately our sound system was quickly shut down by the police and Canary Wharf security. The entire area being private land there were a lot of legal powers in the police's belt. However, as always undeterred, we simply brought out our song sheets and carried on the party."

After the arrest of a partygoer who refused to move when asked, the event was moved to public land on the edge of the river.

- In Liverpool, about eight hundred people marched through the city centre in a demonstration organised by Merseyside TUC.
- In Glasgow a street party took place in Buchanan Street, which passed peacefully despite a strong police presence.
- In Wolverhampton and Ipswich workers and activists from across the regions headed to Mayday festivals.
- In Chesterfield there was a Mayday march and rally on Bank holiday Monday.

News

Insurgency in the Niger Delta

Matt B looks into rising discontent which is closing the oil spigots across Nigeria

Attacks on oil company property and staff in Nigeria's Niger Delta region have risen sharply after last month's rigged and violent national election. Oil output is declining in response.

Four oil production facilities were shut down in early May and around thirty foreign workers kidnapped. The Ijaw Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for kidnappings and the bombing of three major pipelines earlier this month, forcing the closure of a 150,000 barrels-per-day (bpd) export terminal. Chevron and NNPC have also closed production facilities due to attacks. Royal Dutch Shell stated that output was down by 288,000bpd (about 40%) in the first quarter of 2007, and the company has declared force majeure at the Focados export terminal. Output for Nigerian oil as a whole last year was down by around 25%. Militants say they aim to stop the industry completely.

A spokesman for PENGASSAN, a Nigerian management oil union, spoke to *Freedom* about the problems in the region, striking an upbeat note: "It does seem to be getting worse. We believe these problems are politically motivated... but now the Vice President is from the Niger Delta we can see an opportunity for change." He acknowledged that "disenchantment with political parties is creating the tension", although he also suggested, referring to party politics, that "some people

are sponsoring the action".

General Jomo Gbono, of MEND in Bayelsa state, in an email communiqué, denies involvement in party politics: "The fight for justice in the delta has nothing to do with who rules delta state. We are fighting for resource control for the millions of poverty stricken villagers unseen by the world. Those are the people; the struggle in the delta is about." He also distances MEND from new Vice President, Jonathan Adua, describing the 1st May attack on the Chevron export terminal as a 'disclaimer' to indicate that "Jonathan's selection as vice president of Nigeria is of no consequence to us".

Neglect of the region by Yoruba and Hausa dominated governments is long-standing. Villages with no electricity or running water face damage to their health and livelihoods due to pollution caused by oil spills and gas flaring. MEND are demanding compensation by Shell to communities affected by oil spills and 'resource control' for the Niger Delta. The group is linked to the Niger Delta Volunteer Force which declared war on the government in 2004. Unlike the centralised NDVF, they appear to enjoy broad support across the region.

General Godswill Tamuno, of Delta State MEND, in conversation with a journalist at a MEND base, described the situation: "This is our territory. The soldiers dare not come here now. They came and we defeated them. We are civilised people, educated people,



and we do not want our children to be deprived as we have been deprived so other people can get rich from what is under our feet. The oil companies and government have had many years to treat us right. They have never done it. Now we are making them think."

Nigeria is the second richest country in Africa, and oil produced in Delta

and Bayelsa states accounts for 80% of its GDP, grossing the oil companies and Nigerian government \$100 billion a day. Meanwhile, 70% of the Delta's ten million population live on less than a dollar a day. MEND operations are causing the government to lose around \$1,000 million a month.

The federal government has recently

launched a Niger Delta Development Plan and is reported to be attempting to start a peace process in the region, possibly due to American concern over their fifth largest source of oil. After fifty years of neglect it may be too little, too late.

You can find MEND communiqués at unitedijawstates.com/mend.htm

i07 wonders of the world

The last weekend of April saw a gathering (i07) take place in Paris of militant and class struggle syndicalists from across the world. This conference was a follow up to i99 which took place in San Francisco and i02 which took place in Essen. It was hosted by the CNT-France which is a revolutionary syndicalist union that has been growing in size and influence over the last 10-15 years.

Around 300 individuals and delegates took part in the conference which ran over three days. They represented unions and groups as diverse as the SAC (Sweden), UNICOBAS (Italy), SNAPAP (Algeria) and Lutte Ouvrière (Congo). One of the strengths of the conference was the participation of a large number of militant unions from Africa. This was made possible by the internationalism of the CNT-France who paid for the flights and visas for most delegates coming from the global south.

Translation into three languages (French, Spanish and English) was

provided by the CNT-F and this enabled many useful discussions to take place.

A discussion on anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism saw a range of opinions presented by comrades from the CGT (Spain) about the benefits and problems of participating in workplace elections to company councils. Benefits mentioned by the International Secretary of the CGT included the cash that this gave the union.

An education worker from the CGT stated that the participation in these elections demobilised the activity of workers who instead relied upon the union to represent them. This discussion is important because it has formed a fault line in syndicalism with many unions in Europe struggling to find the right balance between fighting for workers control and the fight for reforms under our current bosses. The experience of the CGT is important because with roughly 60,000 members it is the largest anarcho-syndicalist union in the

world. This debate has split the syndicalist movement in the Spanish State with the smaller CNT-Spain refusing to participate in company elections.

A meeting of education workers shared experiences from Africa, Europe and the Americas. Delegates from Africa stressed the need for solidarity and horizontal communication to take place between workers in the global north and south. A common theme in this meeting was the need to struggle for the right to organise and take strike action and for decent living conditions for education workers and students. It was decided to organise a global day of action to take place in approximately eighteen months time to unite education workers, students and their organisations in fighting for a set of common demands. This is initially being coordinated by comrades from the education section of the CNT-F.

Dave
(a Solidarity Federation member who attended i07 in a personal capacity)

US notes: Blackwater

When the war in Iraq began in March 2003, it was estimated that as many as 10% of the US forces were private mercenaries. That figure of private combatants in Iraq has now risen to what's thought to be 50% or even higher.

Chief amongst these private armies is Blackwater, a quickly growing force of violent and greedy mercenaries. They describe themselves as "the most comprehensive professional military, law enforcement, security, peacekeeping, and stability operations company in the world".

Ten years ago, Blackwater didn't really exist. Erik Prince, its president, has been a major contribution to Bush's election campaigns and is also a right wing Christian fundamentalist with relationships with such fanatics as James Dobson, Gary Bauer and Chuck Olson. Prince was an intern in Bush senior's White House but left because it wasn't sufficiently conservative on gay issues and the environment.

Now Blackwater has contracts with the State Department alone that are

worth \$750m plus whatever they earn from work for the DoD and US intelligence. Blackwater protects the US ambassador and senior officials and regional occupation offices in Iraq; it's responsible for training forces in Afghanistan and has been deployed in the Caspian Sea - next door to Iran.

Blackwater is based at Moyock in the Great Dismal Swamp area of North Carolina, where they have the largest private military base (5,000 acres) anywhere in the world. Their facilities are typically several thousand acres and have an artificial lake for amphibious landing 'exercises', airstrips and a fleet of two-dozen aircraft.

Jeremy Scahill, author of the New York Times bestseller, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, comments "we have a company that is essentially declaring itself above any effective law... its forces are capable of overthrowing governments."

You certainly haven't heard the last of Blackwater.

Louis Further

Feature

Rebels without a pause

Correspondent Nancy Davies reports from Oaxaca one year after the Mexican rebellion began, and finds dissent alive and well

In May 2006, the Oaxaca Popular Movement coalesced striking teachers, dominated by 60,000 from Section 22 of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) who covered fifty blocks with tents and sleeping bags, cookware and laundry, kids' drawings and soda cases.

They demanded the usual – this was a strike which went on every year – with requests for salary increases, aid to poor students, free breakfasts, better school facilities (with bathrooms), and re-zonification for the minimum wage of government employees.

On 14th June, the government sent in state police to evict the strikers.

The teachers and their families beat back the police and re-took the zócalo. Tear gas floated over the streets; children were injured; buses were burned; the teachers' FM radio station was smashed and their broadcasters arrested.

Two days later a popular movement grew from the scene with what came to be known as the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO) and 'el movimieneto magisterio popular' (the popular teachers movement).

For the next six months the APPO met, forums met, the teachers met, and the government of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, (URO) with PRI thugs and plain-clothes police picked off its supporters one by one, with murders (the count varies from 13 to 26), torture, disappearances, imprisonment, and infiltration.

Among the APPO convocations, two called for designing a new government, for state and nation, based on face-to-face participative democracy, economic equity, and social and gender equity. Documents were written up and published.

In a state of more than three million people, more than half a million marched against the repressive government, neo-liberal policies and social neglect.

The majority of poor campesinos and the indigenous population back the movement. The middle class participates as 'civil society', mounting forums and discussions, calling attention to the struggle and what it means.

Teachers, taxi drivers, and medical workers took roles on the blockades, supported by their neighborhoods. Among those who don't support the APPO, neither do they support the governor.

Calderón's predecessor, President Vicente Fox, mandated the November repression. The crackdown on 25th November included hundreds of arrests with torture and the closure of APPO media. Many people went into hiding. The total number of imprisoned during the struggle exceeded 500, people were tortured or disappeared. At present, sixteen teachers remain in jail. Arrests continue.

However, reports of the death of the APPO have proven premature. The idea of popular participation in governing and control of Oaxaca had survived. Civil society, perhaps a hundred organisations affiliated with the APPO, maintains consciousness in the city of Oaxaca and statewide.

On 10th January the teachers, reconstructing their damaged union, met and decided to march. Thirty thousand people turned out for the ninth megamarch. The zócalo defence included razor-wire barriers, attack dogs, billy-clubs wrapped with barbed wire and the presence of 4,000 riot police, many mounted on horses.

On 8th March, Women's Day, was the tenth megamarch. The zócalo once again was blockaded behind metal blockades and razor wire. The water tanks reappeared along with the firemen, while the marchers, shoulder to shoulder, shouted 'We are all the APPO!'. Women have been leaders from the outset and proved their importance when the *cacerolas* captured the public television station. Along with the women the APPO, teachers, civil society organisations, and campesinos joined the Coordination of the Women of Oaxaca (COMO), and other indigenous women's organisations. The international Women in Resistance movement marched on 29th April.

Behind the in-your-face marches, the APPO and civil society organise and educate. The APPO social revolution is characterised by horizontal leadership, the Zapatista idea that the leader obeys the popular will, revocability of all offices, referenda, plebiscites, and autonomy. The assemblies meet monthly. The indigenous population has openly joined the movement.

An indigenous forum took place on 28th and 29th November last year, with former bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas present. It allied with the APPO. The federal military occupies several indigenous communities, because of their perceived threat to the government, ever alert to uprisings and guerrillas, real or imagined.

A Triqui indigenous community publicly declared the autonomous municipality of San Juan Cópala on the 21st January 2007. Their election of municipal authorities required two months for consultations, the traditional 'customs and mores', with open decisions of the majority in assemblies. The three authorities meet with the leaders of the twenty participant communities.

One day before the new authorities assumed office, paramilitary groups burst into San Juan and shot up the place. Roberto García Flores, a supporter of autonomy, was ambushed on route to San Juan to participate in the new municipality, and murdered.

State authorities always declare

indigenous deaths to be internal, land boundary disputes. In reality, they are instigated by the PRI to keep control. When the new community declared autonomy it too affiliated with the APPO. About 15,000 indigenous people are involved. The total Triqui population is about 24,000.

The APPO encourages every town, neighborhood, region, union – whatever affiliation you can imagine – to create its own *asamblea*. During the first six months I counted forty towns in conflict, seeking to oust PRI caciques. Assemblies sprang up taking over their municipal government and throwing out unwanted presidents. That continues.

The First Regional Assembly of the peoples of the Isthmus took place in Itepec the 27th and 28th of January 2007. The topics discussed were Economy, Education, Culture and Communication, Health and the environment; Women and diversity. The invitation was signed by the organising groups and individuals such as APPO-Istmo, Otra Campaña-Istmo, Radio Totopo (a community radio station), Grupo Solidario de la Venta (opposed to the wind-farms taking land in the municipality of La Venta), and others. The added note: bring your blanket and bring something put on the common table to make the food sufficient for all (cheese, totopo, beans, rice, sugar...)

The APPO of the Sierra Sur formed in April, strongly anti-neoliberal and in refutation of elected politics and politicians who have sold out.

The struggle of any one political party to gain power within the APPO is checked, but not easily. In 2007 those who wanted to use the APPO as a political party clashed unsuccessfully with those who wish to remain a public voice. The upcoming 'punishment vote' in August of 2007 and again in October, for state and municipal candidates respectively, offers the possibility of a state legislature outside the control of Ulises Ruiz and the PRI, including indictment of Ruiz himself.

Meanwhile, civil society keeps the APPO's goals up front with international as well as national discussions on designing a participative democracy. A national forum discussed the media, and emphasised community radio, which proposed ways to make radio available in the face of the PRI refusal to grant radio licenses. Public forums considered the human rights catastrophe. They convicted URO of a broad range of crimes. Human rights organisations also fund aid to the families of the imprisoned. They sponsor psychology clinics to deal with the after-effects of torture.

The unions have stood strong. The teachers, at the time of the Ninth Megamarch, declared in their assembly:



"We don't forget, and we don't forgive the assassinations, torture, persecution, disappearances and arbitrary arrests committed against the people of Oaxaca, and in particular against the democratic teachers, in complicity with the Federal Government." They also affirmed, "We helped build the APPO and we will keep on participating." The education workers stand against neoliberal policies, privatisations, salary adjustments, reduction in social spending, and the concentration of wealth among a few, saying "we have not surrendered and we won't surrender, and on the basis of a mature policy, we go on united and organised until we achieve our objectives and those of the people of Oaxaca."

By the end of April blockades of major roads were occurring again. An entirely separate union, of administrative and office workers, astonished us on 25th April by marching into the forbidden zócalo, shoving aside the barricades and the police. They raised their banners protesting the new social security changes (Ley ISSSTE), and marched around. No one stopped them. They reflect union rage against privatising social security

benefits. The Mayday march of state and federal unions and the APPO entered the zócalo, unhindered, and staged a rally. The news was broadcast by student activists who took over Radio Universidad, and broadcast for several hours before being shut off. The 2nd May was the day of a national work stoppage. All the unions demonstrated against the ISSSTE law change. This government radicalises people.

There are now at least eleven states – maybe as many as twenty, of the thirty-three Mexican states – that have formed their own popular assemblies.

How can the APPO link thousands of local *asambleas* which must achieve common goals to make national changes? And how link to other states? To Latin America? Unanswered questions in the framework of horizontal decision making abound, while the local struggle continues.

But given the national consciousness of failed electoral politics, failed state and national governments, failed neoliberal economics and failed social policy, the population is re-educating itself about the nature of power and who holds it.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 10

Anarchism

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

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

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

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

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

Angel Alley

It has been a bit of a turnup for the books at Freedom this issue, as the apparently the police have found the paper's finishers in possession of a substantial amount of dodgy cash and some kilos of ever-so-slightly illegal drugs, which may explain why they've been running late recently. While we of course wish them all the best, this means we'll have to move to a different company. Call us stick-in-the-muds if you like...

In less weird and wonderful news, thank you to everyone who has renewed their subscription recently. It always makes a huge difference to the paper, and the building, to have a bit of money coming in and extra donations in particular are massively appreciated. We are also asking the various people who take bundles and who haven't been invoiced properly for some time, to tot up roughly what they owe us.

After a brief hiatus, Matt will be back for issue 6811 as editor, giving me a useful break. Anyone wanting to write, help with mailout, organise a bit of marketing, or generally assist in any way, is, as always, welcome. Contact us at the usual address below.

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 2nd June 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 24th May. 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.

From Glenochil prison

On the 18th April 2007, nine months after my transfer to Castle Huntly Open Prison, and less than a month before a critically important parole hearing to decide my suitability for release after 25 years in prison, I was placed into solitary confinement and the following day transferred back to a maximum security jail.

Incredibly, I was accused of involvement with a 'terrorist organisation' on the outside, a claim emblazoned across the front page of the local *Dundee Courier* ('Castle Huntly killer has terror links') on the day I was locked into solitary. In the current political climate such a claim was obviously made with the deliberate intention of keeping me imprisoned indefinitely.

In fact, the claim was a lie and reveals the extent of the prison system's determination to deny me freedom even after a quarter of a century behind bars. That such a ludicrous and easily refuted lie should have resulted in my return to conditions of maximum security and the almost certain denial of parole also reveals the Kafkaesque nature of power within the police state world of the prison system. There is, however, a certain vicious rationale motivating the absurd claim made against me.

The persecution and victimisation of prisoner activists by the prison authorities is as intrinsic to the role and function of the prison system as the injustice and abuse of power that characterises its treatment of all prisoners. In the eyes of the prison system and those who enforce it, however, the most feared and hated prisoners of all are those identified as 'ringleaders' and 'subversives', prisoners who attempt to collectively organise and mobilise their fellow prisoners into resistance and protest.

For these 'troublemakers' the system reserves its most vicious and vindictive treatment, and an appetite for revenge that blights the lives of such prisoners throughout their entire sentences. If the targeted 'subversive' happens to be serving a life sentence then every means will be employed, including the collusion of prison employed social workers and probation officers, to try and keep the prisoner inside until they die. There are no civilised limits to the vindictiveness of the prison system when it comes to punishing those who have challenged and threatened its power.

For more than two decades in prison I had pursued and fought for the cause of prisoners' rights and tried with every means at my disposal to highlight and expose the frequent and often horrendous abuses of power that I had

witnessed and experienced. As a consequence, my name had become synonymous in the minds of prison officials with sedition and defiance, and the spectre of something that has always frightened, enraged and driven them to use every method and means to eradicate and destroy it: prisoner power.

In January this year as I approached the end of a 25 year recommendation life sentence, the administration at Castle Huntly Open Prison were obliged to prepare reports on me for what should have been a final parole tribunal to decide my release. As part of my preparation for release, I had spent two years working unsupervised in the outside community as a volunteer on projects for the mentally ill and socially vulnerable, and had qualified as a literacy tutor for people with learning difficulties.

For almost a year I had been allowed frequent home leaves. The two fundamental criteria determining a life sentence prisoner's suitability for release, the expiry of the recommended period of time served in the interests of retribution, and the absence of any risk to the public, were both sufficiently established in my case.

Of all the reports compiled on life sentence prisoners approaching final parole hearings and potential release, few are more important and influential than those written by social workers. It is the opinions and views of these supposedly impartial professionals that exert a critical influence on the deliberations of the parole board. In my case, the prison authorities chose to dispense with the services of ordinary prison social workers at Castle Huntly following an allegation that I had formed an 'inappropriately close friendship' with a member of the social work team there, and instead commissioned an outside social worker to prepare my parole report. They chose Matt Stillman, a right-wing American entrenched in punitive ideas about the role of the parole and probation system.

During two brief interviews he attempted to interrogate me about my political views and philosophy, and focused his questions almost entirely on my contact and relationship with prisoner support groups on the outside. He seemed particularly interested in my contact with the Anarchist Black Cross movement and claimed to have researched their website and read articles of mine featured on it. In Stillman's limited right-wing imagination he associated anarchism with violence and terrorism, and despite what he had actually seen and read to the contrary on the ABC website, he decided to write the following critically damning remarks in his report on me to the parole board: "Bowden has written

for a self-proclaimed anarchist website called Brighton ABC and he says he supports many of their ideas and actions. A review of this website brings into question the nature of the group. The members of this group appear to be primarily eco-terrorists or paramilitary members involved in what they see as battles against political systems and principles." He then adds: "Whilst at Edinburgh prison it was reported that Bowden had received a visit from terrorists." This refers to two members of Brighton ABC who had visited me at Edinburgh jail, neither of whom had a criminal conviction between them.

As Stillman was well aware, particularly as an American with firm right-wing opinions, levelling the accusation of 'terrorist' sympathies and associations against me in the current political climate would effectively terminate any possibility of the parole board agreeing to my release. And of course those who invited Stillman to write his report on me knew only too well that the opinions of an apparently unbiased and neutral professional would be given infinitely more weight by the parole board than those offered by conceivably prejudiced prison staff. The social work unit manager at Castle Huntly, Christina Brown, despite having also reviewed the ABC website, submitted a report endorsing Stillman's views and attesting to his impartiality and professionalism.

The entire administration at Castle Huntly deliberately colluded in supporting Stillman's ludicrous report, and reacted viciously when I contacted the ABC and suggested they pursue legal action over Stillman's definition and accusation of them as 'terrorist'. On the 18th April, during the afternoon, all prisoners at Castle Huntly were locked down in their cells as I was escorted to the office of the prison's deputy governor, James McKay. He informed me that I had "compromised the corporate reputation of the prison" by highlighting Stillman's remarks (my intention exactly!), and that my "continuing contact with a paramilitary organisation on the outside rendered my continuing presence in an open jail unacceptable". I was then placed into solitary confinement and the following day moved to a maximum security prison.

I had committed no offence against prison discipline at Castle Huntly, breached no prison rules and had fulfilled every bona fide criterion determining life sentence prisoners suitability for release, and yet on the basis of an obviously ludicrous allegation made by an idiotic, redneck social worker, I was swiftly entombed back in high security conditions and denied any possibility of release for the foreseeable future.

The truth is that my treatment is politically motivated and inspired by a determination to continuously punish me for having fought the system in the past and encouraging others to do so, and also by a determination to render me intellectually and politically compliant and submissive. As far as the prison system is concerned, the imperative now is not about negating any genuine risk that I might pose to the community, that stopped being an issue many years ago, but primarily about eradicating my political identity and spirit. From this point on, therefore, my continuing imprisonment is nakedly political and centres wholly on what I continue to

represent to a prison system ever fearful of a politically awakened and militant prisoner movement.

John Bowden

HMP Glenochil, May 2007

For more on Bowden's case, see page 2.

No changes

After all the singing and dancing, the marching and campaigning, hard work and hard-won concessions – triumphant announcements and bold proclamations – why should anything about the last two years of scandalous, furtive volte-faces be a cause for surprise?

For the G8, the IMF and the World Bank this is entirely business as usual – the shirking of responsibilities and obligations, laid upon them by massive public pressure and opinion, which they nevertheless had not the slightest intention of honouring or abiding by in the first place. It's there in Italy's balance of aid backslide and Germany's cynical sleight of hand, with developed world aid contributions actually decreasing for the first time in ten years. It's there also in the thick layer cake of meaningless double-speak emanating from the World Bank and IMF themselves, which barely serves to disguise the cynical twisting of the intentions of the original accord made by the G8 at Gleneagles in 2005.

The language of the World Bank and IMF belies their fidgety, urgent pre-occupation with maintaining the status quo: balancing aid against debt relief, maintenance of debt ratios, completion points in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme cycle and the downright ominous "easing countries into new borrowing". Reading between the lines, this is the neurotic language of the junkie in danger of losing their fix, and the question then becomes, who is dependent on whom, really? This is, at the end of the day, the real point. We cannot expect to have any sort of discourse with the elites of our world so long as we are speaking different languages, which are grounded in mutually exclusive and antagonistic paradigms.

Those paradigms, ours and theirs, are worlds apart: we speak the language of liberation and equality, of mutual respect. They speak only of enslavement to a self-perpetuating cycle of addiction, couched in the language of economics and bureaucracy in which their own twin addictions of power and greed are expressed, and from which all other addictions flow forth. In the words of Robert Anton Wilson, paraphrasing Dr Timothy Leary and others, this is nothing more than the politics of domesticated primates. A new approach is necessary and the tools are thankfully coming to hand...

Anon

Quiz answers

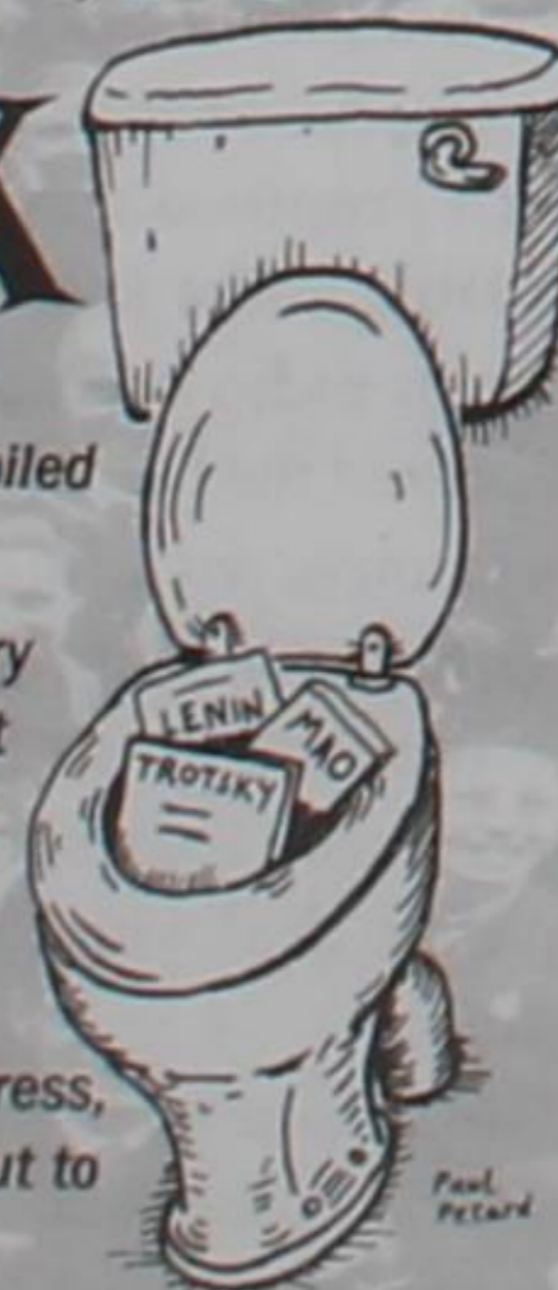
1. The authorities put a tax on beer. There followed four days of rioting, with the police being driven out of their stations and soldiers keeping order, until the King rescinded the tax.
2. The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914. It looks at the many uses they made of the beer halls they set up, including discussion, debates, meetings and theatre.
3. Diego Abad de Santillan (1897-1983), theorist and writer for the FORA and the CNT.
4. He reconfigured it as three-sided, to illustrate his concept of trilectics (as opposed to dialectics).

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REVIEW

BBC2's 'The Trap' documentaries can't see beyond the false dreams of freedom they expose, argues Tom Jennings

Pitched to unsettle received wisdom about democracy and liberty, *The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom* screened in March to complete Adam Curtis' documentary trilogy exploring the modern history and contemporary significance of conceptions of the individual self. First *The Century of the Self* (2002) excavated the deployment of psychoanalytic theory in the development of seductive advertising and public relations techniques for manipulating unconscious desires, enticing citizens into governable thralldom to consumerism. *The Power of Nightmares* (reviewed in *Freedom*, 13th November 2004) then interpreted the subsequent moral and social bankruptcy of Western liberalism as facilitating the complementary political backlashes of neo-conservatism and Muslim fundamentalism. Both series charted specific professional elites persuading wider sectors of society of the 'truth' of their discourses by pandering to their sundry agendas – whereas, more ambitiously, *The Trap* purports to uncover the underlying philosophical paradoxes of the pursuit of individual freedom now apparently ending in utter subjugation.

'Freedom of choice' these days is, to Curtis, strangely vacuous compared to the claims of state and capitalist institutions. Voting for Tweedledum or Tweedledee or buying this or that brand scarcely justifies global poverty, environmental destruction and war, yet the scientific measurement of such superficial and ephemeral details of behaviour and attitudes supposedly reveals our essence – therefore being the best guide to what policy should tackle. Such truncated empirical visions of human nature, and the liberties appropriate to it, date from the 1950s when the mathematical predictability of poker players was generalised to the nuclear standoff. The robustness of US Cold War strategy then ensured the currency of assumptions that people are purely rationally self-seeking sociopaths. Congenial maverick theories in evolutionary genetics, anthropology, psychology and economics suddenly echoed the zeitgeist once attention turned to the costs of welfare, exploiting popular disillusionment with the unaccountability, corruption, malevolence, or plain

wrong-headedness of bureaucracies and traditional organisations. The hugely profitable model of society as a collection of isolated paranoid narcissists has since become political common sense as the better managerialism of capitalism.

The Trap's audacious thematic sweep is matched by its visual style – with a rhetorical collage mirroring the way ideology jumbles theoretical principles, via real-world practical techniques derived from them, into more or less rigid systems of belief and action. The dizzying montage of archive news footage, cult cinema and sixties TV, overlain with equally eclectic and dissonant soundtrack and voiceover, stitches together a progression of concepts and assertions with both emotional and (arguably) rational logic – entirely appropriate to contemporary society where so much information is taken on board with simultaneous multimediated glitter and subliminal gloss. Uniquely in mainstream media, Curtis explicitly demonstrates how politics disciplines us in the age of Spectacle. Instead of brute force (held discreetly in reserve), a far more subtle, multilayered cunning of reason persuades us that its complex, sophisticated – but extremely partial – sets of suggestions are coherent, established facts brooking no argument or alternative.

The predictably tiresome criticisms of the programme's intellectual accuracy – that it misunderstands and misrepresents game theory, sociobiology, anti-psychiatry, liberal philosophy, neoliberal economics, etc. – thus miss the point, as do charges of pessimism, paranoia or conspiracy-mongering. The influence of ideas in general practice may often be achieved deliberately and cynically, but by no means necessarily so – though certainly irrespective of their 'purity' or 'correct' usage. Then, when crystallising into powerful discourses of management and control, they acquire an implacable material force of their own – both from the effort that powerful groups exert in moulding them to maximally serve their interests, and in dealing with widespread and energetic resistance to resulting powerplays on the part of those made subject. So, in order for political opposition to exploit the inherent weaknesses of ruling ideas (rather than reacting blindly against them), it is sensible first to grasp their mechanisms of operation.



Paradise mislaid

Curtis certainly captures the irony that, in 'properly' implementing Thatcher and John Major's hamfisted market reforms, New Labour's farcical systems of targets, incentives and sanctions are comprehensively wrecking public services and intensifying inequality, just as the crusades for democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan conclusively pre-empt its possibility. What is missed, in neglecting the central organising role of economic power in the disposition of resources, is that appealing to the disinterested selfishness of individuals and then punishing them for their collective inability to comply is a tremendously productive (if schizophrenic) mode of social engineering. Apparently also justifying privatised initiatives to meet the shortfall, it legitimises the mobilisation of ever-more penetrating, microscopic, authoritarian methods of monitoring and regimentation – thereby more deeply entrenching newly-ascendant sectors of capital (e.g. information and media technology and management), and rendering genuine solutions around local

autonomy and grass-roots control increasingly out of reach and out of sight. The question, then, is who will be capable of seeing through the fantasies of a better life as the regulated performances of programmable robots – their architects, planners, functionaries and shareholders; or us billions of post-modern rats eternally terrified, tempted and tortured round their mazes?

The Trap's narrow focus further ignores earlier crossovers of science and statecraft, nourishing waves of colonialisms and technological revolutions with similarly ridiculous and limited notions of humanity and civilisation to validate the forms of suffering imperial domination favoured at the time. Retrospective appreciation of the appalling damage done by the transparently fallacious fits and starts of the history of ideas – long before being nailed and superseded by later generations of research – proves the continuing rational necessity to distrust scientific certainty just as much as the miracle cures spun in party politics. The conceptual frameworks within which truth claims are made, assumptions

required for practical application, and likely ramifications of and potential recovery from these collapsing or failing (not to mention the types and distribution of possible benefits accruing or precluded), only receive adequate attention when powerful interests are threatened – otherwise being trampled over in the haste to cash in. Hence the lunacy of GM and nanotechnology, pathetic mass sedation of misery and frustration with Prozac and Viagra, manic production of novelty to pollute existential voids, and towering heights of belief in and commitment to human endeavour manifested in transient public opinion surveys and reality television. This is no trap of misguided pragmatism versus exhausted idealism, as Curtis seems to conclude, but of the constitutional insanity of hierarchical order based on the superior knowledge wielded by leaders and experts. Acknowledging this, of course, would be a fundamental paradigm-shift too far – for him, the Beeb and for liberal democratic capitalism in general.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

FILM

Freedom Writers

directed by Richard LaGravenese
A snappy MTV spin on the long and dishonourable Hollywood tradition parachuting privileged super-pedagogues into inner-city educational warehouses, *Freedom Writers'* 'true story' exemplifies the dishonesty both of the genre and the underlying philosophy. Hilary Swank plays Erin Gruwell, a young teacher who "really wanted a school that had diversity, that had been affected by the riots and could be this wonderful eclectic mix of races

and economics and cultures". Choosing Wilson High School, Long Beach (California, post-Rodney King) – which "included every ethnicity under the sun, with kids who could be headed off to Harvard or to jail" – her patronising cluelessness strikes lucky when *The Diary of Anne Frank* resonates at just the right stage of Gruwell's intuitive group therapy. Classroom 203's 'unteachables' realise the common suffering in their segregated communities and, via Shakespeare and Homer, become

uplifted into diligent scholars believing they can be "anything they want to be".

Blackboard whitewash

Breathtakingly ignorant or dismissive of abundant relevant material, like Black literature, hip-hop culture, or local history (Black Panther community self-defence in early gang development; the Crips/Bloods truce after the LA uprising and its joint working group producing a sophisticated, eminently practical

regeneration plan, for example), Gruwell merely equates gangs with Nazis – exonerating the authorities for the warzone mentality despite colluding in the ghetto floods of guns and drugs, withdrawing welfare and ruining public education. Choosing literary expressions from the distant European persecutions of Jews or in Bosnia likewise prevents the US state's domestic genocides and global adventures (so salient to Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans) – let alone the present daily grind of

oppression and exploitation – being either sources of empathy or targets of critique.

Such conventional liberal agendas thus absolve prevailing power structures from blame while honouring their most 'enlightened' fractions as uniquely capable of dispensing top-down salvation. Comparably massive denials of historical, political and social reality then purge complexity from the youngsters' lives, with dramatised diary snippets mapping

➔ page 8, column 3

A Sideways Look

Most people assume that crisis situations demand firm government action. Many people in this country talk about it in times of war, and talk about the sacrifices made under Churchill's leadership during the Second World War. Of course, as anarchists we wouldn't share the aims of Churchill and his government, but it is a popularly held view that government is the best solution to crisis.

Of course, we only have to look at Hurricane Katrina and the pathetic response from the world's biggest superpower to see that governments often don't work well in a crisis.

You can read about the potential health affects of climate change elsewhere in this issue of *Freedom*. It is clear that there is growing recognition of the problem, but little public recognition by governments. Blair has said that there is "no bigger long-term question facing the global community" than the threat of climate change. Bush is known to privately regard it as important. If you read through any of the literature, the consequences of a more than two-degree rise in are catastrophic. There will be crop failures, droughts and environmentally-driven migration. Yet, not only are most government's targets for reduction of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases too little, they are rarely met.

Not all governments have the same motivation for not acting, but they all seem to be doing too little, too late. Developing countries like China and India claim that they must build more power stations and sell cars to all their citizens, as otherwise they are denying the benefits of such development to their citizens. The US and their close allies are in almost total denial about it. They reject Kyoto and other international attempts to regulate it as a threat to US business, particularly those they have close links to. In Britain there is a recognition that 'something must be done' but mainstream opinion clings to the idea that this can be achieved without changes to the lifestyle of the average comfortable citizen. Some take a fatalistic view, that there's no point in doing anything when China is opening a new coal-fired power station every two weeks.

Why is the government committed to building more airports, more roads and shifting more production outside the country? It's not just about profits - there are profits to be made from doing other activities instead of those. I suspect that the government don't want to tell middle England that their holiday homes and cheap flights are not environmentally sustainable. The budget airlines go on about how their prices allow poorer people to fly and are more egalitarian. Of course, most of their passengers are actually from the better-paid social classes, but they never mention that.

If climate change is more important than any other issue, you'd think that it would be worth upsetting the lifestyles of the well off. And if governments are of such little use in a real long-term crisis like this, what do we really need them for?

Svartfrosk

Imagine if...

Michael Meacher and John McDonnell, the two left wing candidates for power, squared up to each other.

"So, how left wing are you? Are you the right man to replace Blair?" Meacher asked.

"Well, as an Oxford-educated supporter of the war, I'm a well-known rebel against the government."

"Ah so you've opposed them on the big issues?"

"Yes I complained a bit about Trident, and opposed a couple of elements of the Terrorism bill."

McDonnell looked unimpressed. "Is that it?"

Meacher sniffed "Well what about you?"

"Anti-terrorism laws, anti-ID cards, foundation hospitals, student top-up fees and voted against the Iraq war." McDonnell said smugly. "And I've got 'another world is possible' as my campaign slogan, you know like the World Social Forum?"

Meacher sniffed again. "So as a left-winger who has never had a chance of getting into a Blair cabinet, you voted for a couple of crowd pleasers and took on the slogan of a massively underachieving anti-globalisation group. Big whoop, have you stood up for your principles against the state itself? Direct action?"

McDonnell looked uncomfortable. "Well... I spoke out to say how great the IRA are a few years ago..."

Meacher laughed. "What, supporting all kinds of demands and actions in the name of freedom followed by a general forgetting of socialist principle at the top as soon as power was achieved? How apposite!"

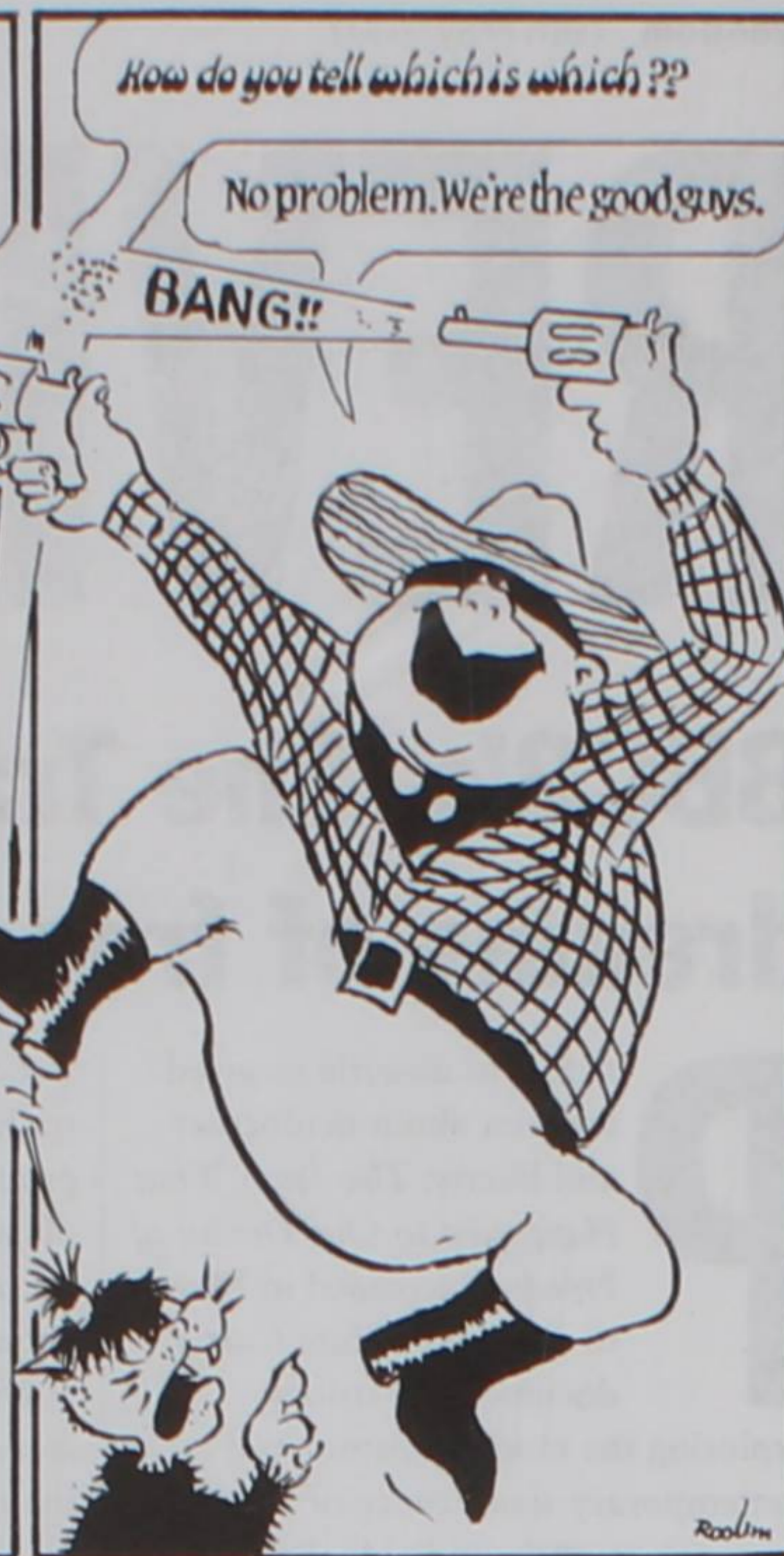
Real change has never looked so close.



The quiz

1. What brought about the Bavarian beer riots that Engels wrote about in May 1844?
2. What is subject of the book *Beer and Revolution* by Tom Goyens?
3. By what name is Sinesio García Hernández better known?
4. What adaptation did Danish situationist Asger Jorn make to the 'beautiful game' of football?

Answers on page 6



BAE Systems

➔ page 1

senior Tory Julian Lewis, has been named in court as a man who obtained confidential legal information on CAAT's legal challenge to closing the inquiry and passed it on the BAE Systems' security department.

The fact that the SFO inquiry was dropped against the Saudis but continues elsewhere raises questions. What do the Saudi's have on the UK government, apart from business and security links? Exactly how much influence does the arms trade have within government? And who else, apart from the Saudi's and possibly senior UK government figures, is being protected?

Film review

➔ page 7

their alienation as the price paid for individual aspiration. Nothing wrong with broader horizons, of course, and writer-director LaGravenese does implicitly posit their escape as exception rather than rule (marginally redeeming the clichés) - only Gruwell's two extra part-time jobs pay for the teaching resources withheld by school managers; and (we learn), she promptly abandoned the front line for university educational evangelism. Yet in intimately detailing her trials and tribulations, but merely schematically sketching the desperate depths of her charges, *Freedom Writers* renders the latter essentially passive, malleable objects of its heroic missionary. Progressive humanistic transformative trappings notwithstanding, the mission is still unmistakably 'business as usual'.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Listings

24th May Guantanamo Bay: close it down, talk with speakers Moazzam Begg and Sadat Sayeed from 6.30pm at London South Bank University Keyworth Centre.

26th May Radical Book and Zine Fair from 10am-5pm at the Cowley Club, London Road, Brighton, for details see cowleyclub.org.uk

28th May to 2nd June Tent State University UK: 'education not war' protest, Noam Chomsky will speak via video link and dozens of academics and activists will lead discussions at an 'alternative university', organised by a group of Sussex staff and students as part of a protest against the invasion and occupation of Iraq, at University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, for info email web@tentstate.org.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, dissent.org.uk or vision07.net/drupal
16th June It's broke - let's fix it! finding solutions to poverty, conflict

and climate change, an all-day conference aiming to take a positive approach to some of the grave global problems that concern us all, and which underlie many of the issues discussed in the cafe diplo talks, at Imperial College, London, for info see mondediplofriends.org.uk/

30th June World Development Movement annual conference: activism past, present and future with speakers including Ngugi wa Thiong'o and George Monbiot, plus sessions on apartheid, slavery, climate justice, privatisation struggles, music and protest, women's rights, corporate globalisation, from 1pm to 6pm at University of Leeds, for more call 020 7820 4900, email register@wdm.org.uk or visit www.wdm.org.uk

6th to 8th July Antiworld Outdoor Festival Experience at a secret location near London, see antiworld070707.com

8th July Phillip K Dick day - this is part of a film being made about the science fiction writer, in Hyde Park, London (the director/writer is looking for actors and others interested in working as part of a film crew) all afternoon, email punksketamineanddrones@no-log.org

STEAL THIS FILM



Wednesday 23rd May
Camberwell Squat Centre
192 Warham Street, SE5

Steal This Film is the first part of a free documentary series about file-sharing, focusing on The Pirate Bay, (p2p torrent site)-raided last year by swedish police with pressure from the US government - and copyfighters Piratbyran. - Download, Watch and Copy.

starting around 7.30
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FREEDOM fortnightly ISSN 0016